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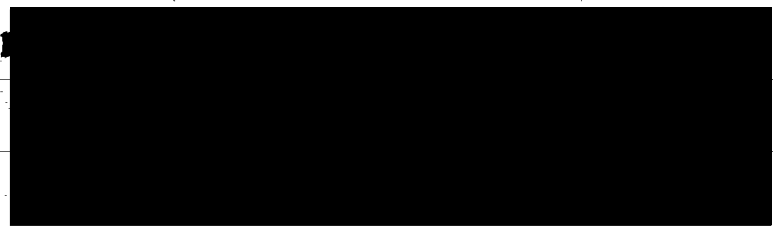
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DATED. Dec 3 1974

AN ANNOTATED TRANSLATION OF RAINER MARIA RILKE'S

SONNETS TO ORPHEUS, PART I

by

Karl H. Siegler

B.A. (Honours), Simon Fraser University, 1969

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of

English

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## Abstract

This thesis presents not only a translation of the twenty-six sonnets comprising the first part of Rilke's Sonnets To Orpheus, but also a detailed explication of the poetic methodology of the translations by way of extensive annotations on specific issues confronting the translator.

The methods used to translate this sequence generally are derived from a study of modern American poetry. Ezra Pound and H.D. practised translation in their studies of poetic craft at the beginning of the century, and maintained a working interest in this activity throughout their lives -- the emphasis of the activity shifting to an expressed need to "make it new" -- the ontology of poetic form and content. These concerns can be seen to culminate in Jack Spicer's After Lorca, where the task becomes not only to bring over the form and content of the Spanish, but also to follow the transformations of the elements of Lorca's landscapes as they are brought into the poet-translator's own cosmology or vision of things.

It should be mentioned here that the absence of rhyme schemes in the English translations of this thesis is quite deliberate, and is grounded in issues of poetics which have developed since the turn of the century -- summed up by T.S. Eliot with the statement:

"No vers is libre for the man who wants to do a good job." Those instances where Rilke's rhymes either change, modify, or add to the progression of meaning or image in the poem beyond a reasonable doubt, I have attempted to retain the effect by substituting English rhymes in their original place; by the creation of a different rhyme structure designed to accomplish a similar function; or in one of several alternately imagistic, alliterative, or onomatopoeic ways.

## Acknowledgment

I should like to thank Dr. Jerald Zaslove for his enthusiastic support for, and assistance in, the idea this thesis embodies; and the graduate studies committee and the supervisory committee for granting their permission for the execution of a thesis of this nature.

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## INTRODUCTION

These translations and the annotations which accompany them are meant to offer the reader (as no doubt the original intended) a path which he or she may follow -- a path on which a world is discovered by way of a building construct of song. Since the spaces or distances that these poems create remain eternally open, no attempt has been made on my part to delineate, in an introduction, Rilke's apparent Weltanschauung. The concern here is not so much Weltanschauung as Weltentdeckung. Thus the reader may find, both in the translations and in the accompanying notes, issues raised which are not elaborated on immediately, but clarified much later on in the sequence. Those issues the reader must keep suspended as elements of the metric of the process of his discovery. The attempt of this thesis is not merely to present a translation of the first part of the Sonnets To Orpheus, but to simultaneously leave a record and explication of the methodology employed in that endeavour. This thesis has been undertaken in spite of, or perhaps because of, the failure of previous critical modes to deal with the major issues involved in a reading, and hence a translation of Rilke's work. The most prevalent of these modes has been the philosophical -- in particular, the existential:

Wir verstehen die geistesgeschichtliche Stellung Rilkes am besten, wenn wir ihn in denselben Zusammenhang einordnen, der philosophisch in der Existenzphilosophie zum Ausdruck gekommen ist. Das soll nicht bedeuten, dass er in irgendeinem schulmaessigen Zusammenhang mit der als Existenzphilosophie bezeichneten philosophischen Stroemung gestanden haette - das ist schon darum nicht moeglich, weil deren entscheidende Werke erst nach seinem Tode erschienen sind - er verwendet darueber hinaus auch nicht den Begriff der Existenz im besondern Sinn der modernen Existenzphilosophie, und er spricht auch sonst nicht die Schulsprache der Existenzphilosophen. Wir verwenden den Begriff der Existenzphilosophie in einem sehr viel weitern Sinn, naemlich als Namen fuer eine grosse umfassende Bewegung, die in diesen Jahren das gesamte geistige Leben

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ergriffen hat und sich auf den verschiedenen Gebieten in einer korrespondierenden Weise einheitlich auswirkt. 1.

This passage (quoted again later in the body of this thesis with reference to the problem of Dasein in sonnet I - 3) shall serve to initiate the issue of these translations. The paragraph reveals its author's interest to be a "history of ideas" rather than a study in poetics. In that Bollnow admits that Rilke uses neither the term "existence" in the special sense of modern existential philosophy, nor does he elsewhere use the vocabulary of the existential school; and in so far as the poet died some years before the major texts of this "modern, all encompassing philosophical movement" were published, I consider it necessary that some other methodology or critical vocabulary with which to approach the texts of the poet's work be developed. I say "necessary" because I do not believe that one understands the work of any writer "best" by translating that writer's vocabulary into that of another discipline. Any methodology of approach to a writer's work must produce a vocabulary which deals directly with the work itself, and not with a body of ideas abstracted from that work, since to do the latter is to place any discussion of the work in a position twice removed from that work: i.e. once by developing a primary vocabulary of "ideas" or "concepts" abstracted from the original, and twice by developing a secondary vocabulary with which one then talks about those ideas and concepts, as if they were the work itself. That other methodology or critical vocabulary is developed in this thesis by three basic interrelated entrances taken to the work itself. The first centres on Rilke's statements concerning his own work, specifically the Sonnets To Orpheus:

To a lady who sought to understand one of the Sonnets by calling upon the idea of the transmigration of souls, Rilke wrote: "You are thinking too far out beyond the poem itself ... I believe that no poem in the Sonnets To Orpheus means anything that is not fully written out there, often, it is true, with its most secret name. All 'allusion' I am convinced would be contradictory to the indescribable 'being there' of the poem. " 2.

This statement gives rise to two "works" Rilke demands of the reader:

a) a study of the word in great detail, which in these translations finds its expression in an intense preoccupation with lexicographical, etymological and syntactical issues; and b) a careful study of the "mythos" in order to uncover the "secret names" of the iconographical elements of the sonnets. These two "works", once accomplished, give rise to the second basic entrance taken to the work itself: a critical and comparative reading of three previously published translations of the Sonnets To Orpheus done by MacIntyre, Leishman, and Herter Norton. Such a reading reveals not only that these three translations differ totally among themselves, but, (and this is the factor most important to the prospective translator), they each respectively differ as much, if not more, from the original. As is delineated in specific instances throughout the notes, MacIntyre's translations consistently employ a vocabulary of "abstraction" and "idea" where Rilke uses "object" and "image;" Leishman's translations consistently employ a "poetic" (in a pejorative sense -- i.e. regularly metrical, archaic, sweet, rhymed, and archetypically imagistic) language in which any and all particularity of the original disappears; and Herter Norton's translations, while remaining in most cases refreshingly literal, share with those of MacIntyre and Leishman, an inability to reproduce, if not to read, those more complicated grammatical (syntactical) passages in the sonnets where the poet addresses, through the structure of the



language, a realm or realms beyond the human. For example, all three miss the doubling of pronouns in sonnet I - 26, which addresses Orpheus' two natures, and through which the central metamorphosis of the poem appears; and they all miss the syntactical fact that the "dancer" in sonnet I - 25 is reminded of the events of her life after she has entered the realm of the dead, and that she is not therefore displayed as a pitiful person to the people (ihnen), but her persona is used as an emblem of the human condition of which she is a part. The point here is that all previous translators and critics seem to have overlooked the fact that language can be metamorphic in form as well as content, and that therefore any vocabulary or syntax employed by the translator or the critic must be equal to the capacity of the original to hold both meaning and form. Once one realizes that the thought of these sonnets, and the action of the syntax which holds that thought, may move in this post-rational manner in specific instances, one is committed to abandon any attempt at abstracting a Weltanschauung, and gives one's thought over to the process of Weltentdeckung that the sonnets offer.

The two entrances into the poetry delineated above are developed most effectively in conjunction with a third important entrance taken to the work itself -- the use of modern American poetics as a methodology of craft for the translations. All three of these entrances are not treated necessarily as critical problems; however they are concerns which have made it necessary to develop a poetic vocabulary to lead questions of meaning back into the images of the poems themselves, and not into the realm of disembodied ideas or philosophical constructs. In order to clarify this distinction between abstract thought or language (in which

the poem is subsumed under a construct of ideas), and passionate thought or language (in which the poem remains visible as the rhythmic record of object and action), it is useful to look at Ezra Pound's summary of the imagist movement. An "image" he defines as an "intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." 3. This definition was given rise to by a specifically proposed poetics:

- 1) Direct treatment of the "thing" whether subjective or objective.
- 2) To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
- 3) As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome. 4.

and finds its resolution as an expressed methodology in the imagist credo:

Rhythm. -- I believe in an "absolute rhythm," a rhythm, that is, in poetry which corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed. A man's rhythm must be interpretative, it will be, therefore, in the end, his own, uncounterfeiting, uncounterfeitable.

Symbols. -- I believe that the proper and perfect symbol is the natural object, that if a man use "symbols" he must so use them that their symbolic function does not obtrude; so that a sense, and the poetic quality of the passage, is not lost to those who do not understand the symbol as such, to whom, for instance, a hawk is a hawk.

Technique. -- I believe in technique as the test of a man's sincerity; in law when it is ascertainable; in the trampling down of every convention that impedes or obscures the determination of the law, or the precise rendering of the impulse.

Form. -- I think there is a "fluid" as well as a "solid" content, that some poems may have form as a tree has form, some as water poured into a vase. That most symmetrical forms have certain uses. That a vast number of subjects cannot be precisely, and therefore not properly rendered in symmetrical forms. 5.

The single most important effect of this proposed methodology, (the success or failure of the "movement" quite aside), is that it established that there is no such thing as a "poetic language as such." It freed the poetics and the intelligence of the poem from all strictures of reason and systematic form. Which is not to say that

thought ceased to be one of the poles of the poetic process -- quite on the contrary, it simply freed poetic thought and language from external, arbitrarily symmetrical measures, and allowed the ground of poetic thought to move back into the possibilities of metric and meaning in the structure and history of language itself as it showed forth things in action. Not logic or rationality informs the work, but language, as it displays a living actual world. As William Carlos Williams has it in the opening of Paterson:

"- Say it, no ideas but in things -" 6.

This language of poetics, the structure of which is of the ear and the breath as they give shape to the musical phrase, and the content of which is a movement of things, is summarized in the opening lines of Charles Olson's Projective Verse:

(projectile                      (percussive                      (prospective

vs.

The NON-Projective

(or what a French critic calls "closed" verse, that verse which print bred and which is pretty much what we have had, in English & American, and have still got, despite the work of Pound & Williams:

it led Keats already a hundred years ago, to see it (Wordsworth's, Milton's) in the light of "the Egotistical Sublime;" and it persists, at this latter day, as what you might call the private-soul-at-any-public-wall)

Verse now, 1950, if it is to go ahead, if it is to be of essential use, must I take it, catch up and put into itself certain laws and possibilities of the breath, of the breathing of the man who writes as well as of his listenings. (The revolution of the ear, 1910, the trochee's heave, asks it of the younger poets.) 7.

Which is not to say that I pretend to recognize a similarity of form between modern American poetics and the tightly structured sonnets of Rilke's Sonnets To Orpheus; what I do recognize, despite Rilke's attack on things "American:"

Now, from America, empty indifferent things are crowding over to us, sham things, life-decoys ... A house, in the American understanding, an American apple or a grapevine there, has nothing in common with the house, the fruit, the grape, into which went the hopes and meditations of our forefathers ... Animated things, things experienced by us, and that know us, are on the decline and cannot be replaced any more. We are perhaps the last still to have known such things. 8.

is a similarity of concern for a particular kind of language which can hold on to the landscape, the particular and the history or story which resides in it. Certainly Rilke would not take issue, in the light of the above statement, with Pound's and Williams' concentration on the particular in both form and content, nor with Olson's concentration on the local as it is informed by history. Thus the "ear" and the "breath," while not formal elements in the Sonnets To Orpheus, are definite concerns of content. In sonnet I - 3 Rilke draws a sharp distinction between "song" originating from a breath which expresses "self," and "song" originating from a breath informed by an outside through the "ear." We recognize here an effort of the language to move from "psyche" to "persona." It is precisely in this issue of "persona" that form and content come together to create "world." Rilke's interest in the figures of the poet and Vera as "personae" has its counterpart in the work of major poets of the twentieth century. Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and Charles Olson all begin their major works speaking through a persona, a mask that the soul wears, and it is through this persona that the world is revealed as "outside" rather than "personal." Within this imagination of things, the world gives one a place -- one does not personalize or invent the world. Ezra Pound's first poem in a collection of his shorter works entitled Personae begins with the following lines:

I stood still and was a tree amid the wood,

Knowing the truth of things unseen before ... .

Jack Spicer begins the record of his craft by adopting the persona of Lorca. In H. D.'s last major work, Hermetic Definitions, an entire world is shattered and then recalled as she follows the metamorphoses of the personae as they adopt and then cast aside one mask after the other. Thus a poetics which moves by personae moves the centre of the poem outside of the personal back into the multiplicity of "world" -- to an outside which is always larger than the human. What fascinates in Rilke's Sonnets To Orpheus is the very multiplicity of this image of the centre. It is on this ground that a discussion of open form becomes relevant with respect to the sonnets -- not in terms of the structure of each separate poem, but in terms of the narrative structure they propose together, which can best be defined as polytropic:

"... of many turns;" or in mathematics "of a curve, turning more than once around a pole, of a function, multiform;" and in zoology "visiting many kinds of flowers for nectar, as certain bees or other insects." 9.

Let us return for a moment to Pound's statement that "most symmetrical forms have certain uses." Now a sonnet, with its symmetrical, double movement of octave and sestet, comprises one turn about its own centre. (It is for this reason that the line structure has been rigidly adhered to in the translation.) What this means in terms of the polytropic form of the larger narrative structure is that any number of sonnets may in fact be written in the sequence -- each a "turn" about an invisible centre. In fact, each of the sonnets may be read separately -- they create a narrative only by echoing back and forth to any and all of the other sonnets in the sequence. Thus while the formal concerns of modern American poetry have their counterpart in only the largest formal element of the Sonnets To Orpheus, the concerns of content and direction

of the modern American poets have their counterparts in the sonnets to a very particular degree.

Finally, the ground of modern American poetry has increasingly moved to the etymological and the mythological, since it is only on this ground that the language is freed in content to the same degree as it has been freed in form. It is here that both the individual "word" and the "song" or "story" as a construct of language is seen as projecting a complete world or cosmology which includes not only the elemental powers and objects of that world, but also its history, rather than "a meaning of or about that world." Thus we have come full circle from the original question: when Rilke warns about "going beyond what is fully written out there" (in word and syntax), he is directing the reader back into the word or language, into the "secret name" it contains. The song then is the meaning. It is translatable only into other poems, not into other modes of thought, if any loss is to be avoided. That the notes to the translations presented in the body of this thesis often uncover that "secret name" is a blasphemy which is unavoidable: (eg. in the image of the horseman has been seen the Centaur; in the image of the tree, Yggdrasil; in the image of flight, Icarus; etc.). These "secret names" have been revealed, however, only to make the methodology of translation that much clearer. None of those names appear in the English versions of the poems. In all of them, the image has been "made new," as Rilke does in the original. The "secret names" have again become invisible; their visibility only appearing in traces and fragments of an image of the activity which originally informed them. (c.f. above, pg. 5 -- Pound's statement on "symbolism."). We are not dealing here with "symbolism" or "allegory,"

which always proposes that the world is referential: i.e., that the particulars of experience relate to or are defined by a preexistent form. Quite on the contrary, in the Sonnets To Orpheus, the particular discovery precedes, and in fact replaces, again and again, any generality.

These, then, are the entrances. As far as my own stance to the finished work goes, the translations reflect not only Pound's dictum to the poet-translator, "make it new," but also Rilke's own poetics. Since Rilke himself is involved in this "making new," where the "known" ceaselessly becomes invisible in the newly visible space of the "unknown," the task of the translator working within a field defined by Pound's poetics of translation becomes so much the easier. The difficulties arise in those instances where an image or thing must not only be "translated," (perhaps because it is too vague in English, or perhaps because English does not have the facility for that particular kind of syntax or expression), but "transformed." One of the clearest instances of such a case is the problem of the word Geraet in sonnet I - 23. The way in which this word has been rendered in English is not meant to be a "translation" in the usual sense of the word, but a "correspondence." As Jack Spicer says in After Lorca;

Things do not connect; they correspond. That is what makes it possible for a poet to translate real objects, to bring them across language as easily as he can bring them across time. That tree you saw in Spain is a tree I could never have seen in California, that lemon has a different smell and a different taste, BUT the answer is this -- every place and every time has a real object to correspond with your real object -- that lemon may become this lemon, or it may even become this piece of seaweed, or this particular color of gray in this ocean. One does not need to imagine that lemon; one needs to discover it. 10.

or:

Tradition ... means generations of different poets in different

countries patiently telling the same story, writing the same poem, gaining and losing something with each transformation -- but, of course, never really losing anything. This has nothing to do with calmness, classicism, temperament, or anything else. Invention is merely the enemy of poetry. 11.

It is on the above grounds that these translations seek to accomplish what T.S. Eliot has said of H.D.'s translations of Euripedes: to become "much nearer to both Greek and English than Mr. Murray's," 12. i.e., close to the language of the original and to the language of the translator. It is within this measure that the translations should be judged.

It remains now only to summarize a few directions in which this stance toward language and poetics leads. The first is that language, which constantly moves from the visibility of its past into the invisibility of its future as it records the "real" or Dasein of the present in the poem is, like the world or "speech of the year," (sonnet I - 14) ALIVE. Thus, the critical vocabulary which attempts to deal with the record of that poetry must be equal to that life, and must not be bound by the dead strictures and categories of reason; neither must it pretend that the writing is a matter of the "personal" or "psyche," (i.e. the "inside" recording the inside) rather than "spirit" or "muse " (i.e. the "inside" recording its outside). Rilke wrote:

Psychoanalysis is too basic a help for me, it helps once and for all, it clears out, and to find myself cleared out one day would perhaps be even more hopeless than this disorder. 13.

... keeps me from this operation (psychoanalysis ed.), from this great clearing out that life does not do, -- from this correcting of the whole hitherto written page of life which I then imagine all rewritten in red as in a school notebook -- a silly conception and surely quite false -- , but that is how it looks to me. 14.

... I am afraid of disturbing by any classification or survey, be it ever so relieving, a much higher order whose right, after all



that has happened, I would have to acknowledge, even if it were to destroy me. 15.

... the terrible thing about art is that the further one gets in it, the more it commits one to the highest, almost impossible. 16.

The second is that the phenomenon of dictation (Rilke wrote the entire first part of the Sonnets To Orpheus in two days of February, 1922, and he found later, in retrospect, that he had to change not a single word) implies that language itself, in its possibilities of both content and form, is the "higher mind" or "spiritus mundi" which speaks through the voice of the poet -- (see sonnet I - 3 where "true song" is seen as, "A drift in the god. A wind.", and sonnet I - 4, "step from time to time into that breath which does not mean you"). Here language places the poet as a persona within an imagination: language uses the poet, rather than the poet using language. This is the place where we traditionally find the muses. Rilke has here stepped into the Geist der Sprache, the intelligence (Geist) of which is not bound by, but opens up into ecstasy (spirit - Geist) on the one hand, and terror (ghost - Geist) on the other. Thus, especially in view of the phenomenon of dictation operating in the writing of the sequence, the relevant question in terms of the Sonnets To Orpheus is not one of developing a systematic Weltanschauung, but one of discovery: Weltentdeckung. The critical vocabulary which attempts to deal with a poetics of this order must reveal that process of discovery. It may contain no conclusions about either the "world" or the "psychology" of the poet -- it may only indicate the possibilities and directions into which the imagination and its elements unfold within the work. In short, the translation must remain true to the openness of the text.

Before proceeding into the body of this thesis, the reader should

be aware of the lexicographical materials used throughout the notes:

Langenscheidts Handwoerterbuch, Deutsch - Englisch.

Der Grosse Duden, Band 7, Herkunftsworlerbuch.

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary.

Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition, Unabridged.

The notes which accompany the translations, providing an ongoing critical explication of the methodology, also include a comparative commentary on three previously extant publications of translations of the Sonnets To Orpheus by M.D. Herter Norton, C.F. MacIntyre, and J.B. Leishman, wherever such commentary was felt to be either necessary or appropriate.

Notes

- 1) Rilke, O.F. Bollnow, W. Kohlhammer Verlag, Stuttgart, pg. 19.
- 2) Sonnets To Orpheus, M.D. Herter Norton, (trans.), W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., New York, 1942, pg. 10 - 11.
- 3) Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot (ed.), New Directions, New York, 1968, pg. 4.
- 4) Ibid., pg. 3.
- 5) Ibid., pg. 9.
- 6) Paterson, W.C. Williams, New Directions, New York, 1963, pg. 6.
- 7) Selected Writings, Charles Olson, New Directions, New York, 1966, pg. 15.
- 8) Sonnets To Orpheus, M.D. Herter Norton, (trans.), W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., New York, 1942, pg. 134 (notes).
- 9) Webster's New International Dictionary, second edition.
- 10) After Lorca, Jack Spicer, Coach House Press, Toronto, 1974, pg. 35.
- 11) Ibid., pg. 3.
- 12) Selected Essays, T.S. Eliot, (Euripedes And Professor Murray), Harcourt Brace and World, New York, 1950, pg. 50.
- 13) The Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke, Vol. I, M.D. Herter Norton, (trans.), W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., New York, 1969, pg. 34.
- 14) Ibid., pg. 43.
- 15) Ibid., pg. 43.
- 16) Ibid., pg. 35.

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

Tiere aus Stille drangen aus dem klaren  
geloesten Wald von Lager und Genist;  
und da ergab sich, dass sie nicht aus List  
und nicht aus Angst in sich so leise waren,

sondern aus Hoeren. Bruellen, Schrei, Geroehr  
schien klein in ihren Herzen. Und wo eben  
kaum eine Huette war, dies zu empfangen,

ein Unterschlupf aus dunkelstem Verlangen  
mit einem Zugang, dessen Pfosten beben, -  
da schufst du ihnen Tempel im Gehoer.

I - 1

There rose a tree. Oh pure <sup>1.</sup> ascent!  
 Oh Orpheus sings! Oh <sup>2.</sup> high <sup>3.</sup> tree within the ear!  
 And all sound ceased. Yet still in this <sup>4.</sup> concealment  
 proceeded new beginnings, signs, metamorphoses.

Out of the <sup>5.</sup> transparent forest, from nest  
 and lair, animals <sup>6.</sup> pressed out of silence;  
 and it <sup>7.</sup> happened there, that not craft  
 and not fear <sup>8.</sup> made them so still

but hearing. Bellow, scream, roar  
 seemed <sup>10.</sup> as small in their hearts. And where of late  
 hardly a hut stood this to <sup>11.</sup> conceive,

<sup>12.</sup> a haven of darkest desire  
 offering entrance with trembling gates, -  
 there, in the hearing, you built them temples.

1) Rilke's use of the word Uebersteigung demands considerable care on the part of the translator, especially when seen in the light of his use of stieg in the first part of the line. Both of these words have a common root, -- Steigen, indoeuropean steigh, -- schreiten, steigen ("to pace, to climb"). "Die Bedeutung 'schreiten' ist in den germanischen Sprachen nur resthaft erhalten, Z.B. in 'Steig, Fussweg' (m.h.d. 'stīc', a.h.d. 'stīg'), das Verb hat hier von Anfang an die Bedeutung 'hinauf - hinabschreiten, klettern'." We find therefore at the root of the word a literal physical activity -- "walking" -- along with the implied landscape of this activity: "the way" -- the "way" or "path" which constantly reappears throughout the sonnets. In view of this, one cannot use the word "transcension" as MacIntyre and Leishman do, or "transcendency" as Herter Norton does, since Rilke does not intend to focus our attention on a transcendence (he could have used the word in German), or a moving beyond or out of, but on the way or path of ascent itself -- an ascent still rooted in the ground out of which it has its origin (image of tree which strives upward through layer after layer of branches only so long as it remains rooted in the ground). Now literally rendered, Uebersteigung on these terms would be "ascension," but I have chosen the infinitive "ascent" because it is an abstraction of the activity, and not the abstraction of the condition. This was necessary because the word I had used to translate stieg, "rose," is inaccurate by itself and needs the strong modification of a word tied more closely to the verb rather than the noun. ("climb" would be more exact, but the humorous ambiguity of the sentence "There climbed a tree." is unacceptable.)

2) hoher has been translated as "high" and not "tall" as Leishman,

MacIntyre, and Herter Norton have, because the image of the tree is here meant by Rilke to be both the subject or content of the song, and simultaneously the song itself, or form of the song. Only if we see the form and content of the song as one and the same can we understand how the tree in the first two lines moves from outside to inside the ear. The Greek idea of Harmonia was concentrically and correspondingly quantitative, like the rings of a tree or its ascending branches, not qualitative like our present idea of harmony:

The extreme note of one tetrachord (for example, E in the diatonic tetrachord already illustrated) might be taken as the lowest note of another tetrachord, thus:

$$\begin{array}{cccc} a & g & f & e \\ & & & | \\ & & & e & d & C & B \end{array}$$

in which case the tetrachords were said to be conjunct, and the two together produced a scale of seven notes. Or the added tetrachord could begin at the distance of a whole step from the extreme note of the original tetrachord, thus:

$$e \ d \ C \ B$$

$$A \ G \ F \ E$$

in which case the tetrachords were disjunct, and the scale produced was that of a whole octave.

The possibility of further additions at either end of the scale would be immediately obvious, but the results which followed the exclusive use of either the principle of conjunction or that of disjunction were confusing. If the conjunct method were followed for every added tetrachord, the following scale would be produced. (We now capitalize the notes of our original tetrachord only, to show the additions on either side.)

$$--- \ g \ f \ e \ d$$

$$d \ c \ b \ a$$

$$a \ g \ f \ e$$

$$E \ D \ C \ B$$

$$b \ a \ g \ f \#$$

$$f \# \ e \ d \ c \# \ ---$$

A scale of this sort was not a theorem, but was a musical actuality. The term which the Greek applied to the joining of tetrachords was harmonia -- a word obviously very different in meaning from our own derivative of that word. (from A History Of Musical Thought, Donald N. Ferguson, Appleton - Century - Crofts, inc., N.Y., 1959, pp. 14 - 15.)

In view of this, "high" mediates between the two appearances of the tree, via an image of the quantitative harmony of ascending and descending scales, a task which the word "tall," (which previous translators arrived at because of their focus on "tree" as object, not image, and their corresponding neglect of the historic difference between ideas of harmony) cannot accomplish.

3) I have used the word "within" here rather than the more literal "in," in order to clarify the transformational aspect of Rilke's first two lines where a tree first visually apprehended as a pure ascension, is, by the magical power of Orpheus' song, transposed into the listener's organs of perception. The intent of the image is the appearance of a microcosmic tree within the channels and caverns of the ear, directly correspondent to the tree seen with the organs of sight -- a harmonizing or bringing into alignment of two previously different and complete worlds of perception. All of these moves within the first two lines of the first poem introduce the constantly implicit "Leitmotif" of the entire sequence -- that Orpheus' gift to man was not the finding of a music which would make the trees dance according to his will, or to coerce nature into following his will, but the discovery of a music through which a previously threatening, dark nature, which was only dimly and fearfully apprehended, could be seen as dancing -- a music or poetry which could bring to light the sympathetic correspondences between man and the natural world. This view allows us to guess at what is meant by the legend that Orpheus



"invented" the rites of Dionysos -- rites which had to do mainly with the immortal regenerative processes of the natural world and man's participation in them. These rites of ecstatic participation do not triumph over physical death of course, as Orpheus' death at the hands of the maenads tells us. Indeed he dies within the ritual forms he celebrates. Yet they do triumph over the view that death is somehow a final disjunctive end, since the joy of nursing the newborn, both human and animal, is tied inextricably to the terror of wanton dismemberment and death in the maenad's dance. (from Dionysus, Myth And Cult, Walter F. Otto, Indiana U. Press, 1965, pp. 132.)

4) Doch selbst is here rendered as "Yet still," creating a pun when seen in conjunction with the phrase "in this concealment." This is meant to deal with the connotation created by Rilke's use of the word Verschweigung, meaning not only "to keep something silent, to keep 'mum' about it," but also "a conspiracy." This connotation is far reaching in view of the explicit and implicit content. Explicitly, a visible, externally active and independent tree or song entering a being which corresponds to it inside the ear, is an image of an act of knowledge. This act is transformational: when one begins to carry that image inside one's organs of perception and thought, one silences that external thing -- it no longer needs to be present to the senses to be known -- it can be silently called to mind anywhere. Implicitly, it also characterizes the knowledge here spoken of as "knowledge of the mysteries" (via the meaning "conspiracy") like those of Eleusis for instance, which were kept secret on pain of death. (We have no concrete knowledge of those mysteries despite the fact that they were enacted every year for over a thousand years as one of the most

important mysteries of the ancient world.) Now the characteristic of the knowledge of an initiate is that it transforms not primarily the individual and his world, but more importantly it illuminates the ties and relationships of that individual to his world, and as a consequence the individual and his world are understood or seen as changed. Rilke's use of connotation in this passage, and my corresponding pun, are more clearly understood if one remembers that the Eleusinian mysteries revealed the immortality of the soul by the display of a corresponding natural process of regeneration, (the subject we know, it is the how of it that remains lost), and that Rilke wrote the Sonnets To Orpheus as a funeral monument to his acquaintance Vera Ouckama Knoop. The "new beginnings, signs, metamorphoses" are to be seen therefore, not only as arising out of the secret stillness of Vera, the initiate's, death, but also in a larger sense (since the sonnets are not to Rilke's acquaintance primarily, but to Orpheus himself, the inventor or reformer of the rites of Dionysos -- one of the major figures at Eleusis) they are to be seen as the legendary historical event of discovery by Orpheus of this new knowledge out of the mysterious dark stillness of the forest. (for additional information concerning Dionysos at Eleusis, see: Die Mysterien Von Eleusis, C. Kerényi, Zuerich, 1962.)

5) Rilke uses klaren geloesten, which means literally "clear" and "loosened" or "solved" (as in "to solve a mystery"). "Transparent" retains both of these meanings.

6) The pun in English, which works by syntax, is also present in the German. Rilke says: Tiere aus Stille drangen, not Tiere drangen aus Stille which is in natural grammatical order, the former being

inverted. The intent of the pun is the creation of an image of these animals crossing a threshold of communion -- not only do they emerge out of the stillness, they also bear its stamp: they are moulded from it and seen in the new light of a suddenly "solved" mystery of dark, tangled beast and forest before the song is heard.

7) The usual translation of da ergab sich is "it came to pass," yet this would be inaccurate here because of its Christian connotation of mutability. What Rilke is celebrating here is not the mutable condition of all things, but an immortal event created within human history or legend (see Prometheus as a parallel), to which human history is witness, and after which the human condition is permanently changed. It is not a part of a previous condition which the human is born into. Thus the phrase "it happened there" is more accurate in that what we are witness to here is the actual moment of origin in which we constantly participate thereafter.

8) Rilke uses a conjugation of "to be," waren here. I have used "to make" instead: a) to carry forward the notion of the German "out of (because of) craft" and "out of (because of) fear" in the original; b) for metric considerations (see note # 9 below); and c) because the phrase "out of" has already been used twice previously in the stanza with an entirely different emphasis in meaning, and its repetition again here would have made for confusion and awkwardness in the pattern of meanings throughout the stanza.

9) Rilke uses the rhyme scheme ABAB/CDDC in the octave. What this does is to arrest the reader at the end of the second stanza and lead him back to its beginning. Its rhyme scheme is a very closed, circular construction -- it does not lead directly to the first stanza of the

sestet the way a scheme of CDCD would. The stanza is also a completely self-contained landscape of activity. This accomplishes several things which I have attempted to duplicate with: a) internal rhymes, "forest, nest, lair; pressed, there;" b) parallelism, "not craft and not fear;" and c) ending the stanza with the word "still." A suspended dream-like or surreal landscape in which the reader is momentarily caught is created by these forms, serving to isolate the phrase "but hearing" (actually the end of the sentence making up stanza two) from the stanza, because it properly belongs to and begins the activity and subject of the sestet, which is passive in opposition to the pronounced active nature of the octave. In fact the structure of the sonnet duplicates and explicates the structure of its first two lines, where we are presented with a tree outside, transformed and implanted inside the cavern or womb of the ear through the enchantment of song. The sexual imagery is obvious. The octave penetrates the sestet by the way in which the sentence in stanza two pauses, gathers in on itself, and thrusts into the opening of stanza three. The phallic image of the rising tree, and the corresponding vaginal image of the entrance in the last stanza hardly need comment. Yet to fix on the sexual aspect of the imagery here would be naive. The question is: "how does it operate within the poem?" If we return to the first two lines, and the mystery they present to us: "how does the outside move into the inside," we recognize immediately the old problem of epistemology. Rilke is not interested in explaining this process, but rather in showing it forth as an image of communion which can be recognized and experienced, and can and is celebrated on that basis as a mystery, yet it cannot be explained without removing one's participation from it

which would cause the process to disappear before it could be examined. Again, one does not transcend the process -- one ascends its orders (from knowledge presented to man of woman, and vice versa, -- the first or elemental entrance of the "other," to knowledge of the world, the largest order of "otherness"). The entrances to these orders are presided over by essentially the same mystery.

10) "As" has been inserted here to preserve the perfect balance of the "Doppeldeutung" of the German sentence: i.e. "small in (to) their hearts" (outside), and "small in (within) their hearts" (inside).

11) The word Rilke uses here is empfangen, which in common usage means "to welcome" or "to receive." -- Originally the active taking up or taking upon oneself that which comes toward one, now usually the simple receiving of a thing. Already in a.h.d. (intvāhan) exists the special meaning "to become pregnant." So from the beginning we have an active embrace, a conception. I used "conceive," because the alternative "an expectant hut stood this to receive" would focus on the condition of the hut rather than on that which was coming toward it -- a change in meaning which would have damaged the movement of the poem. In order to retain the image of receptivity which "conceive" leaves out here, I have changed Rilke's simple presentation of an "entrance" (Zugang) in line 13, to the qualified presentation "offering entrance."

12) "Haven" as oposed to "sanctuary" or "refuge" has been chosen, to retain the shape of the penetrating imagery which moves through the poem. Rilke's word Unterschlupf means literally "a place to slip under (into)." "Haven" is etymologically tied to the German Hafen -- "harbour." (i.e. "to harbour dark thoughts, desires.") The poem leads one through the process of that tree moving from outside, to its correspondent

inside, through an image of accepted communion, sexual and otherwise:  
the brutish ear made fertile.

## I - 2

Und fast ein Maedchen wars und ging hervor  
aus diesem einigen Glueck von Sang und Leier  
und glaenzte klar durch ihre Fruehlingsschleier  
und machte sich ein Bett in meinem Ohr.

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

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

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

I - 2

And almost a girl it was and went forth  
 from this <sup>1.</sup> joyful union of song and lyre,  
 shone clear splendor through her spring veils  
 and made herself a bed within my ear.

And slept within me. And all was her sleep: <sup>2.</sup>  
 the trees beheld in wonder, this  
tangible distance, <sup>3.</sup> the meadow's touch,  
 and each amazement having come to me.

She slept the world. Singing god, how have you  
 perfected her, <sup>4.</sup> that she should not desire,  
 even to awaken? See, <sup>5.</sup> she was bid rise, and slept.

Where is her death? Will you yet invent  
<sup>7.</sup> this motif, <sup>8.</sup> before your song is lost? --

Into what depths does she sink from me? ... A girl almost ...



1) The connotation of Rilke's phrase einigen Glueck has a very special significance. In sonnet I - 1, we are presented with the dualities inside/outside, feminine/masculine. Here, these dualities are married into a "one" -- the root of einig is ein, "one," and the word itself, einigen, also means "agreement, accord." Now what is brought into accord here in the image of a performing bard, is the outside of the lyre, and the inside of the song. This "union," which is the word I have used because of its Latin root unus, is presented as the nature of joy itself.

2) I have ended the line with a full colon for the sake of clarity, since the attempt of this stanza is to present the marvellous and magical nature of the way the external world enters the persona. The method is paradox, which preserves the duality even within the act of union; i.e. the external world enters the persona by taking him up into its (or her, since the world is personified as a feminine entity -- the opposite to the persona's masculine entity) dream.

3) diese/uehlbare Ferne, die gefuehlte Wiese -- literally: "this/distance able to be felt (physically), the felt meadow." These lines continue the movement above -- that of marrying the far and near within the "one" of the persona of the poem. We find however, that this marriage of the opposites is not a product of the persona's effort or craft or even experience, but rather is the dream of this mysterious outside "other" which he can only approximately characterize as "almost a girl." Furthermore, this dream is seen as a gift -- "and each amazement having come to me" -- the persona is in fact magically taken up into the dream of the other, totally without explanation and with the mystery absolutely maintained.

4) Rilke's use of begehrte here, along with its isolation at the end of the line by the use of a comma, emphasizes that word in such a way that the reader is led immediately to connect its use to its use in line 5 of sonnet I - 3, and to focus on that whole sonnet's concern with the opposition of being to desire.

5) erstand -- this word is a key both to the movement of the poem and to the narrative structure beginning to take shape through sonnets I - 1, I - 2 and I - 3. Its full significance is realized when one traces the etymology of the word. The root is stehen, indoeuropean st(h)ā -- "stand." Erstehen, which is related to the word form auferstehen, m.h.d. ūferstēn, a.h.d. ūfarstēn -- sich erheben, vom Tode erstehen, begins to be restricted to a purely religious meaning only as late as n.h.d. In early n.h.d., erstehen means both "to become," "to come into being," and "to remain distant," "to be wanting." The interaction of these two meanings creates an understanding of the "newly created" as a recognizable presence which is, however, still closely tied to its absence -- indeed more so than to its presence. It is still held by that other world of absence; it keeps its distance from the already created -- it is wanting, incomplete, and therefore inaccessible: the mystery of a new born child at birth -- neither here nor there. This image of the newly created, referring both to the "girl" and the sonnet sequence itself as it presents itself to the poet, appears continuously throughout the poem in the repeated phrase "almost a girl ~~it was~~ ..." The dual play of meanings becomes clearer when one looks at m.h.d. entstēn: weg-treten -- "to step away" (in the context of creation -- from the realm of "not being"); entgehen -- "to avoid or escape from;" sich erheben --

"to raise oneself;" and werden -- "to become." Finally, the a.h.d. irsten means "to stand up, to rise." The reader begins to notice here a distinct connection between this sonnet and I - 1 via the emphasis on "rise" (steigen - er stehen) and "becoming" (Da stieg ein Baum - sie er stand). Through this connection, the extreme sexual imagery of sonnet I - 1 is quite consciously modified, since what is erstanden is "a girl, almost." In the notes to sonnet I - 1 I have warned against fixing merely on the sexual because Rilke's concern is how the outside or "other" moves into the inside of perception, and this process, while being imagined as participating in the nature of sexuality, is so imagined only as the total extension of that process: i.e. not exclusively as human sexuality, but a metaphor for the meeting of all opposites. Similarly here, in sonnet I - 2, the way the outside unites itself with or gains entrance to the persona is not by a specifically human act, (all of these specific acts remain incomplete -- "almost a girl it was") but by a total imagination or dream of the union of all things -- "she slept the world," which includes herself, the persona, and a multitude of other things: ("and each amazement having come to me"). The other range of meanings, having to do with business and legal transactions, makes the connection between sonnets I - 1, I - 2, and I - 3 more precise by clarifying the narrative movement. In this category we find er stehen defined as kaufen, auf er stehen: "In der ersten Bedeutung seit dem 17. Jahrhundert, eigentlich vom langen stehen bei Versteigerungen; m.h.d. erst en, sich erheben, (vom Tode) aufstehen, entstehen, vor Gericht stehend erwerben". Three things are of interest here: a) the notion of a purchase, kaufen; b) the connection of er stehen with a Versteigerung where one "stands out one's bid" ties the

erstehen of the girl in this sonnet to the opening image of sonnet I - 1, Da stieg ein Baum; and c) the connection of the last meaning vor Gericht stehend erwerben (in conjunction with the other two meanings above) to the phrase in sonnet I - 3 nicht Werbung um ein endlich noch erreichtes -- "not a bidding for a thing at length attained." Thus within the narrative movement we find the explicit sexual imagery which opens the sequence in sonnet I - 1, modified to such an extent that already in sonnet I - 3 Rilke characterizes an exclusively personal desire not only as a blindness, but as an actual impediment to a complete knowledge of world or cosmology.

6) A brief note on Rilke's rhymes. The scheme ABBA/CDDC/EFG/GFE, in conjunction with an alliterative phrase and a reversed repetition of the first and last words, creates a totally veiled mystery within the poem. The stanzas close the poem into itself -- in fact it goes once around the perimeter of the mystery and ends with an open question. I have attempted to approximate this with a strongly alliterative line, except for the last lines which are left open -- sonnet I - 3 of course begins to point to the way the mystery may be approached. The open question at the end of sonnet I - 2, "Into what depths does she sink from me ..." is responded to by the opening lines of sonnet I - 3; "A god may, but how, tell me, shall/ a man follow him through the narrow lyre?" One understands this movement more clearly if one remembers that the "figure" of sonnet I - 2 approaches from the joyous union of song and lyre, and it is down through this gate of the lyre that the image of the girl returns, and through which a god may pass easily. One thinks immediately of Hermes, the original inventor of the lyre, (Homeric hymn to Hermes I); Dionysos' entrances through the gates

of the underworld; and the story of Orpheus' attempt to pass through those gates to raise Euridice.

7) dies -- "this" creates a pun, the two referents of which are: "will you yet invent the remainder of her story," and "will you (as muse) yet grant me the remainder of this sonnet sequence."

8) The most literal translation of eh sich dein Lied verzehrte would be: "before your song has consumed itself." However, the word "consumed" carries an unwanted connotation in English, especially in view of the fact that throughout the sequence, Rilke constantly contrasts the world of mechanized consumption to the world of organic relation proposed by the Orphic.

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\* MacIntyre uses the phrase "harmonious joy," which, quite apart from the literal inaccuracy, is undesirable because of the kind of harmony it ascribes to the Greeks. (see note 2, sonnet I - 1) Leishman's "deep unsounded theme" does not appear in Rilke's poem. Herter Norton uses "consumed," the undesirable connotations of which are discussed in note 8 above.

I - 3

Ein Gott vermags. Wie aber, sag mir, soll  
ein Mann ihm folgen durch die schmale Leier?  
Sein Sinn ist Zwiespalt. An der Kreuzung zweier  
Herzwege steht kein Tempel fuer Apoll.

Gesang, wie du ihn lehrst, ist nicht Begehr,  
nicht Werbung um ein endlich noch Erreichtes;  
Gesang ist Dasein. Fuer den Gott ein Leichtes.  
Wann aber sind wir? Und wann wendet er

an unser Sein die Erde und die Sterne?  
Dies ists nicht, Juengling, dass du liebst, wenn auch  
die Stimme dann den Mund dir aufstoessst, - lerne

vergessen, dass du aufsangst. Das verrinnt.  
In Wahrheit singen, ist ein anderer Hauch.  
Ein Hauch um nichts. Ein Wehn im Gott. Ein Wind.

## I - 3

<sup>1.</sup> A god may. But how, tell me, <sup>2.</sup> shall  
 a man follow him through the narrow lyre?  
 His <sup>3.</sup> mind is <sup>4.</sup> discord. At the <sup>5.</sup> crossroads of two  
ways of the heart <sup>6.</sup> stands not <sup>7.</sup> Apollo's temple.

Song, as you teach it, is not <sup>8.</sup> desire,  
 not a <sup>9.</sup> bidding for a <sup>10.</sup> thing at length attained;  
 song is Being. For the god, a simple matter.  
<sup>11.</sup> But when are we? And when shall he turn --

<sup>12.</sup> the earth and the stars to our being?  
 This is not it, youth, that you love. <sup>14.</sup> So  
 the voice then <sup>15.</sup> breaks open your mouth, - learn

to forget that <sup>16.</sup> you burst forth in song. <sup>17.</sup> That withers in sand.  
 To sing <sup>18.</sup> within truth is a different <sup>19.</sup> aspiration.  
<sup>20.</sup> A breath <sup>21.</sup> about nothing. <sup>22.</sup> A drift in the god. A wind.

1) Ein Gott vermags -- literally "A god is able to accomplish it," since vermags is a contraction of vermag es. Yet Rilke chooses to contract -- wants, I assume, a short, simple, powerful sentence which would present the ease and power with which the act is done. Matter of factness. Thus the English must carry a weight of permission inherent in divine power -- a freedom and permission not granted by the words "is able" or "can," which both imply their opposites because they are strictly mechanical expressions. "May" on the other hand assumes ability, and grants moral authority on the basis of the assumption of mechanical ability.

2) Soll -- literally "should," "shall," "is it possible," "may," etc. "May" is not right here since what is in question is the craft, or ability of man; not divine prerogative -- man must follow -- find the way. "Shall" would be better, since it would indicate a present attempt, which remains ongoing as the poem seeks to answer.

3) Of all the possible alternatives, "mind" is probably best here for the German Sinn, if it is read in its larger sense; i.e. to mean both "meaning" (not only the rational, but the emotional and experiential as well -- in short, all ways accessible to the mind's different modes of thought) and "purpose" or "chosen mode of action."

4) The Duden Herkunftswörterbuch groups the prefix zwie- together with the English "twi-" and the prefixes "bi" and "di," meaning "two" or "into two." However, modern usage has expanded this original meaning so that the Langenscheidts Handwörterbuch now lists the following meanings under Zwiespalt: "disunion, discord, conflict, strife schism, discrepancy, inner conflict, be at variance with." Thus, since the meaning "two" has moved into the background of contemporary usage, and



since the phrase "two ways of the heart" already incorporates an image of duality, the word "discord" has been chosen to translate Zwiespalt in this instance. At first sight, "discord" seems a strange word to use in connection with both a sonnet form and an Orphic subject. Yet Rilke is speaking of the god here -- a god whom we know from the context is not Apollo, whom we must suspect from the context of the larger work to be Dionysos (since it is with this god, and his underworld manifestation as Hades, that Orpheus is associated and whose rites he reforms) and yet who appears from the context of the sentence to be Hermes. This apparent strangeness of the use of the word "discord" disappears therefore, once we realize that we can only be speaking of either Dionysos, whose rites, high up in the mountains, were performed by shrieking maenads who participated in a furiously possessed dance and tore live animals limb from limb, or Hermes, the god "of the dividing ways," patron of thieves, trickster, messenger of the gods, and conveyor of souls to the underworld. In this last function, (as "Psychopompos"), he is of course directly associated with Hades - Dionysos, and it is probable that Rilke is being intentionally ambiguous as to which god is specifically meant here -- certainly the phrase kein Tempel fuer Apoll is an open and leading one: it begs the question. Since we know that Orpheus reformed the rites of Dionysos, and that Rilke in this sonnet is attempting to arrive at a statement concerning "true song," the word "discord" is not only not out of place here, but conforms to the mythic process itself, since the sonnet in its search to follow the god in order to discover the poetics of true song, reenacts and makes present the original activity of Orpheus himself.

5) Kreuzung -- literally "crossing," yet I have chosen "crossroads" because of its more concrete, imagistic nature. The German sich kreuzen is reflexive and thus always denotes an action rather than abstraction.

6) The literal "ways of the heart" does quite well as a translation of Herzwege, since it includes in its range of meanings the physical blood vessels of the heart, all the way over to the non-physical conflicts of emotion and direction. Furthermore, the word "ways" begins, in this sonnet, to initiate a whole series of images of the "way" of the sonnet sequence (and hence of the imagination itself) as it reveals its shape to an ever greater extent in the later poems. "Ways" also includes of course, the meaning "paths," as I had originally translated it. I mention this specifically because in Homeric Greek; "the word for song means path, and the path is composed of the formulae, which enable the poet to find his way through his material." (from From Mycenae To Homer, by T.B.L. Webster, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, 1964, pp. 132). This connection makes even more sense when we realize that Hermes, "the god of the dividing ways," is the inventor of the lyre (he later barter it to Apollo), and the kind of song we are dealing with in the Sonnets To Orpheus is the song of the "double realm" (see especially sonnets I - 8 and I - 9).

7) "stands not Apollo's temple" would focus on the issue of the temple rather than Apollo. As mentioned in note #4 above, the presence of a god here and the mention of a temple begs the question. To say, therefore, "stands no temple for Apollo" emphasizes the phrase "no temple" which the word "Apollo" would then merely modify. If read

hastily, the reader could assume that the god in question was Apollo, and would find himself with neither a god nor a temple at the end of four lines. This cannot be so, however, since the divinity is emphasized throughout the poem. Therefore to translate the phrase as I have done, "stands not Apollo's temple," is to affirm that a divinity is present and has a place of worship, but that that divinity is not Apollo, but rather the one or ones alluded to by the phrase Sein Sinn ist Zwiespalt in line 2.

- 8) "Desire" is the best alternative for Begehr, since it is determined by the issue of "love" raised in line 10.
- 9) "a bidding for" is used here rather than "the courting of," since Rilke's use of Werbung (which in common usage means "advertising"), is too pejorative to allow the use of a word suggesting troubador love lyrics. Rilke has a different kind of love song in mind here -- i.e. the one which sees only its immediate object, and not a world or landscape in which that object and one's love for it is given a place. Also, the overall narrative movement through the sequence demands that at this point, with this word, the whole previous sexual imagery be put sharply into focus -- i.e., that song is not merely the record or a bid for love, but on the contrary, that truly inspired song comes to and overpowers all the singer's faculties in the same way that love itself does: from outside himself, from some "other" whose dimensions are divine and into whose realm or landscape the singer is taken up.
- 10) The German phrase endlich noch Erreichtes as it is used here is definitely a closed construction implying a specific end, the achievement of which would simultaneously annul the raison d'etre of the "song." Since it is on this ground (i.e. that the youth's song

will not go beyond the experience of personal desire) that Rilke rejects that type of lyric later, it is logical that the theme be introduced at this point in the poem. In view of this, "a thing at length attained" is as exact a translation as possible.

11) This sentence remains questionable to me, perhaps because it depends in German as well as in English too much on the italics. Similarly, in line 10, a usual reading in both languages would have the stress fall on "not," but Rilke obviously wants to oppose "being" to "desire," which is the reason he italicizes "is" here.

12) wann wendet er an unser Sein -- literally "when turns (shall he turn) he to our being," yet in the German we must deal with a pun on anwenden, which means "apply to" in the sense that one applies to a thing or situation another thing or situation which is befitting to it. Thus this construction suggests not only a turning of the heavens and the earth to our being, i.e. for our use or to our benefit, but also that implicit in this turning lies a sympathetic harmony which extends far beyond the base notion of simple use of the cosmos. It suggests the achievement of a harmony, the ground of which lies in the assumption of a sympathetic relation between man and cosmos -- man as microcosmos. Furthermore, Rilke has used the visual and tonal rhyme of the final word of line 8, "er," in the centre of the last word in line 9, Sterne. What this does is place the god in the centre of what he is turning -- he is implicit in creation -- he does not move it abstractly from without -- he turns within it and thus the stars and the earth turn themselves. I have sought to recreate this by introducing a dash after "turn," so that in the listening we hear first the god turning, then with him the earth and stars, since man

within the poem begins by following the god until the movement turns back on itself and the landscape is transformed. We end, in the poem, within the body of the god, which is of course the condition of the earth and the stars in harmony with our being.

13) The sentence has been inverted to strengthen the identification delineated in note #12 above. Within the sonnet we have moved from the octave to the sestet in these two lines, and by placing "man" at the end of the lines, the movement of the poem is clarified; i.e. while in the first 8 lines the outside aligns itself, in the following 6 lines man himself is taken up in this alignment.

14) wenn auch can mean "even if," or the expressions "so" or "so what" (interrogative, leading). My use of "so," and a breaking of the sentence, adds clarity and provides the more exact tone suggested by the pun in the following line.

15) Stossen means "to bump," but carries none of the mildness of the English word. It is the kind of bump experienced by a piano edge hitting a wall, a battering ram hitting a door, or an elbow hitting ones ribs -- "bash" would perhaps be closer. Aufstossen thus means "to batter or bash open." Yet the line also contains a spiteful pun, since Aufstossen also means "to belch." By lending the auditory image of a belch to the love lyrics here alluded to, and opposing these to "true" singing, Rilke clearly indicates that these love songs express merely the singer's satisfaction with, or indulgence in, how his own love fills him. However, the severity of this construction is mediated to some extent by the fact that this is not the kind of pun that works grammatically within the sentence if the meaning "to belch" is substituted for "to break open." The pejorative notion enters the

reader's perception only when the word aufstoest is taken out of context. Rilke further mediates the acidic nature of the charge by referring to the singer as a "youth" who may yet learn to sing within the truth. The use of "break," in conjunction with a modification of the following line approaches these problems.

16) Because of the damaging severity of the pun in the previous line, the phrase dass du aufsangst must contain the notion that the subject of the song was the "self." Therefore the translation must remain literal in the rendering of the phrase dass du aufsangst, and must indicate an undesirable self-expression in what was sung. The pun contained in the phrase "that you burst forth in song" handles this problem, in that it means not only that the singer did sing, but also, if read another way, that it was the singer himself who burst forth in a rather messy indulgence of self-expression.

17) Das verrinnt. This expression refers in German to the activity of a liquid disappearing. The two most common instances brought to the immediate visual imagination are those of water running off in all directions from the crown of a rounded surface, (eg. a hill), or of a river splitting off into many arms and disappearing in the sand of a desert. Of the two, I have chosen the second to create in image the intense visual experience of the German expression.

18) "in truth," though literal, is too weak here. Rilke is opposing two types of song -- the former, as we have seen, has been severely condemned as self-expression -- of thrusting out what is within. The alternative must therefore be a participation -- the experience of being taken up into what is without the self. The first key to this

appears in that business of the stars and the earth turning about man in a sympathetic harmony, and this is corroborated by the density of meanings in the last 2 lines of the poem. I have therefore chosen to move off the literal to strengthen the notion of the singer singing from within a cosmos -- out of an order larger than himself -- and have chosen, consequently, to use the phrase "within truth."

19) Hauch -- "breath, breathing, gentle breeze, whiff, waft, aspiration, bloom, film, tinge trace, touch." I have chosen "aspiration" for a variety of reasons. Contextually of course, it works best in that explicitly, the sonnet is an "advice to a young poet." Yet in a deeper sense, the poet has moved here in the last stanza into a larger order; into a world of the "holy spirit" and also, because the world has turned, the "spititus mundi." "Aspiration" of course, contains the word "spirit" (from the latin spiritus - "breath"), and thus allows all of these meanings to condense around itself.

"Aspiration" means literally "desire, ambition, drawing of breath" (OED), the latter being most important here in the above mentioned sense, and also because the act of breathing is an act of communion with an external world which enters man and vice versa. Finally, an "aspirate" sound is one pronounced with an "h," which takes us right back to Rilke's use of the word Hauch.

20) This second use of the word Hauch I have translated as "breath" since at this point in the process of the poem, the transformation from the bringing forth from a definite inside (Aufstossen), to being taken up into an outside is complete to the extent that only the communion remains. The separate identity of the individual has totally disappeared in the taking up of the larger -- it is now a "breath

about nothing," not a belch out of a very definite something.

21) "about" is more accurate than "around," since the German use of um in this case is ambiguous (as is the English "about"); i.e. can mean both "around" and "concerning." In view of Rilke's previous rejection of desire (line 5), the preservation of this ambiguity seems necessary and must be intentional.

22) Wehn -- a pun which includes an enormous range of meanings and rests on a contraction of Wehen. Some of these are: Weh -- "sore, painful, aching, wrench, woe, cause pain, grieve, hurt;" Wehe -- "drift" (snow, sand); Wehen -- "labour-pains, travail;" Wehen -- "blow, drift, waft, flutter, wave, live, reign;" and the constructions Weh--- -- "woefull cries, wail, lament, plaintive cries, melancholy, wistfulness, nostalgia, etc." Now the previous emphasis on "breath," and the following phrase "a wind" would seem to direct one toward those meanings which have to do specifically with "wind" and its activity, Wehen. Yet Rilke's contraction Wehn deliberately focuses our attention on the root Weh, and thus on the grief, melancholy and pain its constructions suggest. In addition the contraction also creates an auditory pun on Wen -- "whom, someone." In order to hold as many of these meanings as possible, I have constructed a pun on "a drift," which suggests not only that the song and/or poet spoken of becomes a tangible and visible record of the moving wind or spirit within the god, but also, when read as one word -- "adrift," it suggests the grief and melancholy which such a giving over, and subsequent loss of one's "self" to a larger order creates.

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MacIntyre, Leishman and Herter Norton all use "can" in line 1



and not "may." The necessity for the meaning "permission" which "may" creates here is discussed in note #1 above. Furthermore both Leishman and Herter Norton use "existence" and "exist" in lines 7 and 8 respectively, creating an existentialist bias in the poem and the sequence which is not there. Possibly the previous translators' fascination with existentialism arises from their taking note of Rilke's special use of the word Dasein. That he wishes the reader to notice of the word is quite apparent for two reasons: a) it has been capitalized; and b) metrically, the line would read more evenly if simply sein were used: the use of two syllables makes the reader pause over the word. The logical move on the part of the critic would be to Heidegger. Vincent Vycinas, in the course of his investigation of Heidegger's special use of the word Dasein says:

Accentuating the existence as a relation to Being instead of to one's own being, Heidegger modifies the way of writing this word. Instead of "existence" he now has "ec-sistence" to signify standing out in the openness of Being. "The standing in the glade of Being, I call the 'ec-sistence' of man," says Heidegger. By standing out into the glade of Being, man is more than what he is as a natural man in the sense of "in-sistence," i.e. not "ec-sistence." To "ec-sist" means not only be what one is but also be the possibility of standing out into one's beyondness. To be this possibility is not an occasional off-and-on event for man but the very basic feature of him as man. "It is a distinguishing peculiarity of man that his essence as nature and his essence as highest possibility do not coincide as with other beings -- with stone and with God."



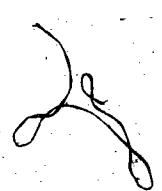
Freedom as letting-oneself-into-the-openness is that which in Sein Und Zeit was called Dasein, the to-be-in-the-world. Dasein is the being free or being open to Being and to that which is assembled in the openness of Being; it is the "ec-sistence." Freedom is "ec-sistence."

(from Earth And Gods, by Vincent Vycinas, Martinus Nijhoff / The Hague, 1961, pgs. 72 - 72 and 158 respectively.)

However, once one realizes that the first part of the Sonnets To Orpheus was written in two days in February, 1922, and Heidegger's Sein Und Zeit was not published until 1927, a year after Rilke's death, it becomes quite clear that while Heidegger's concept of Dasein may be quite valuable as a critical tool with which to approach Rilke's poetics of being, the poet's vocabulary must ultimately remain of primary concern:

Wir verstehen die geistesgeschichtliche Stellung Rilke's am besten, wenn wir ihn in denselben Zusammenhang einordnen, der philosophisch in der Existenzphilosophie zum Ausdruck gekommen ist. Das soll nicht bedeuten, dass er in irgendeinem schulmaessigen Zusammenhang mit der als Existenzphilosophie bezeichneten philosophischen Stroemung gestanden haette -- das ist schon darum nicht moeglich, weil deren entscheidende Werke erst nach seinem Tode erschienen sind -- er verwendet darueber hinaus auch nicht den Begriff der Existenz im besonderen Sinn der modernen Existenzphilosophie, und er spricht auch sonst nicht die Schulsprache der Existenzphilosophen.

(from Rilke, by Otto Friedrich Bollnow, W. Kohlhammer Verlag, Stuttgart, 1956, pg. 19.)



O ihr Zaertlichen, tretet zuweilen  
in den Atem, der euch nicht meint,  
lasst ihn an euren Wangen sich teilen,  
hinter euch zittert er, wieder vereint.

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

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

Selbst die als Kinder ihr pflanztet, die Baeume,  
wurden zu schwer laengst; ihr trueget sie nicht.  
Aber die Luefte ... aber die Raeume ...

I - 4

Oh you <sup>1.</sup> tender ones, <sup>2.</sup> step from time to time  
 into <sup>3.</sup> that breath <sup>4.</sup> which does not mean you,  
 let it divide itself on your cheeks,  
 behind you it trembles, united again.

Oh you blessed, oh you <sup>5.</sup> hale,  
 you who appear as the hearts' origin.  
 Bows of the arrows and the arrows' <sup>6.</sup> aims,  
 more eternal shines your smile bewept.

Do not fear to suffer, <sup>7.</sup> gravity -  
 give it back to the earth's <sup>8.</sup> weight;  
<sup>9.</sup> ponderous are the mountains, ponderous are the seas.

<sup>10.</sup> Even those which you planted as children, the trees,  
 have long ago become too heavy; you carried them not.  
 But the airs ... but the spaces ...

1) The word Zaertlichen, which is built on the root Zart, means originally (a.h.d.) schwaechlich -- "weak." In m.h.d. zaertlich begins to mean "lovable, soft," and in n.h.d. the emphasis of the meaning has shifted to "lovable, beloved, fine, beautiful and tender," and the meanings "soft" and "weak" have moved to the background. The English word "tender" approaches this range of meaning, as it indicates a "tender spot" and a "tender babe" as well as "tender love" for example. Rilke's use of the word here is interesting in terms of the narrative structure, since in the previous poem he has instructed the persona concerning the pride inherent in desire, and has begun to move into a cosmology where the centre is a divine one, and not the human self. In the opening line of sonnet I - 4 then, we have moved from the singular of I - 3 to the plural -- from man to an image of man within a larger structure -- the human condition. With such a loss of self-centred identity comes of course primarily the openness and vulnerability suggested by zaertlich, yet the other range of meaning of this word defines that openness not only as a dangerous vulnerability, but also as a condition of selfless love. As such, this poem creates, among other things, the courage necessary for this kind of relation to a world.

2) tretet zuweilen -- this construction means literally "to take a step when the time is right, this 'time' being recurrent," and reintroduces that emphasis on schreiten, steigen, folgen etc. which creates both within each poem and throughout the narrative sequence, a process or way, constantly dividing and reuniting. I have not used, therefore, a structure as ambiguous as "now and then" since I wanted to hold very clearly the duality that "from time to time" suggests,

and the cyclical, processional aspect of that activity. Indeed the whole movement of this poem -- forward and back, apart together, up and down, is one of recurring parallelisms.

3) The German article den is both definite and indefinite. I have chosen to translate it as "that," since the word Atem here comes directly out of the spiritus mundi of the last poem -- it is not just any "breath," but a reappearance of one of the central images running through the sequence.

4) der er nicht meint MacIntyre translates as "not intended for you;" Herter Norton as "that takes no heed of you;" and Leishman as "not breathed for you." All of these are inadequate if not wrong. The phrase "not intended for you" introduces a notion of intention which is just not present in the German. Furthermore, we have just moved from sonnet I - 3, where "being" is imagined as spacial, (as it is in this sonnet), and not as a movement within space toward some definite goal which a notion of intention implies. "That takes no heed of you" is also unacceptable since all the sonnets up to this point begin to imagine the place of the persona within a world as that of a special kind of beloved. "Not breathed for you" comes closest, but still begs the question. As is so often the case, the literal is much more exact. The German phrase is insolvably ambiguous, which is probably why these previous translators have attempted to bend its meaning into something indicatively specific. The ambiguity of the phrase resides in the fact that it demands completion by the reader, and this imagined completion determines how you translate the phrase. Now if one has been reading the previous sonnets carefully, one can imagine a completion for the phrase "which does not mean you"

something like: "but takes you up into itself."

5) Heilen is usually translated as "whole" or "entire," yet it also means "to heal." Its root, heil derives etymologically probably from the language of cult practise, and proceeds from there into profane speech. In a.h.d. and m.h.d. it originally means "healthy, unblemished, saved." Only very lately has it acquired the meaning "whole" or "complete." It is also used occasionally as a salutation similar to the English "hail." Rilke is playing on all these meanings. Interestingly enough, the Duden - Herkunftswörterbuch presents the English word "hale" -- ("fresh, unweakened") as an illustration of its original meaning. It is for the above reasons, and because it creates an auditory pun on the word "hail," that "hale" has been used here.

6) Although Leishman, MacIntyre and Herter Norton all translate Ziele as "targets," I believe "aims" is closer to the original, since the exact German word for "target" is Zielscheibe. Ziel by itself is not that specific -- it can mean "aim, goal, end, target, etc." By keeping the meaning of the word open (as the German intends), the image is not restricted to a linear imagination, but a spatial one. The "aims" are many and various, not directed to an end at the possible expense of the means: Rilke clearly wants us to focus on the way or means here, since he juxtaposes beginning and end, "bow" and "aim" within one line, so that the line actually becomes the arrows' flight, creating space. This is also why I have placed "Bows" and "aims" at the beginning and end of the line respectively, with the repeated "arrows" separating them. If the word "target" occurred at the end of the line, it would stop. "Aims" on the other hand creates both an end to the line, and takes us back to its beginning -- sighting along an

arrow in a bow. Thus this line defines the condition of blessedness which opens the stanza, and puts the line coming immediately after it into the light of an active duality.

7), 8) & 9) Die Schwere does not mean "weight" (which would be das Schwere), but "the condition of weight" or "weightiness." In the light of this, the phrases schwer sind die Berge, schwer sind die Meere cannot be translated simply as "heavy are . . .," i.e. as simply dead material weight. I have used "gravity" and "ponderous" respectively in order to suggest that this heavy immobility is not only an attribute of matter, but also an attribute of the spirit, as Rilke intends it to be seen by his use of die Schwere. The poet here, as elsewhere, is not interested in a Manichean mind-body split, just as he is also not interested in merely the "self." The subject of these poems is not some kind of interior landscape into which the world is placed or intrudes, but an external landscape of being which gives the self a place -- not a division of mind-body or inside-outside, but the tension and play between these poles. Der Erde Gewicht is thus the only phrase which demands a material image of "weight," since it is the centre and base unit of measure of all known weights -- either physical or spiritual.

10) The pun on "children" and its possible antecedents, "you" and /or "trees," in this English translation, suggesting; "Things which issue from you or that you give origin to gain a stature of their own, and as you grow apart from them are then no longer yours -- you must give them up -- be free of them," creates an interplay also present in the German line.

11) The rhyme between lines 11 and 12 is meant to approximate



Rilke's rhyme of lines 10 and 13. This parallel structure of the two stanzas of the sestet serves to oppose and balance or counteract two movements -- down in stanza 3 and up in stanza 4. These two movements create vertical space, as the image of the dividing wind in stanza 1 creates horizontal space, the bows and aims of stanza 2 create curved space (the arrows' flight), the bewept smile of line 8 creates a passionate space, and the pun in line 12 creates a space of time (i.e. things growing through time). All of these simultaneous tensions lead directly to the openness of the last line, where we find an opening of the field -- a created space in which Orpheus may live again.

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

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

O wie er schwinden muss, dass ihrs begriffst!  
Und wenn ihm selbst auch bangte, dass er schwaende.  
Indem sein Wort das Hiersein uebertrifft,

ist er schon dort, wohin ihrs nicht begleitet.  
Der Leier Gitter zwaengt ihm nicht die Haende.  
Und er gehorcht, indem er ueberschreitet.

## I - 5

Erect no <sup>1.</sup> stone. <sup>2.</sup> Simply let the rose  
 bloom each year in <sup>3.</sup> propitiation.  
<sup>4.</sup> 'Cause it's Orpheus. His metamorphosis  
 in <sup>5.</sup> this and that. We should not trouble ourselves

for other names. Once and for all <sup>6.</sup> times,  
 it's Orpheus, if <sup>7.</sup> there's song. He comes and goes.  
 Isn't it much already, if he outlives the <sup>8.</sup> chaliced <sup>9.</sup> rose  
 sometimes by a couple of days?

How he must be <sup>10.</sup> consumed, that you might <sup>11.</sup> grasp it!  
 Even if the <sup>12.</sup> fear came to him, that his <sup>13.</sup> strength might abate.  
 In that his word <sup>14.</sup> outstrips <sup>15.</sup> presence,

he is already there, where you do not accompany it.  
 His hands are not bound by the lyre's <sup>16.</sup> gate.  
 And he obeys, in that he <sup>17.</sup> oversteps.

1) Denkstein -- usually "commemorative stone, stone to the memory of, monument, cairn." I have chosen "stone" for a variety of reasons. In previous anotations I have already begun a discussion of how Hermes enters the narrative. In Jane Harrison's Mythology we can trace the evolution of the anthropomorphic Hermes from a simple stone set up at the boundary of a field, to a mound of stones, an ithiphalic stone monument, to later stages of semi and complete anthropomorphism. We find also that this stone marker comes to designate not only physical, but also temporal, mental, and cosmological boundaries. In Russia, for example, the word "boundary" and "grandfather" is the same -- a boundary is indicated between the living and the dead. This is the concern of sonnet I - 5. It is because this poem deals with that particular issue of the mortal confronting the immortal, and what it is that remains from this meeting, that I have chosen the word "stone." The erection of the stone immediately implies memory, and the whole spectrum of the above associations which lends images to the kind of memory the remainder of the poem presents to the reader. (from Mythology, by J.E. Harrison, Harbinger Books reprint, 1963, Chapter I, Hermes.)

2) The German phrase Lasst nur, while meaning literally "let only," often means colloquially "let it alone, leave it" or "simply." I have chosen "simply" because the focus of Rilke's impatiently vituperative attack here lies in his opposition of the organic world (and the Orphic story growing out of it), to the understanding of Orpheus as a "conquering hero" to whom one erects monuments or gravestones. The kind of memory or commemoration which Rilke wishes to characterize Orpheus with is not a static one -- one that erects immovable stone

monuments to a dead historic figure -- but an active one: a memory that returns each year -- like the memory of the earth itself -- and lives again. A continually renewed presence -- not a reminder of a continual absence. One does not see Orpheus in old text books, unless one realizes that these books are based on a simple looking out in the world each year to find his flowering and necessary death.

3) zu seinen Gunsten -- literally "for his benefit," yet that would place an active intention on the line which is not there in the original -- it is a passive construction. (see note 2 above). It is the world in its entirety which remembers him -- the human merely is witness to, and participates in, the yearly propitiation. "At Zone in Thrace a number of ancient mountain oaks are still standing in the pattern of one of his dances, just as he left them." (from The Greek Myths, by R. Graves, Vol. I, Pelican, 1966, pg. 111). Leishman translates Rilke's quite explicit use of the word Jahr ("year") as "summer," thus destroying the entire significance of the poem. Rilke is interested here, as he is throughout the sequence, in the interplay of all the elements of the process, not merely a celebration of one of them. In the light of this, I wonder what Leishman thinks Rilke meant by his opening phrase "Erect no stone?!"

4) The tone at this point in the poem and in the overall narrative lapses into a weary frustration and anger. The poem bristles with colloquialisms and contractions. The poet's stance becomes that of a boxer in the ring, defending a victory in a rather flippant manner. It is not until the sestet that he begins to realize faintly that the lack of understanding which he is battling in his opponents is

in fact a necessary integral part of what he is defending, and he grudgingly begins to withdraw his assault with a growing understanding of the necessity of both the viciousness of the attack, and his temporary, desperate defense. The figure of Orpheus himself during all this has overstepped the boundaries of the ring (see note 1 above on "stone"). -- The issue between the opponents has moved, through their conflict, on to another realm.

5) in dem und dem -- literally "in that and that," yet the expression in German is a colloquial "turn of phrase" and a non-literal translation of the phrase into the English equivalent "in this and that" is much more accurate.

6) Ein fuer alle Male -- again we are dealing with a turn of phrase, yet in this instance I have translated it literally for two reasons: a) in the equivalent English expression "once and for all," the completion "times" is understood, and b) it is necessary at this point to reinforce the notion of recurring instances, and time itself, in order to clarify the images of the rose (mutability), and the song (immortality) which play off against one another in this stanza.

7) wenn es singt -- literally "whenever it sings." (sic) I have used "if there's song" (and not "when ..." as the three previous translators have), because "when" would imply Orpheus' existence outside of song in some abstract eternal world -- a transcendence which, as we have seen, Rilke is not interested in. Mortality is only defeated, in the human realm, "for a few days," and Orpheus is human, not divine. "If" in this case thus means "only if."

8) "chalice" duplicates the punning ambiguity of Rosenschale, since it can mean both the cup or bowl form of the rose itself,

(calix), and a cut rose which has been placed on display at the peak of its perfection in a rose-bowl. (See the decapitated head of Orpheus put on display in a cave and becoming such an important oracle that all the others, including Delphi, were emptied of supplicants). This condition was finally ended by Apollo himself who commanded the head to be silent in a fit of jealous anger at the impropriety of the situation. (from The Greek Myths, by Robert Graves, Vol. I, Chapter 28).

9) At this point, the reader literally arrives at the central image of the sonnet. It occurs at the end of line 7 in the middle of a continuing sentence which encompasses all of lines 7 and 8. The rose has traditionally been used as an image of perfect earthly beauty (even in Dante, the celestial rose is an imagination of the centre of divinity by a living mortal), yet simultaneously as an image of the mutability of that perfection. That the duplicity of this rose image is intended, is evident from the first line where the static permanence of stone is replaced by the continually dying and regenerating rose; from the rhyme of Male ("times") with Schale ("chalice"); and from the punning ambiguity of the word Schale itself. In order to emphasize this duplicity in due proportion, I have constructed a rhyme fusing the phrases "he comes and goes" with "the chalice rose," which also, of course, makes Orpheus present through his signature -- the rose. Yet we also know from line 6, that Orpheus only appears in song. The phrase "sometimes by a couple of days" closes the octave and weaves these threads of meaning together -- that Orpheus' gift of song is tied to memory (in Hesiod's Theogony the Muses are the daughters of memory) and it is this tie which

creates the prophetic voice (as opposed to the personal voice) by giving "presence" a place in what has been and what will be (i.e. constructing a cosmology). This poetry, while being tied inescapably to the present, "outlives it sometimes by a couple of days" by offering access to a permanent world through image or "word," yet not transcending the present completely: this song asserts that permanence is part of the condition of the present.

10) schwinden has no exact equivalent in English. It can be approximated by words such as "fade, dissipate, dissolve, disappear (verschwinden)," etc., but none of these hold that image of the break-up and disappearance of an unstable object piece by piece from the outside in which the German word implies. The etymology of the word provides the translator with helpful discoveries: the strong verb m.h.d. swinden; a.h.d. swintan, "to reduce (oneself or itself), to eat oneself, to pass away;" anglo-saxon swindan "to reduce (oneself or itself), to starve" is probably related to the slavick (Russian) vjánut "to wilt." Also, the word schwindeln, "to be dizzy" or "to swindle" is built on the word schwinden. The prefixing of ver to schwinden expresses a complete passing away, which may mean verzehrt "to be eaten, consumed," vernichtet werden "to be transformed into a condition of 'not'" (to be destroyed), as well as ausser Gebrauch kommen "to pass out of use" or "to become invisible." Last but not least, the construction Schwindsucht meant "tuberculosis," as it still does in the common speech of many areas of Germany. Now our equivalent to Schwindsucht is "consumption," and when we examine the range of meaning above, we find one construction which definitely can be translated as "to consume" (verschwinden),



and the implication of "consumption" in almost every case. This is one of the two reasons I have translated the phrase O wie er schwinden muss as "How he must be consumed." The other reason is contextual, both in terms of this poem and the larger narrative structure. Rilke's previous use of words and phrases alluding to advertising, auctions and banal marketplaces of commodities, and the later sonnets' condemnation of mechanization and industrialization as it destroys the natural world, all indicate a range of meaning focussing on an image of consumption here. In terms of this sonnet, the vituperative tone, and the knowledge that the maenads tore the singing Orpheus to pieces also point in this direction.

11) "to grasp" is an exact literal translation of begreifen, which means both "to understand" (verstehen), and "to lay hands upon" -- i.e. a very physical, practical understanding of a thing. The simplicity and concreteness of this understanding relates back to the first line, and it also recalls the dance of the maenads, in the course of which wild animal and human infants are suckled, and then torn to pieces.

12) The phrase wenn ihm ... bangte indicates a possession and threatening of the persona by an external presence of fear (the concrete image of which would undoubtedly be the maenad throng), which is why I have translated this expression with the phrase "fear came to him."

13) In Homer, strength is usually "strength of limbs" -- a composite image of different parts and functions. Since we know how Orpheus died, schwinden, with its meanings "to fade" and "dismemberment" (see note 10 above) has here been rendered as "abating

strength" -- strength leaving the limbs. (from Die Entdeckung Des Geistes, by Bruno Snell, Claassen Verlag, Hamburg, 1955, pp. 23 - 24 & also Kapitel 1.)

14) uebertreffen -- this word contains the implication of contest -- i.e. in archery, one archer may outshoot or "shoot farther" than the other, or in a footrace one man may run past or "outstrip" (which is the word I have used) his companion. The importance of the implication is that the first distance is covered by both together -- it is only the boundary created by the limit of one's companion that is overstepped. For this reason, victory for the Greeks was always associated with the divine -- (see Pindar, or the episode in Homer's Odyssey, book 23, where Athena surrounds Odysseus with her silver light when he presents himself to his court as victor).

15) The word which I have translated as "presence" -- Hiersein, has nothing to do with the generalities of "existence" or "existentialism." Literally it means "to be here," "in this place," implying a quite specific being in a place but at the same time not denying that this being or presence may move to other realms both spatially and temporally. As such, Hiersein is used by Rilke as a punning reference to his use of the word Dasein in sonnet I - 3. It is important to notice that "being" is there defined not as a "condition," but as a "relation" to a world or worlds. Now we know from sonnet I - 3, and especially from sonnets I - 6, I - 8, and I - 9, that for Rilke, complete Dasein or "being" always implies presence in more than one world or realm -- "Only in the double realm / do the voices become / eternal and mild." Thus the use of Hiersein in this instance defines a one-dimensionality -- it is this

one-dimensionality of the "self" or "human" or "mortal" which Orpheus "word" or song oversteps. Herter Norton's phrase; "transcends the being-here" is thus misleading, since it missed the play Rilke has constructed between his use of the two words. MacIntyre and Leishman also do not use phrases in their translations of the two sonnets which clarify Rilke's discriminations, but they are not as misleading as Herter Norton on the business of transcendence.

16) This line is inverted in order to duplicate Rilke's rhyme schwaende / Haende with "abate / gate." Gitter has been translated as "gate" and not the literal "grate" for two reasons: a) Gitter means literally "a lattice work grating," but it is almost always associated with a window, doorway or gate. Thus when one uses the word, an image like that of a wrought iron gate is an immediate visual association. The lyre itself has been previously seen as such a gate (see sonnet I - 3); b) the literal translation of Gitter as "grate" here would produce an auditory image of a discordant "grating" music which is simply not present in the German -- quite on the contrary, the line is suggesting a free flowing, "unbound" or unhindered music.

17) The purpose of this rhyme, both in the German and the English, is to draw the reader's attention to the fact that lines 10 and 13 can and should be read following each other: "Even if the fear came to him that his strength might abate / his hands are not bound by the lyre's gate." This variant clarifies the movement of the sestet: i.e. fear for his own life does not alter his dedication to what goes beyond the personal -- the "word," song or poem, wherein lies the only human access to and record of the immortal. Singing; he was torn to pieces and singing, his head floated on the waters until it was

finally silenced by Apollo days later -- only the lyre was placed among the immortal stars.

18) Ueberschreitet -- literally "to step or stride over or beyond."

This reintroduces the image of "the way" -- the "foot," both anatomical and poetic, and its ground. What Orpheus oversteps is of course the stone or herm marking the boundaries of "rose," "presence" or "the mortal." (Again, Hermes as Psychopompos, conveyor of souls to the underworld.)

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

Geht ihr zu Bette, so lasst auf dem Tische  
Brot nicht und Milch nicht; die Toten ziehts -.  
Aber er, der Beschwoerende, mische  
unter der Milde des Augenlids

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

Nichts kann das gueltige Bild ihm verschlimmern;  
sei es aus Graebnern, sei es aus Zimmern,  
ruehme er Fingerring, Spange und Krug.

I - 6

Is he from <sup>1.</sup> here? No, from both  
realms grew his wide nature.

More skillfully would bend the willows' branches,  
he who had come to know their roots in the field.

2.

Go you to bed, no milk and no bread  
on the table leave; it draws the dead -.

3.

But let him, the <sup>4.</sup> conjuror, mix  
under the eyelid's mildness

their appearance in all things seen;  
and the enchantment of earth-smoke and rue  
shall be true to him as the clearest veil.

For him, nothing can impair the valid image;  
be it from graves, be it from rooms,  
praise he finger-ring, clasp and <sup>5.</sup> pitcher of ale.

6.

1) ein Hiesiger -- this construction in German is similar to our notion of "native." It does not imply a belonging, but rather an origin -- i.e. "from here," independent of later location except in terms of how that origin informs a person's presence either at home or abroad. (All previously published translations use "belong here.") Rilke's phrase also relates immediately back to sonnet I - 5, where the issue is how Orpheus oversteps the boundaries of "here" to "there" where we do not accompany him, and as such is a direct continuation of the narrative movement between the sonnets.

2) Three things need noting here. The awkwardness of the construction duplicates the original -- if anything, the German is more unwieldy -- yet it serves the purpose of creating a surprising appearance of Orpheus in the willow tree. Line three at first sight looks as if the willow is bending its own branches, which in a primary and intended sense is quite true. Yet in line four we have an appearance of a persona doing this bending. Thus, in the entire construction we have the roots of the willow informing the bending of its branches, and this process is personified by a figure who has come to know and thereby come to be the process itself. I am reminded here of Ezra Pound's first poem in Personae: "I stood still and was a tree amid the wood, / Knowing the truth of things unseen before." The second point of interest is the German pun on Weide, which means both "willow," and "field, meadow or pasture." I have retained the meaning "willow" with the construction "their roots" (as opposed to "the roots"), and added "in the field" (which is not explicitly stated in the German) to carry the meanings suggested by Rilke's use of the pun. Finally, the willow is a tree associated with Orpheus -- it is a

tree of the dead, and the pun on "field" or "meadow" in which the trees are rooted suggests, among other things, a cemetery. The notion that the dead -- our ancestors -- are our roots in the field has been hinted at previously, and is implied by the folk-saying immediately following this construction (see note 3 below). It is also stated explicitly in the later poems of this sequence.

3) These two lines, isolated from the remainder of the poem by periods and dashes, are a bit of folk wisdom -- an old saying, whose antiquity we can only surmise (since we do not have a corresponding germanic record) through a parallel observation by Jane Harrison: that in Greek cult practice milk, barley and honey are used as sacrificial offerings before wine and meat. The parallel is permissible here however, since the subject is Orpheus. (From Prolegomena ..., Jane E. Harrison, Meridian Books Reprint, 1960, pp. 92 - 94.) It is very important that these lines come across as a folk-saying or "old wives' tale," and in order to achieve this I have approximated Rilke's use of a tight metric structure and archaic language, and have gone beyond him by introducing a repetative rhyme scheme in the English version. The reason for the necessity for preserving the "old wives' tale" tone is that the poem drops from a very tight, slightly fearful prophylactic saying intended to keep the dead or chthonic away, into the very open short lined alternative of the initiate, or "one who knows." The "conjurer" is one who, by or in the blink of an eye, intersperses with everything he sees the chthonic darkness and reminder of death and absence which the profane fear and continuously seek to avoid. Again, the conjurer's knowledge is twofold -- not only does he see the interplay between root and branch, the dead and the



living, but also between absence and presence, and the terrifying dream brought by the mildness of sleep and the blink of an eye. It is a central characteristic of "old wives' tales," that they gloss over or veil a more true knowledge which introduces the initiate to heights of ecstasy and revelation, but does so only through or in conjunction with an abyss of terror.

4) Beschwoerende -- this word is derived etymologically from "schwoeren" (English "to swear"), which originally means "to speak" or "to present a speech" (before a court). This meaning is still present in the English "answer" via the Anglo-Saxon and-swaru. The prefix construction beschwoeren (m.h.d. beswern, a.h.d. beswerian) means originally "to ceremoniously ask," and in m.h.d. comes to mean "to cast a spell or call up through magical words." It is not until n.h.d. that it comes to mean also "to substantiate by oath," along with its previous meanings. For these reasons I have translated the word as "conjuror" -- "one who can call up."

5) Rilke's word Krug has two etymological roots. The first is either from m.h.d. kruoc, a.h.d. kruog, A-S crōg, (English "crock"), meaning a vessel made by applying clay over a woven base, or from an undetermined root word for the Greek krossos. The second comes from the low German expression for "tavern" or "ale house," Krug, derived from the latin gurgulio, "throat" -- gurgustium, "tavern, ale house." These two meanings have become fused to the point where Krug almost always means "a vessel for beer or ale." Also, according to Jane Harrison, the epithet Bromios for Dionysos indicates that he was the god of a beer-like brew before he was the god of wine. (From Prolegomena..., Jane E. Harrison, Meridian Books Reprint, 1960,

pp. 413 - 416.) Rilke is in this poem, as we have already seen from the ritual alluded to in lines 5 and 6, working within the context of that older strata of myth. Yet the most important reason (the above serves only the purpose of justification) for adding the word "ale" to this line is to recreate Rilke's rhyming connection between lines 11 and 14 (see note 6 below).

6) The last line refers to the seer or conjuror as singer. One imagines him performing at a court (as in the bard scenes in the Odyssey and Tristan for example) reconstructing heroic events, yet the praise of the local or historic information presented does not veil the central image which informs the entire narrative -- whether it is the underworld episode of the Odyssey, or Tristan's cave of the lovers in the primeval wilderness where the lovers are united in the form of a stag and all dualities take on a new metamorphic image of unity for those who would see. Rilke's rhyme, drawing together an apparent and a real veil, thus serves to modify the lines: "For him, nothing can impair the valid image; / be it from graves (earth-smoke and rue), be it from rooms, (finger-ring, clasp, and pitcher of ale.)"

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MacIntyre, by using the phrase "could bend more deftly the willow's growth," is bending an abstraction rather than a thing. Now the way a willow's branches bend is toward the roots -- Rilke wants the reader's imagination to picture this image of a thing so that in his thought he or she may find the implications of that simple thing. The more complex the image, the fewer are the associations one can make to it. MacIntyre, by making explicit what is there

in the original only by association or extension, has already taken that image one step further than its intention. Furthermore, like Herter Norton, MacIntyre uses the word "symbol" to translate Bild, which means literally "picture." Now a poetic "picture" is an image, which may or may not have certain symbolic values and is therefore, a much more open construction than a symbol, which always has a very specific referent and direction. Had Rilke wanted to use "symbol" here, there is no reason why he couldn't have.

Leishman distorts the original terribly by introducing all sorts of images and ideas to his translation for which there is absolutely no justification. E.g., in line 3, he has an image of a wedding (which may be implied -- see note on MacIntyre's translation -- but is by no means necessarily the only thing implied by the image); in line 6, he uses "forcing" rather than the more literal "draws" (implying that the relation between the living and the dead is one of compulsion on the part of the living, rather than one of desire); and finally, by using the word "saves" in line 12, he implies a possession on the part of the conjuror which is simply not there in the original. The conjuror sees the valid image (in sonnet I - 9 it is "Know the image"), he does not have power over it.

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

Nie versagt ihm die Stimme am Staube,  
wenn ihn das goettliche Beispiel ergreift.  
Alles wird Weinberg, alles wird Traube,  
in seinem fuehlenden Sueden gereift.

Nicht in den Grueften der Koenige Moder  
strafft ihm die Ruehmung Luegen, oder  
dass von den Goettern ein Schatten faellt.

Er ist einer der bleibenden Boten,  
der noch weit in die Tueren der Toten  
Schalen mit ruehmlichen Fruechten haelt.

## I - 7

<sup>1.</sup> Praise, that's it! As one <sup>2.</sup> inaugurated to praise,  
he came forth like the ore out of the stone's  
silence - his heart <sup>3.</sup> the mutable wine press  
of a wine inexhaustible to man.

Never by dust is his voice <sup>4.</sup> disclaimed,  
when divine <sup>5.</sup> instance <sup>6.</sup> possesses him.  
All becomes vineyard, all becomes grape,  
ripened in his sentient south.

Neither decay in the grottos of kings  
strains his praise, nor  
that from the gods a shadow falls.

He is one of the enduring messengers,  
that yet reaches far into the doors of the dead  
with bowls of <sup>7.</sup> exalting fruits.

1) Ruehmen -- this is the same word for "praise" that we find in the last line of sonnet I - 6. Between these two poems, a discovery has taken place. It is one of the structural peculiarities of this sequence that the poet not only records his vision, but that the words and images of this record function as keys or centres for further discoveries. One has the sense that the poems begin to write themselves, through the agency of the poet. All previously published translations use "praising," the gerund here, rather than the noun "praise," and as such they lack the power and clarity of the discovery of the deed and its word.

2) Bestellter -- literally "ordered, invited." The root however is stellen -- "to stand up, to set up." I have chosen "inaugurated" because of the extremely matter of fact tone of the context. "Ordained" (as MacIntyre translates it) would suggest a reward after learning which the context does not imply. Orpheus' craft, throughout the sonnets, is imagined as a gift to him and the world; as an ability which happens upon the world suddenly, as a surprise. (See sonnet I - 1, which begins right at the heart of the matter.) Similarly, "invited" would imply a humility toward him by whom or whatever invited him, which simply is not there in the sonnets, and "ordered" (or "appointed" as Herter Norton translates it) implies a power and causality which is also not there. Orpheus' appearance is seen here and elsewhere as elemental in the world -- he appears and takes his place in the cosmology, after which all things are changed or "seen anew." His appearance is not rationalized, much less explained or justified -- it just happens and continues to happen in its time as one of the elemental acts within that cosmology. This extreme matter of factness,

coupled with the root of the word, stellen, takes the reader immediately back to sonnet I - 5 -- "Errichtet keinen Denkstein ...."

3) Rilke uses two sentences here, and instead of the article "the," employs the celebratory "oh." I have joined the two sentences and inserted a pause between them via the use of a dash in order to recreate the conceit formed by the poet's rhyme of Erz with Herz, the content of which fuses the images of Orpheus' praise, which is likened to ore being smelted out of stone, with wine flowing from a wine press like the blood from his tortured heart. (It is significant that Kelter is feminine -- etymologically it is derived from the latin calcare, "to kick with the heel, to stamp with the feet" (lat. calx -- "heel, foot"). Originally, wine was pressed from the grapes by the feet of women. Thus again Rilke is playing on an image of the maenads.) "Oh" has been replaced by "the" in order to approximate the German construction eines den Menschen, which expresses the relation of "man" to "wine" as a modification or characterization of "wine" by "man." A literal English translation; "a wine press of a, for man, inexhaustible wine" does not express such a tight characterizing relationship, but rather, because of the rhythm of the speech and the construction of the phrase, alters the meaning subtly to a possessive case.

4) Rilke's use of versagen here is not straightforward. Versagen usually means "to fail," but the poet is playing with the roots of the word, ver and sagen, in conjunction with a personification of Stimme. Sagen means "to tell" or "to say," ver is a prefix implying "false" or "inadequate." Now we have an image of an external, independent voice in the presence of or influenced by "dust" (in a metaphorical sense as well as a physical -- see sestet), speaking falsely through

the poet -- the entire image being modified by "Never." In order to preserve this complexity of meaning, I have completely reformed the line by the use of the word "disclaimed."

5) The word which has been translated as "instance" is Beispiel. Rilke is punning on this word (which, unlike, "example" the usual English translation of it, which implies a permanently divided relation of "A" to "B," where "B" follows or copies "A") implies through its root Spiel ("play") and prefix bei ("with"), a harmony and simultaneity of action. Thus "instance," with its implication of "in step (stance) with," is a more suitable word here. Of the three previous translators, MacIntyre is the only one who has realized this.

6) A more literal translation of ergreifen would be "to grasp" or "to seize." However, "possession," with its meaning of "taking up into," while not being as literal as "to grasp" or "to seize," reinforces the required notion of harmonious action which "instance" begins but does not quite duplicate. The visual image of Beispiel is so strong in the German, that I have found it necessary to use the special meanings of two English words in my attempt to recapture it.

7) The movement of the octave appears reversed in the sestet. While in the former the threat of death and dust is seen behind the activity of praise, in the latter praise and exaltation is seen behind the decay of death. Thus the grapes at the end of the octave appear again as grown for and from the dead at the end of the sestet. Leishman distorts this movement by using the phrase "for the dead to praise," implying by omission that the living need not praise them. I realize that superficially, this seems to be a small point, yet



bearing in mind that a part of Rilke's narrative is concerned with demonstrating the relation and dependence of the living (in the largest sense) to the dead, these kinds of distortions are unacceptable.

Nur im Raum der Ruehmung darf die Klage  
gehn, die Nymphe des geweinten Quells,  
wachend ueber unserm Niederschlage,  
dass er klar sei an demselben Fels,

der die Tore traegt und die Altaere. -  
Sieh, um ihre stillen Schultern frueht  
das Gefuehl, dass sie die juengste waere  
unter den Geschwistern im Gemuet.

Jubel weiss, und Sehnsucht ist gestaendig, -  
nur die Klage lernt noch; maedchenhaendig  
zaehlt sie naechtelang das alte Schlimme.

Aber ploetzlich, schraeg und ungeuebt,  
haelt sie doch ein Sternbild unsrer Stimme  
in den Himmel, den ihr Hauch nicht truebt.

I - 8

Only in the realm of praise may <sup>1.</sup> Lament  
<sup>2.</sup> walk, the nymph of the weeping spring,  
 watching over our precipitation,  
 that it may run clear on the same rock,

that carries the gates and the altars. -  
 Look, about her still shoulders <sup>3.</sup> dawns  
<sup>4.</sup> the intuition, that she may be the youngest  
 among the siblings of <sup>5.</sup> disposition.

Jubilation knows, and Longing <sup>6.</sup> reveals our condition, -  
 only Lament yet learns; with maiden hands,  
 night after night she counts the <sup>7.</sup> old wrongs.

But suddenly, oblique and untried, .  
 she holds a constellation of our <sup>8.</sup> songs  
 into the sky, that her breath does not cloud.

- 1) "Lament," like "Jubilation" and "Longing" are capitalized throughout because they are personifications -- literal personae or "masks that the soul wears."
- 2) gehn translates equally well as "to go" or "to walk." I have chosen the latter in keeping with the personifications. There is no linguistic or contextual justification for MacIntyre's translation of this word as "work."
- 3) frueht -- literally "earlies," (sic) which is of course impossible. The word gives an image to first beginnings -- be it buds, flowers, spring, dawn, etc. I have chosen "dawns" because it is not only a concrete image of such a beginning, but also because of its common use in the turn of phrase "it dawns on him / her" (i.e. "to become aware of"). MacIntyre and Leishman use the word "broods" in their translations of this phrase, creating an implication simply not there in the original. Quite to the contrary, what we are presented with is the opening out of a revelation -- not the closing in of a melancholy reflection. (A lightness, not a darkness!)
- 4) Gefuehl is usually translated as "feeling," but may also mean "sentiment, emotion, sense, sensation, touch, feel, instinct, intuitive understanding" or "flair (for)." Etymologically, the word is based on the word fuehlen, meaning "to perceive by touch (physical)." Gefuehl, coming into use in the 17th C., means "sense of touch" or "mood of the soul." Since Rilke's alliterative series Gefuehl, Gemuet, gestaendig, which I have approximated by a rhyme on "...tion" ("intuition, disposition, reveals our condition") contains words which are functions of the soul (see also notes 5 and 6 below), I have chosen to translate it as "intuition." What I mean

by "function of the soul" is that Gefuehl in this instance lacks a physical object of reference for the body's touch -- the feeling, or more exactly the intuition (which can be seen as the soul's organ of touch) dawns on or in the maiden.

5) Gemuet may be translated as "mind, feeling, soul, heart, nature, disposition, temper(ament)," or "cast of mind." None of these is adequate. Of all of them, "soul" in the sense of "he / she has soul," and "disposition" come closest. One can see an illustration of the impossibility of translating this word in the fact that the English language has not managed to produce an equivalent for Gemuetlichkeit, (a word the construction of which is similar to "responsibility" -- the ability to respond) which means an ebullience of soul or disposition. Etymologically, Gemuet is created in m.h.d. on the root Mut, and originally means "the totality of the soul's perceptions and thoughts," and later comes to mean also "the seat of the inner perceptions and thoughts." I have chosen to translate Gemuet as "disposition" in this case, since; a) any other word like "nature" or "temperament" carries a connotation which would steer the reader into undesirable directions; b) we do understand the phrase "disposition of the soul;" and c) the word "soul" would be inaccurate, since we are dealing here with a function or faculty of the soul, and not the soul itself.

6) Gestaendig is etymologically based on the root stand, meaning "to stand, place of standing," as it does in English which shares that root. Staendig was created in the 16th C., meaning "continuously, always returning." Gestehen actually means "to acknowledge" (originally "to testify before court," in m.h.d. also "to pledge one's

assistance, to acknowledge, to incorporate with or place into.") Gestaendig has primarily come to mean "to acknowledge one's guilt," yet it originally meant, (m.h.d.) "responsible for, to stand with or take sides with," and "to agree with or consent to." Thus an examination of the etymology of Gestaendig reveals that the word is not primarily confessional (which carries the immediate connotation of guilt), but revelatory -- i.e. it reveals one's place in the proceedings (see root "stand," stance) without a simultaneous admission of guilt. Bearing in mind the original milieu of the word, (legal terminology), witnesses are not asked either to accuse or pronounce sentence on themselves -- they are merely asked to testify. The question of innocence or guilt is decided later, and by someone else. For these reasons I have chosen to translate the word Gestaendig with the phrase "reveals our condition."

7) schlimm means "bad" or "acute in a negative way." das Schlimme is therefore "the bad" or "all that is bad." It is not as strong a word as "evil," neither does it carry the moral connotations of that word. It means in its broadest sense "misfortune" or the "trials of fate" a person may be subject to. It has been translated here as "wrongs" both because that word lacks the moral connotations of "evil" (which is the word both MacIntyre and Herter Norton use), and because of the necessity of duplicating Rilke's end rhyme between this line and line 13 (see note 9 below).

8) A word for Stimme -- "voice" was needed here which would rhyme with the word I had used to translate Schlimme -- "wrongs." (see also note 9 below) The choice of "songs" for this purpose can be justified in several ways: a) We know from line 1, that Lament may

only walk within the realm of praise, which is, as we have seen in sonnets I - 1 through I - 7, always imagined as sung. It seems logical that a thing "B," assigned to the realm of "A," will have a similar form to "A." b) Lament is personified and is therefore not to be seen merely as the act of lamentation, but as an image or form of that act in its largest significance. c) Lament holds a "constellation" of our voice into the sky, i.e. a fixed or eternal form of the voice of lamentation, and we know from both the previous and the following sonnets that the only immortal act accessible to man is the act of song or poetry. Therefore, by moving off the literal in this instance (in order to recreate Rilke's rhyme of lines 11 and 13), I do not think I have violated the meaning of the passage to any great extent.

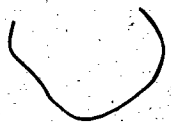
9) The rhyme Schlimme and Stimme ("wrongs" and "songs") informs the reader as to the kind and nature of the voice which here becomes immortal. Since it ties both lament and praise together as constituent elements of Orphic song, this poem acts as a bridge between the dual concerns of decay and growth of sonnet I - 7, and the concerns of the living and the dead of sonnet I - 9. While the dead are praised or exalted in sonnet I - 7, they literally give voice to the singer in sonnet I - 9. This is only possible through an image of lament ascending to the heavens, "making itself worthy" so to speak, in sonnet I - 8.

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

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

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

Erst in dem Doppelbereich  
werden die Stimmen  
ewig und mild.





I - 9

Only he who has raised the lyre  
<sup>1.</sup>  
even among shades,  
may present the <sup>2.</sup> intimations  
of endless praise.

Only he who has eaten of the poppy  
with the dead, <sup>3.</sup> of their kind,  
shall never again let the slightest  
sound escape him.

Though the still pool's reflection  
often shatters from us:  
<sup>5.</sup> Know <sup>6.</sup> what is seen.

Only in the double realm  
do the voices become  
eternal and mild.

1) Although auch usually means "also," it can also, depending on the context, mean "even" as it does here. MacIntyre alters the meaning of the first stanza by leaving this word out. Rilke is clearly saying that only he who has raised the lyre both among the living and the dead (see last stanza) may present ... etc. By leaving out this word which includes the living in the subject of the poet's song, MacIntyre leaves the reader with a false impression of necromantic hocus pocus which is precisely what Rilke wishes to avoid. Leishman on the other hand, again comitts the error of assuming that Rilke is granting the living (via the poet) power over the dead (by translating the phrase as "Only by him with whose lays / shades were enraptured"), when Rilke is clearly stating that it is the dead which are giving the poet the gift of their voice.

2) ahnen -- "anticipate, foresee, have a presentiment of, have a foreboding of, divine sense, suspect." Since an equivalent adverbial for ahnend in English would sound more awkward than the German allows, and since the qualification of "endless praise" via the adverbial construction ahnend erstatten is absolute in the German, I have chosen to change the construction to an adjectival one. Leishman's use of "celestial praise" is another of his distortions. Rilke does not introduce the celestial into this poem. His concern is to discover what is unendlich -- literally "not (never) ending" on earth.

3) This is a literal translation of the German phrase von dem ihren, which creates a punning ambiguity concerning its referent in both languages. It is not clear from the construction whether the phrase "of their kind" refers to the poppies, (i.e. the poppies of the dead), or to the dead and their offspring themselves, or as is

more probable, to both -- where poppies would be seen as the product of the dead, giving entrance to or initiation to their realm. Leishman translates "the dead" here as "the sleeping," no doubt to preserve his rhyme scheme. On this point I have an open question: If Leishman is so concerned with a slavishly formal duplication of a rhyme scheme to the point where he is willing to distort the content of what he is translating to such a hopeless extent, why is he even bothering about the content at all and maintaining the pretext of a translator -- why doesn't he merely create thousands of sonnets in perfect form containing totally indiscriminate nonsense? It is precisely on this issue that I have come to the realization that in order to translate a poem with due respect for the original, one must translate not only the content of that original, but one must also invent a new form in the new medium which is suitable to that content.

4) leisesten Ton -- literally "quietest tone," yet Rilke is creating a pun on the German phrase nicht den leisesten Ton verlieren, which commonly means "to keep secret about something." Thus what these lines in the poem mean is that the poet's sensibility is immeasurably increased by his entrance into and knowledge of the realm of the dead, and that this knowledge is of the nature of the initiate who has obtained a knowledge which is secret by way of the fact that it is simply inaccessible to the profane. In order to preserve this pun, the phrase has been translated as "the slightest sound."

5) Wisse -- the literal "Know" does admirably as a translation. It is capitalized because it is held in opposition to a passive relation to a fleeting reflection or representation. The previous two lines contain an image of Narcissus. Narcissus only passively observes the

human condition, seeing a static picture whose every movement causes him endless grief. The poet on the other hand, says Rilke, actively knows that condition in the construction of his songs where joy and grief, praise and lament (see sonnet I - 8) play off against one another, creating a field of activity.

6) The above understanding of the meaning and place of the word Wisse relates directly to the reason das Bild has been translated as "what is seen." The word Bild is based on the word Bilden, "to form or shape or build," and thus refers to any thing which has either formed or shaped itself, or been formed or shaped by an agent or through a medium. In any case it implies a transposition of either a mental or a physical reality to some other objectively simultaneous place. Now the singular characteristic of such a transposition, and of the word Bild itself, is that it is always visually apprehended. Thus the scope of meaning which the word Bild has come to include ranges all the way from the artistic ("painting, photograph, image") where the "forming" aspect of the word is paramount in its meaning and the visual is only secondary, to the strictly representational ("reflection, picture") where the forming aspect is negligible if not downright non-existent and the visual is paramount. With this in mind, the first of the three interrelated reasons for translating das Bild as "what is seen" here is simply that the "reflection" the phrase refers to is a purely visual apprehension. Second, the English word which at first sight appears to be the most appropriate, "image," has a more specific meaning than the word Bild allows: i.e. an "image" is different from a "symbol," a "picture," a "reflection" or a simple visual perception, all of which are encompassed to a greater or

lesser degree by the meaning of the word Bild. Finally (and in a manner quite related to the second reason above), especially in the field of the arts the word "image" has a very specific formal or structural meaning, and in terms of his own language Rilke is not only aware of this meaning, but uses it as a structural element in his sonnet sequence by drawing a distinction between the general word Bild (as a visual generality), and the specific word Figur (as a particular, constructed "image") in sonnet I - 11. The key to this movement from Bild to Figur lies in the word Wisse. Rilke insists here that the persona "know what is seen," in other words not merely consume the visual, but bring the intellect to bear upon it so that it may be understood in its place, "is given a story" so to speak. In this way "what is seen" becomes part of a permanent larger order outside, while simultaneously ordering the structure of the inside by bringing it into sympathetic alignment with that new element of order in the outside. If this process of "knowing what is seen" is accomplished, we no longer have a Bild, but a Figur; no longer a mere description or representation, but image. (See note # 15 on sonnet I - 11 for a direct continuation of this argument.)

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## I - 10

Euch, die ihr nie mein Gefuehl verliesst,  
gruess ich, antikische Sarkophage,  
die das froehliche Wasser roemischer Tage  
als ein wandelndes Lied durchfliesst.

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

alle, die man dem Zweifel entreisst,  
gruess ich, die wiedergeoeffneten Munde,  
die schon wussten, was schweigen heisst.

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

---

## I - 10

<sup>1.</sup>  
You that have never left my <sup>2.</sup> sensibility  
 I greet, antique sarcophagi,  
 through which the mirthful waters of Roman days  
<sup>3.</sup> meander as a <sup>4.</sup> transforming song.

Or those so open ones, like the eye  
 of a joyous awakening shepherd,  
 - inside full of <sup>5.</sup> bee's work and <sup>6.</sup> stillness -  
 from which whirled enchanted butterflies;

all that one tears away from doubt  
 I greet, the reopened mouths,  
 that have <sup>7.</sup> come to know the <sup>8.</sup> name of silence.

Do we know it, friends, do we know it not?  
 Both <sup>9.</sup> forms the hesitant hour  
 on the human countenance.

1) The construction of this phrase has necessarily been altered, since the literal translation, "You, that you never my sensibility left" is impossible in English. Also, although the three previous translations all use some form of "who," I have chosen "that," since the personification of "sarcophagi" is not as strong as the German gender makes it appear to be.

2) Gefuehl has been translated here as "sensibility" -- as a capacity or "negative capability," rather than as an active organ of perception. (For a full range of meanings for this word, see note 4, sonnet I - 8.) The reasons for this translation are several, the primary one being related directly to the image Rilke is using here. These sarcophagi are empty of their original contents -- the body -- which has metamorphosed into some other realm. In stanza 2, they are seen through a conceit, as flowers from which the transformed butterflies have flown. This metamorphosis is assigned an element -- water -- which is a moving image of the "way" via Rilke's pun on wandeln (see notes 3 and 4 below) which reappears throughout the sonnets. Now the meaning of the phrase "have never left my sensibility" is simply that these sarcophagi, as images or vessels of (or capacity for) a certain kind of information, have always been present in the poet. The secondary reason for this translation, which is directly related to the first, is that we know from the overall sequence, (especially sonnet I - 9 which immediately precedes this sonnet), that this capacity for the embrace of knowledge from the invisible or the dead is a necessary part of a poetic sensibility.

3) durchfließt means literally "flows through." It has been translated as "through which ... meanders" in order to deal with



Rilke's pun on wandeln. (See note 4 below).

4) wandeln derives etymologically from a.h.d. wanton, "turn," belonging to the group of verbs winden. It means, therefore, "to turn again and again." (See "meander" above.) The meaning "to go back and forth" arises in the 14th C. The meaning "to change itself" goes back to a.h.d. Rilke's play of meanings resides in the fact that wandeln in current usage means almost exclusively "to change" or "to transform" (as it has been translated here), yet in poetic usage the sense often focuses on the root image of that meaning "to change" or "to transform," and means "to wander." This play is maintained in this translation by the conjunction of the two words "meanders" and "transforming."

5) Bienensaug -- when used as a plant name this word means "nettle." However, literally it means "beesuck" (sic) or "nectar." Throughout the second stanza, Rilke is constructing a conceit wherein the open sarcophagi of stanza 1 are seen as an opening eye, and this in turn is seen as an opening flower releasing a butterfly. A symbology of death and transformation is thereby created, fusing the beginning of the vision of stanza 1 to its resolution in stanza 3. I have chosen to translate the word as "bee's work," and not as "nettle," as Leishman and MacIntyre have for two interrelated reasons: a) the flower symbology of lines 7 and 8 is implicitly obvious without an explicit reference to the "nettle," and is substantiated by the phrase "bee's work" in that bees gather nectar from flowers, while they also sting, (like the nettle which has a sweet lemon smell and stinging nets that entangle); and b) Rilke is clearly playing on the literal meaning of Bienensaug here, something which previous trans-

lators seem to have missed. ("We are the bees of the invisible" -- again the sarcophagus not as object, but as image of capacity. It is the invisible contents of the sarcophagi and their process which is the central concern here. Rilke, after all, had been in Egypt.)

6) "stillness" and "bee's work" have been inverted purely for metrical and onomatopoeic purposes. The entire line, held between dashes, functions as an aside in the monologue, and as such it must not disrupt the movement of image. The "s" sounds of "shepherd, inside, stillness and butterflies" thus form a rhythmic matrix of alliterative sound which allows the inclusion of the aside with much less jarring protrusion than an ending to line 7 with the harsh sound of the words "bee's work" would allow. Furthermore, we are moving in a landscape of silence wherein the only sound is the wash of a gentle stream and the sound of bees. The repetition of the "s" sound at the beginning and the end of the line serves to reinforce this stillness in an onomatopoeic function.

7) It becomes clear in stanza 3 that the subject of this poem is not the object "sarcophagus," but the image of the moving process. Now literally, die schon wussten means "which already knew." The substitution, here as above (see note 1), of "that" for "which" or "who" has already been discussed: the poem constitutes a formal address and not a personification. "already knew" has been rejected in favour of "have come to know" in order to create an image of process, not an axiomatic abstraction -- i.e. "already knew" indicates that the sarcophagi, as objects, had this knowledge from the beginning, rather than having gained it as a function of their use. The line immediately preceding this contains an image of the wieder-

geoeffneten Mund, a "reopened mouth." In Egyptian funerary practise, the "opening of the mouth" ceremony (actually a "reopening of the mouth," since this part of the ritual is the last act performed on a completed mummy) is performed by the high priest immediately prior to the enclosing of the mummy in the sarcophagus. It is an image of rebirth -- the mouth is opened (the lips painted red by the stroke of a brush shaped like an adze) so that the man may breathe and speak in the new world. (So that his KA is freed.) Here, the open sarcophagi from which the butterflies whirl are seen as a larger extension of this ritual.

8) was schweigen heisst is usually translated in common speech as "what silence means," which is how the three previous translators have handled it. However, it literally means "what silence is called" or "the name of silence," and Rilke is playing on this literal meaning, creating an ambivalence between both silence and the sound of a voice pronouncing a name, and the fact that the occupants of these sarcophagi once had names, while now they are forgotten.

9) "forms" here duplicates the ambiguity of the original where it is unclear whether "both" engraves a "hesitant hour" on the "human countenance," or whether the "hesitant hour" engraves "both" on the "human countenance." Both meanings are doubtless intended and should maintain a tension of play in the eye of the reader.

Sieh den Himmel. Heisst kein Sternbild "Reiter"?

Denn dies ist uns seltsam eingepraegt:  
dieser Stolz aus Erde. Und ein zweiter,  
der ihn treibt und haelt und den er traegt.

Ist nicht so, gejagt und dann gebaendigt,  
diese sehnige Natur des Seins?  
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?  
Namenlos schon trennt sie Tisch und Weide.

Auch die sternische Verbindung truegt.  
Doch uns freue eine Weile nun,  
der Figur zu glauben. Das genuegt.

I - 11

<sup>1.</sup> Observe the heavens. Is there no constellation called "<sup>2.</sup> Horseman?"  
 For this in us is <sup>3.</sup> singularly <sup>4.</sup> stamped:  
 this pride <sup>5.</sup> of earth. And a second,  
 that drives and restrains him, and whom he carries.

Is not <sup>7.</sup> this, <sup>8.</sup> chased and then tamed,  
 the <sup>7.</sup> sinewous nature of being?  
 Way and wending. <sup>10.</sup> But a touch informs.  
 New <sup>11.</sup> distances. And the two are one.

But are they? Or do both not <sup>12.</sup> mean  
 the way they make together?  
 Nameless already <sup>13.</sup> table and meadow divides them.

Even the stellar tie deceives.  
 But let it <sup>14.</sup> delight us now for a while  
 to believe the <sup>15.</sup> image. That suffices.

1) "Observe" has been chosen instead of "look at" or "see" for two reasons. The first and most obvious is that the word "observe" immediately suggests astronomy -- it is the root of the word "observatory." The other is that "to look at" and "to see" both imply a passive, one dimensional direction -- "to look at" moves from the observer to the object, and "to see" moves from the object to the observer. "Observe" on the other hand implies a visual relation with an object which is part of a larger process of activity. It implies previous intent and consequent action. In the context of the scientific method it is the central step in a series of active processes implying discovery and change. Rilke's sentence Sieh den Himmel., is very much akin to the construction of the English phrase "see chapter ..." -- it implies a past and a future, of which this present "see ..." is the nexus or turning point of revelation. Had he meant what is usually meant by the English words "look" or "see," he would have used the sentence Sieh in den Himmel.

2) "Horseman." This word is used in the translation (rather than the more literal "rider") for two interrelated reasons: a) by the conjunction of "horse" and "man" it introduces the image of the Satyr or Centaur (constellation Sagittarius) to the sequence, (see also notes on sonnet I - 20); and b) the compound word "Horseman," while it may mean "rider," also illustrates in its construction the perceptive mode of the creative imagination developed by the entire sonnet -- the possibility of two things being imagined as a composite of function and action.

3) Seltsam -- literally "seldom," usually "peculiar." "Singular" combines both of these meanings, since a thing more seldom than a

"one" or "singular" would be "never," and "singular" does carry a notion of the unique or peculiar. However, there is also a contextual reason for the choice of this word. In the first stanza, Rilke is setting up a parallelism of one to one -- each is stamped singularly -- the first and the second. The number of the poem is 11, which can be read separately as 1 - 1; as the sum of 2; or as a larger combination of both of these, the usual 11, where each of the same digits modifies the other to create a larger order of meaning to which both contribute, but which goes beyond either. The number of the poem is therefore an indicator of the task of the poem -- the working out of the one to one relation constructed in the first stanza.

4) praegen means "stamped" -- eingepraegt therefore, means "stamped in," not "engraved" or "etched" which are different processes. The nature of the process is significant when one considers it in conjunction with Rilke's phrase Stolz aus Erde. (See note 5 below.)

5) aus -- "made of, made out of." The making of cosmologies, the laying out of images in the heavens to correspond to activities under our feet is a kind of pride, since it stamps onto or sees in the configurations of the stars, figures which correspond to (cyclical) events on earth. Yet this pride is not imagined as the usual "sin of pride," i.e. an anthropomorphism which challenges and or denies the cosmic powers. The pride is "stamped in us" and it has its origin in the earth or "out of the earth." This is reinforced by the last image of the stanza where the rider is seen not in the first person but in the second. As such, the human becomes the vessel or medium through which this pride grows out of the earth toward the stars -- the medium through which the earth seeks to align itself with the heavens. A

biological instance of this phenomenon would be heliotropism. As such the poem questions not that we make cosmologies, but our stance within, or understanding of, that function.

6) The alliteratives "c, s, s, c" duplicate the structure of the content of this stanza.

7) Ist nicht so -- literally "is not so." The less literal "this" has been chosen because the spectrum of referents for the German phrase is much larger than the literal English equivalent allows. The phrase "is not this" refers to the last line of stanza 1 and the first line of stanza 2, constructing a parallelism between treibt und haelt and gejagt und dann gēbaendigt, and as such refers to the whole of stanza 1, turning its oppositions of activity into a unified image of activity in stanza 2.

8) It is deliberately ambiguous whether, with this phrase, Rilke is referring to the breaking of the horse, the riding of it, or the use of it in the hunt. This deliberate ambiguity gives the image of "being" in stanza 2 its past, present, and future form.

9) sehnige has been translated as "sinewous" (sic) rather than "sinewy" in order to create a pun on "sinuous." This was done for several reasons: in order to make the transition from line 6 to lines 7 and 8 clearer -- the tension and resilience implied by "sinew" creates not only the power of the way, but also its turning; the word Weite in line 8 designates not merely a one dimensional but a three dimensional space, implying a helical twisting of the "way;" and finally, the image of the wending or "sinuous" way, in this stanza relates back directly to the wandeln of the song and the water of sonnet I - 10.



10) Doch ein Druck verstaendigt. This sentence cannot be translated literally and retain its meaning, since Druck in this context means not merely "pressure," but pressure transmitted by an agent in an act of communication. The word "nudge" comes closest, but is inappropriate in this case because it implies a certain brusqueness of action which is not present in the original. Furthermore, verstaendigt means literally "to make intelligible" or "to communicate." "Informs" has been chosen to retain the shape of the image here: i.e. it is the touch which begins the form that creates the space of the "new distances," or the touch initiates the form of space. The touch does not "communicate" space or make it "intelligible" as if it already existed outside of the action. On the contrary, the image tells us that space does not exist without form. It is on this ground that the "two are one." This is in fact the mystery of the sonnet. The two are one only insofar as the reader imagines the space they create together. Without this imagination of the "figure" they create, the world remains eternally separate and disjunctive -- as disjunctive as a table and a meadow seen outside of any imagined context.

11) die Weite has no English equivalent. One imagines looking out over a great plain or expanse of sea. "Space" is inadequate, since it implies through its special uses an absence of content or form. The singular "distance" is also inappropriate since it implies a one dimensionality. Weite without the article means literally "width," not the "length" "distance" implies. For these reasons the plural "distances" has been chosen, since it implies a space of many directions, objects, and forms.

12) This word creates a pun in the sentence which is also present in the original: i.e. "do they both in conjunction mean (in the sense of "designate or make up or are the content of") the way they make together," or, "does each separately not mean (in the sense of "intend") to create the way by working with or being in conjunction with the other?" The implication of the pun is of course that any two or more things working in conjunction create a figure or Gestalt of activity irrespective of whether they intend to or not, thus destroying the necessity for the questions the sonnet proposes, and leaving the reader with the last two lines: "But let it delight us now for a while / to believe the image. That suffices."

13) This sentence is the fulcrum of the poem. The difference between a table and a meadow is that a table both looks and is two dimensional, whereas a meadow may look two dimensional from a distance, from close up it is in fact contoured or three dimensional. In like fashion, while the constellations or the images we see in the stars look two dimensional (or rather like a spherical segment -- but then so is a table. Gravity, which determines "level," is spherical, not rectilinear), they are in fact three dimensional. The stars we choose to constitute a stellar image may in fact be as distant from each other on the same radius of observation as we are from the one nearest us. The interest of this juxtaposition of table and meadow goes beyond the geometric, however. What Rilke is doing here, is determining that the duality between the "ideal" and the "real" is a false one. This false duality is destroyed by his use of the word namenlos -- "nameless." If we allow the "ideal" and the "real" to come into conflict (table and meadow), we lose the "name" or the

ability to recognize figures of the imagination, and we find ourselves in a world where nothing moves in relation to anything else -- stasis. This is the meaning of the first two lines of the following poem, sonnet I - 12: "Heil dem Geist der uns verbinden mag; / denn wir leben wahrhaft in Figuren."

14) Freude is usually translated as "joy" or "happiness." Of these, "joy" comes closest, but is not quite an equivalent. The construction Rilke uses, uns freue, has a specific direction -- i.e. the joy is to come to us from our belief in the image. Since a construction like "let it joy us" is impossible in English, and since "let us rejoice" is a phrase wherein the joy is coming from the "us" rather than from an externally believed "image," the phrase has been translated as "let it delight us."

15) Rilke's use of Figur here and in sonnet I - 12, comes very close to Ezra Pound's definition of image -- "An image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." This is essentially what sonnet I - 11 achieves -- such a complex. The central concern is of course the phrase "in an instant of time" -- it is here that the seed of story lies, rather than in the linear causal or rationalistic speculations that the poem weakly offers as an alternative to imaginative passionate thought. Yet the weakness of these rationalistic speculations is intentional -- they are presented as a foil for a definite statement of belief in a poetic epistemology, seen as providing the only valid or satisfactory imagination of the place of man within a cosmology. (See also note 3, sonnet I - 12.)

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

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

Reine Spannung. O Musik der Kraefte!  
Ist nicht durch die laesslichen Geschaefte  
jede Stoerung von dir abgelenkt?

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

I - 12

Hail the spirit<sup>1.</sup>, that may<sup>2.</sup> unite us;  
for verily in images<sup>3.</sup> we live.

And with small steps the clocks do<sup>4.</sup> pace  
beside our actual day.

Without knowing our true place,  
we proceed<sup>6.</sup> from working<sup>7.</sup> alignments.

The antennae feel the antennae,  
and the empty distance spanned ...

Pure tension. Oh music of the powers!

Do not our venial<sup>9.</sup> transactions  
turn all interference<sup>10.</sup> from you?

Though the farmer toil<sup>11.</sup> and trouble,  
there<sup>12.</sup> where the seed turns<sup>13.</sup> into summer,  
he will never reach. The earth bestows.

1) The comma in this line causes the reader to focus on an implication of the second part of the line he might otherwise have missed -- the ambiguity of the word mag. We are dealing again with that issue of "can" vs. "may" opened by the first line of sonnet I - 3. If the intended emphasis of the word here were a straightforward statement of ability, the comma would be unnecessary. However, as it stands the peculiar punctuation makes the "spirit" a given, autonomous being, which may or may not unite us. Thus, Rilke celebrates the spirit of imagination (Geist means "spirit," but is never divorced from "intellect," thus automatically giving the intellect a necessary and inseparable place in the imagination -- see previous discussions of Figur -- "image") as the highest principle of unity between man and world, while admitting simultaneously (rather stoically) that there is nothing of prescription or necessity about that principle.

2) The autonomy of "spirit," created by the comma in part, does not allow us to translate mag as "can" in this instance, since the recognition of the spirit entails the concomitant recognition of its latent ability. The issue here is that this latent ability could become actuality if we would "tune ourselves to play the music."

3) A further note on the translation of Figuren as "images." Literally, Figur is "figure," yet such a literal translation would belie Rilke's purpose. "Figure" in English carries a definite connotation of "number," "arithmetic" or "counting" which the German does not, especially not Rilke's specific usage. He has rhymed Figuren and Uhren for just this reason -- to contrast an active imagination to a numerical, linear, rational inventory.

4) gehn has been translated with the rather "poetic" "do pace" for several reasons, the most important being metric considerations -- i.e. what is needed here is the rhythm of a clock -- the kind of tick-tock of mechanical feet -- thus the alternating hard and soft stresses of the syllables. Also, the "do pace" is a similar construction to "mark time" etc., -- i.e. place the clock outside of or anterior to the action it describes, -- like "do penance" or whatever. Finally, I wanted the rhyme of "pace" with "place" to somehow salvage what Rilke is doing with his rhyme of Figuren and Uhren. (See note 5 below.)

5) Pound defines "image" as an "emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time." (from Literary Essays ..., T.S. Eliot (ed.), New Directions, N.Y., 1968, pg. 4.) Olson says "time is the life of space."... Rilke's Figur here is active -- its place is constantly shifting -- it is seen not as an object, but as a moving relation in a field or landscape. A Figur thus imagined, once it is given a place, is simply no longer there, since the act of definition itself moves that image, brings to bear new alignments on it.

The error of all other metaphysic is descriptive, is the profound error that Heisenberg had the intelligence to admit in his principle that a thing can be measured in its mass only by arbitrarily assuming a stopping of its motion, or in its motion only by neglecting, for the moment of the measuring, its mass.

(from Selected Writings, Charles Olson, New Directions, N.Y., 1961, pg. 61.) Thus Rilke's rhyme of Figuren and Uhren functions as a contrast -- the process (image) is contrasted to its mechanical measurement eternally banished to an outside anterior position. My rhyme of "pace" and "place" is an attempt to recreate this notion -- the "paces" of the clock marking where the "place" has just been.

6) The German word here is handeln -- "deal, act (in the material world), proceed, take action, trade, bargain, haggle" -- and comes from the a.h.d. hantalon meaning "to grasp, to touch" or "to work (with the hands)." This is the same root which lies behind the English word "handle," yet in German, as can be seen from the above, it retains a much wider spectrum of meaning, signifying, when not used in a modified or specific sense, any human action. This etymological digression is necessary at this point, because one and the same word is translated here as "proceed" (the human is understood by the use of "we"), and later, in line 12 (where it is used in a specifically modified sense) as "toil."

7) aus wirklichem Bezug -- Bezug means "cover, slip, purchase, procurement, supply, subscription," etc., based on its root in the word ziehen -- "to draw" and the prefix be -- "over" -- hence, "to draw over or from." As such it also means "relation," in the sense that one draws information or a place over from that which one stands in relation to. The image of this relational aspect of the word becomes clear in the construction: eine Linie ziehen, where the line drawn out from one point to the next is a literal image of the dependent relation of point "A" to point "B." With the word aus ("out of"), Rilke has captured this notion of ground or origin in his image of wirkliche relations -- i.e. "real, genuine, active or working" relations where we are the nexus of an energy coming from outside ourselves and which we, in our "doing," again give a place in the outside of what our hands do -- our craft. It is with the above in mind that aus wirklichem Bezug has been translated as "from working alignments" -- to hold that image of a "one" receiving its "place"



in terms of its active relations to the "many."

8) The German here is literally "carried ... / Pure tension." However, the word Spannung is not an abstraction, as "tension" is in English. It is an imagistically active word, the root of which is the same as the one for the English word "span." The closest the English language comes to that German notion of Spannung is in the alternate word for "bridge" -- i.e. "span," where we see both the form of the thing and how that form holds a tension within itself -- in fact a perfectly economical image of that tension between two poles -- the tension itself assuming a visual form. (See R. Creeley in Selected Writings, C. Olson, New Directions, N.Y., 1961, pg. 16 -- "Form is never more than an extension of content.") Hart Crane uses precisely this recognition of form as the base line for his epic poem The Bridge. The absolutely central importance of this word Spannung in Rilke's poem has led me to substitute for the literal verb "carried," the alternative verb "spanned." ... Lines 8 and 9 contain a further ambiguity: if we read the last two lines of the octave as they are intended to be read -- i.e. with a long pause that seems to indicate the end of a sentence at the end of line 8, we are left with the phenomenon of the antennae feeling not only other antennae, but also the distance between them, creating a three dimensional image of relation. It is only when we begin the sestet that we realize that the sentence may not have been complete, and we see an image of pure power suddenly shaping itself between all things. This is the Figur -- "image." The music of the spheres is heard when we are tuned, when we are "aligned" -- the condition of being "in - tension" or in the current or wave. Yet it is not only the great metaphysical music

of the spheres that the reader confronts here, -- it is also the simple image of a radio -- tuned to play the music. Rilke, like Whitman, Hart Crane, Jack Spicer and Jean Cocteau (though Rilke will viciously attack the misuses of technology later in the sonnet sequence), does not commit the folly of dismissing all technology as "unpoetic" because "no place can be found for it in a poetic language." (sic) On the contrary, the forms of technology are seen as a continuing source of metaphor. ... At this point we have moved from the metaphysical assertion of sonnet I - 11, (i.e. that space is an imagination of the shape of a field created by the interaction of two or more poles) to a physical illustration of this assertion -- electrical waves can be measured on an oscilloscope leaving a record or picture of the moving image or field by measuring, like the clock of line 3, beats per minute -- as the radio creates an auditory image from the invisible images (messages) of the cosmos.

9) "venial" is an appropriate and literal translation of laessliche. If the third stanza bears any relation in content to the fourth, then we can assume that the "venial transactions" Rilke is speaking of here are those efforts in which man engages which actually duplicate the processes of nature, but "in a more efficient manner" (according to the anthropocentric point of view). The domestication of plants was begun sometime around 9000 B.C. -- the domestication of animals some thousand years earlier. These efforts are thus in a real sense "venial" -- "(of offences) trivial, far from unpardonable;" not "indulgent," a "display," or "casual" as MacIntyre, Leishman, and Herter Norton have it.

10) "interference" is a literal translation of Stoerung, which,

like the English word, continues the radio - metaphor, since its special use in radio or electronic language is common to both languages.

11) Sorgen means "to worry" or "to trouble oneself." Since the German construction is a reflexive one (sich sorgt), I have chosen "trouble" over "worry." However, there is another reason for both the choice of this word and the inversion of Rilke's word order. -- Handeln (see also note 6 above) denotes any human physical activity -- yet it also carries the meanings "dealing" or "bargaining." Now the farmer's activity of digging into the bowels of the earth to discover and gain mastery over the process of the seed's turning into summer can be seen as a necromantic obsession. For these reasons I have chosen to translate the phrase with one from Macbeth: "toil and trouble." At first sight this may seem to contradict the tenor of the remainder of my translations, in which I continuously maintain that Rilke is not a transcendentalist in these sonnets -- he constructs a cosmology centred in the processes of the earth itself. This doubt should disappear however, when one remembers that Rilke characterizes the farmer's "toil and trouble" as a "venial transaction" -- i.e. of the right direction but of the wrong methodology. Not only is the farmer after control of the process (whereas Rilke is after control of the self within that process), but also he sees only one half or pole of that process, the cthonic (whereas Rilke states in sonnet I - 14 "they speak the speech not only of the year") -- i.e. not merely the fertility cycle, but also a regeneration of the spirit ... to turn those invisible messages and alignments of the cosmos back into the visible forms of the imagination which reveal the shape of

their arrival as congruent to the shape of their origin.

12) wo has been translated as "there where" for two reasons: a) to reinforce the pun Rilke is creating here -- "though the farmer toil and trouble there (i.e. works in that place) where the seed etc." ... and "though the farmer toil and trouble (i.e. no matter how hard he works) there where the seed etc." ... and b) to avoid the abstraction MacIntyre introduces with his phrase "never reaches those deep sources." The source, if there is one in this case, is the seed itself as the image or vehicle of the power Rilke speaks of. The poet is not interested in this abstraction however -- he is interested in seeing that seed or process in a clearly imagined landscape of activity.

13) Again, as in the previous sonnets, we have an instance of the word wandeln -- in this case verwandelt. It has been translated as "turns" to hold the continuing sense of the helical or spherical way, and placed into conjunction with the word "into" (i.e. "turns into") in order to hold onto the metamorphic aspect of that turning way (i.e. metamorphosis being the method by which it turns).

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

wenn es sie erschmeckt. Dies kommt von weit.  
Wird euch langsam namenlos im Munde?  
Wo sonst Worte waren, fliessen Funde,  
aus dem Fruchtfleisch ueberrascht befreit.

Wagt zu sagen, was ihr Apfel nennt.  
Diese Suesse, die sich erst verdichtet,  
um, im Schmecken leise aufgerichtet,

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

## I - 13

<sup>1.</sup>  
Fullness of apple, pear and banana,  
 gooseberry ... All <sup>2.</sup> this speaks  
 death and life <sup>3.</sup> into the mouth ... I <sup>4.</sup> intimate ...  
 Read it from a child's countenance

as it tastes them. This comes from afar.  
<sup>5.</sup>  
Does a slow namelessness cloud your mouth?  
 Where once there were words, flow finds,  
 freed startling from the fruit-flesh.

<sup>6.</sup>  
 Dare to tell, what you call apple.  
 This sweetness, which first <sup>7.</sup> condenses,  
 that it may, rousing itself quietly in the savour,

become clear, awake, transparent,  
<sup>8.</sup>  
show forth two fold, sunny, earthy, present - :  
<sup>9.</sup> Oh experience, <sup>10.</sup> sensation, exhilaration - , immense!

1) Although Rilke usually avoids abstractions in favour of a particular word or image, and although the word he uses here translates literally as "full" (Voller), I have used the phrase "fullness of" for two reasons: a) voll is used to denote a plumpness or heaviness of a thing in German (i.e. as an adjective describing the condition of a thing itself, rather than its capacity for some other thing not itself) far more often than in English; and b) the phrase in line 2 Alles dieses spricht refers back not only to the particulars of the preceding lines, but to a singular sum of these greater than their parts -- i.e. each thing, its "condition of fullness," and its imagined and anticipated ripeness, taste process, etc.

2) If this phrase referred only to the particulars of the preceding, it would read alle diese sprechen, a fact that MacIntyre, who is usually so infatuated with abstraction, seems to have missed. Leishman's translation is even worse, since by his use of the phrase "all this convey" he is pretending that life and death are some kind of Platonic entities which are "conveyed" into the mouth via the conduit of the fruit, rather than realizing that Rilke's point throughout the sonnet is that life and death have no existence outside of their presence in action -- in this case the eating of a living substance -- their confrontation as constituent parts of that particular act, inside the organ of speech.

3) in in this case must be translated as "into," since "in" would be ambiguous -- it would suggest both an active and a passive presence of that speech in the mouth. The phrase in den clearly states that this "speaks into" -- it actively thrusts the necessity for speech into the mouth. Were Rilke's intent merely to state that

speech somehow follows as a passive corollary to the act, he probably would have used the phrase in dem Mund.

4) "intimate," despite its somewhat archaic nature, is usually the best translation of ahnen, rather than "suspect, divine, sense" etc., since the pun "intimate" ("to sense, suspect, etc.") -- "intimate" ("close, familiar") duplicates the pun in German between ahnen ("to sense, etc.") and Ahnen ("ancestors").

5) Wird euch langsam namenlos im Munde? cannot be translated literally. One comes close to it if one says either "does a slow namelessness sieze your mouth?" (but this is inaccurate insofar as the "namelessness" remains an active exterior agent of the process), or "Does your mouth slowly become nameless?" (but here the focus resides too heavily in the organ of speech itself, without consideration of what it contains). This particular construction is common in German, and is used in cases like "Wird euch kalt?" (approximately: "Are you becoming cold"), where the relation expressed is one of indivisible participation -- i.e. the cold outside effects the body's increasing condition of cold. In the case of Rilke's line, the "namelessness" is both the condition of the mouth and the cause of that condition at the same time. Since the English language lacks the facility for such a construction, it can only be translated metaphorically or imagistically -- i.e. the "clouding of the mouth" (speech) is both the indistinguishability of the speech in the mouth, and the condition of the organ of that speech -- rather like looking through a window and not being able to determine whether the indistinct nature of the image perceived is due to a mistiness outside the clear glass, a mistiness of the glass between the clear eye



and the clear image, or both. (See also note 7 below.)

6) sagen has been translated as "tell" for a variety of interrelated reasons. Its root sagen is related to the latin in - seque (sag an, erzaehle) -- "begin telling, relate," and belongs to a group of words meaning "to display for sight, to show, to indicate (point to), or comment on" -- i.e. to a word group in Indo-european designated by the word "to see" (sehen). In this sense the English word "saw" (as in "an old saw" -- "turn of phrase or saying") and "to say" are based on the same root. However, in view of the fact that the English word "say" has lost to a great extent its immediate connection to the objective particulars of the content of what is said, the word "tell," which always implies an objective outside quantity of particulars, has been chosen over and above the strictly etymological word "say." This is especially important because of the relation of Sage (as in legend) and "Saga," words denoting an oral epic tradition, to the root sagen. When Rilke says, therefore, Wagt zu sagen, he is addressing not only the reader, but also his own task of "telling the story," discovering the poetic form for that simple primal act of eating. In terms of the larger narrative structure, we have just moved from two poems, sonnets 11 and 12, where the tale of one's relation to external forms becomes central in terms of knowing those forms, not their abstractly objective particulars listed in a vacuum of activity, to the statement of this poem with its assertion that not the verbal category of a thing is its reality, but the tale of what we discover in our relation to it. It is in this latter function that the sanctity of poetic language resides. Poetry is a gift of the muses, not the expression of pride -- Wagt zu sagen. ... It is only through

this gift that Orpheus steps beyond the human. -- The reason the severed head keeps singing is synonymous with its function -- song. (See also note 8 below.)

7) verdichtet -- literally "to grow more concentrated, thicker, to condense." The particular meaning of this word determined in part the choice of the image "clouds" in line 6 above.

8) doppeldeutig -- doppel is taken over from the French double in the 15th C. The origin of both these words is the latin adjective du-plus, from duo -- "two" and the root pel -- "folds." Hence "two-folded" or "twofold." deutig is rooted in the Germanic eudo -- Volk -- (folk -- "the people"), hence Deutsch. The original meaning of deuten was thus probably "to explain or to make understood to the (assembled) people." Since in this poem Rilke is continually addressing a plural "you" (the assembled people -- audience), and since the poem is telling the tale of what an apple (fruit) is, (not naming or categorizing that thing), the word doppeldeutig has been translated as far back (etymologically) as possible. What Rilke is doing with "apple" here is a similar ontological endeavour -- a rediscovery of the process and relation of man to an object, which first gives rise to the naming of that thing or group of things (fruits). Their two fold nature -- "sunny" (light, fire, celestial, life) and "earthy" (dark, cool, terrestrial, death) is shown forth -- "present" (presented). This leads us directly to the other two fold matters operative in the poem that this word is a key to. The most obvious of these is of course that the death and dismemberment of one thing lends life and new form to another (here in the act of eating). The other has to do with what Rilke is doing with the list of fruits

which begin the sonnet -- the importance of the order of that list seems to have occurred previously only to Herter Norton. Usually the apple, and sometimes the pear tree are designated the fruits which grace the fields of Elysium. Paraphrasing a passage from Plato's Gorgias, and also Pindar's Olympic Ode II and Hesiod's Works And Days, Robert Graves says of Elysium that it is a place "where the inhabitants may elect to be reborn on earth whenever they please.

Near by are the 'Fortunate Islands' reserved for those who have been three times born, and three times attained Elysium." (from The Greek Myths, Vol. I, Robert Graves, Penguin Books, U.K., 1964, pg. 121.)

It is commonly held that Plato's theorizing on the fate of the dead in this passage is based on a thinly disguised Orphic tradition. Now by juxtaposing these two fruits which have a fixed symbolic function within the tradition of Greek (specifically Orphic) myth, with two fruits that bear no explicit relation to that tradition (although implicitly they do -- the fig and the pomegranate, both fruits of the underworld through which the dead must pass on their way to Elysium, have the same structure as a gooseberry -- they are little more than seed bags or vessels), Rilke both "de-mythologizes" the original symbols and "mythologizes" his own additions on a middle ground where things constantly move into and out of mythic thought. By thus re-discovering the process of the original symbol, he can open its content up to extend into other areas, creating an open image of activity where once stood only a closed symbol of meaning. He in fact "makes new" or breathes new life into the old story by including two such incongruous fruits as a banana and a gooseberry into "high poetry." Thus he accomplishes with these symbols what he later

accomplishes with the word "apple." -- By placing the symbol or category in confrontation with the process it ostensibly delineates, the "symbol" or "word" is overwhelmed and dissolved by the manifold nature of its origin until that process finds a new "word" or "story," a new form in which to present itself.

9) Fuehlung -- MacIntyre and Leishman both translate this word as "feeling" which is inaccurate since it demands qualification. Unqualified, "feeling" is Gefuehl. Herter Norton comes closer by realizing that Fuehlung denotes the activity of sense perception, yet by translating it as "sensing" she has not taken Rilke's parallel structure into account, which demands that the word be translated as "sensation."

10) "Exhilarate" -- "enliven, gladden," as a root for "exhilaration" comes much closer to the image of possession demanded by this poem than "joy" does.

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

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

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

Sind sie die Herrn, die bei den Wurzeln schlafen,  
und goennen uns aus ihren Ueberfluessen  
dies Zwischending aus stummer Kraft und Kuessen?

## I - 14

We <sup>1.</sup> go about with flower, <sup>2.</sup> vine-leaf, fruit.

They speak the speech not only of the year.

From the dark ascends an iridescent <sup>3.</sup> manifest

<sup>4.</sup> that has perhaps the sheen of <sup>5.</sup> envy

of the dead about it, who strengthen the earth.

What do we know of their part <sup>6.</sup> in it?

It has long been their manner, to mark the clay

with veins of their generous marrow. | 7.

<sup>8.</sup> Now we must ask: do they <sup>9.</sup> proffer this?

Is this clenched fruit, the work of heavy slaves,  
thrust up to us, to their lords? | 10.

Are they the lords, that <sup>11.</sup> with the roots as lovers sleep,

and grant us from their <sup>12.</sup> surfeit

this <sup>13.</sup> hybrid of <sup>14.</sup> mute strength and kisses?

1) gehen um -- umgehen -- Rilke is using this construction as a pun, creating three directions of meaning: a) "to handle, to work with," b) "to go around (about) with" and c) "to detour (about)." This is possible because the word umgehen, while meaning literally "to go about (around)" depends for its particular meaning (i.e. how one "goes about" anything) entirely on context and word order. While the distinction between these three related meanings is not as sharply delineated with the literal English translation "go about," it is the only phrase which comes close to suggesting the ambiguity of the original.

2) Weinblatt -- literally "wine leaf," commonly translated as "vine leaf." In this sequence of natural morphology, Rilke is doing the same thing as in the opening of the previous sonnet 13. The unspecified flower and fruit are joined by a specific aspect of Dionysos. This open-endedness of the symbology allows him, in line 2, to state "they speak the speech not only of the year" -- i.e. we are concerned here not only with a "fertility cult or ritual." Certainly the Orphic tradition says precisely that -- that we are interested not merely in the dark chthonic rebirth or cycle of matter, but also, via the spirit (Geist der uns verbinden mag), in the rebirth of light:

... the Orphics say that black-winged Night, a goddess of whom even Zeus stands in awe, was courted by the Wind ("spiritus mundi") and laid a silver egg in the womb of Darkness; and that Eros ("desire"), whom some call Phanes ("revealer"), was hatched from this egg and set the universe in motion. ... Night, who named him Ericapaius ("feeder upon heather," hence "bee") and Protogenus Phaethon ("firstborn shiner," hence "sun"), lived in a cave with him ...

(from The Greek Myths, Robert Graves, Vol. I, Penguin Books, Edinburgh, 1964, pg. 30.) (See also note 3 below.)

3) "Manifest" is the last word of the line where light is born out of darkness; where Eros or Phanes is born out of the silver egg lain in the womb of darkness. As a noun, "manifest" means "a list of cargo for customs" -- in other words a revelation of contents. In terms of the mythos, this is precisely what happens here -- the world in its manifold colours shines forth its complexity -- not only the many colours of the natural world, (flowers, trees, plants, animals, etc.,) but also the light itself as it radiates between and reveals this multiplicity -- (speaks the speech not only of the year). Not only the letter of creation appears, but also the spirit -- ("spiritus Mundi", the shining wind) -- dem Geist der uns verbinden mag. Thus we have moved from "what is seen" in sonnet 9, through "image" in sonnet 11, through the recognition of "spirit" in sonnet 12, to the birth of "light" in sonnet 14 -- into the centre of the sonnet sequence. Like the tree in sonnet I - 1, the poet and the reader are ascending orders or spheres of initiation. The first half of this sequence culminates in sonnet 13, with an intense image of sensual perception of the material world and the limits of that perception -- the speech "only of the year." By line 1 of sonnet 14, we are going "about with" that process. From this point on, the demand becomes to dance that experience (sonnet 15) which we have learned in sonnets 1 through 13 -- (all the images of "climbing, the way, walking, coming erect"). By our own actions to bring that learning "into the light" -- to present it in the figures of poetry, dance, music etc., now becomes the necessary nature of obedience. (See also note 5 below.)

4) Rilke wants the last line of this stanza to be able to stand on its own as a completion of the lines preceding it, although.



grammatically it proceeds on into the next stanza. The only way he can do this within the bounds of German syntax is to begin the line with und ("and"), since that allows him to retain the verb hat ("has") in line 4 immediately adjacent to und. The construction would assume a much more definite clarity if he could say "that has" instead of "and has," but had he done so, the verb "has" would necessarily move to the end of the sentence in the next stanza. Fortunately, English syntax allows the use of "that has" while retaining the possibility of reading the line as a completion of the one immediately preceding it. (See also note 5 below.)

5) This word has a three part ambiguity, as it does in the German: it can be read as a simple modification of "manifest;" as "the envy of the living for the dead" (of their power -- "they strengthen the earth"); or of the "dead for the living" -- for what they nurture or "give rise to." The latter is the most obvious reading, and it has classical and modern precedents. Achilles tells Odysseus in the Odyssey:


Let me hear no smooth talk  
of death from you, Odysseus, light of councils.  
Better, I say, to break sod as a farm hand  
for some poor country man, on iron rations,  
than lord it over all the exhausted dead.

(from The Odyssey, R. Fitzgerald, trans., Anchor Books, N.Y., 1963, pg. 201.), or as Spicer says in an imaginary letter to Lorca -- "The dead are notoriously hard to satisfy." This is the measure in which they speak the speech not only of (i.e. more than just) the year -- the possibility and the obligation (see the Elpenor episode which

precedes the above quoted passage from the Odyssey) that the living have of putting that knowledge of the dead back into imaginative action. What Rilke is offering is an initiation into orders or worlds which are always present -- a constant interplay between light and dark, the living and the dead, inside and outside. The object of the initiate is to learn them in order to travel in and out of them at will -- shaman -- "how may a man follow?" (See also notes on sonnet I - 20.)

6) Teil an dem -- this phrase contains a pun on Anteil -- "portion, allotment" which is reproduced with the English phrase "part in it."

7) With his choice of the word Marke in these two lines, Rilke is layering all the meanings that have characterized the dead in the previous 13 sonnets together into one image. One notices immediately that he uses an "e" ending to the word Mark ("marrow") which is not an empty use of the "poetic" form of the word to hold the metric, but rather the key to unlock this sudden expansion of meaning. A simple dictionary will disclose all of these levels. Thus: Mark -- "marrow, pulp (of fruits), core;" Mark -- "boundary, borderland, (pl.) marches;" Mark -- "unit of money;" markant -- "marked, striking, characteristic, salient, prominent, strong featured, prominent landmark, chiselled features, man of mark, outstanding personality;" Marke -- "mark, sign, pass, check, stamp, counter, chip, badge, shield, coupon, index mark, trade mark, brand, type, sort, grade, quality (of wines), (growth, vintage);" Markenartikel -- "proprietary article;" Markieren -- "mark, brand, indicate, designate, earmark, accentuate, sham, simulate;" Markschneider -- "surveyor of mines;" Markstein -- "boundary stone, landmark, milestone." All of this is "what we know of their part in



it." Although the lexicographic precision with which Rilke handles this image cannot be duplicated in English because the pun on Mark cannot be duplicated, I have attempted to hold some small measure of its complexity with the words "mark" in the sense of "signature" and "stamp;" "veins" in that double sense of "life" and "riches" (ore); and a mining image in which one sees the wealth layered in level after level of sediment.

8) Since the reflexive construction used in the original does not exist as a possibility in English, I have changed the sentence from the general to the particular and added the pronoun "we."

9) tun sie es gern -- usually translated as "do they like to do it." However, "like" is too general and indefinite -- closer to the German moegen. In view of what is being asked, I have chosen "proffer" -- "to offer spontaneously, to go out of one's way to offer, spontaneous or pointed offer," rather than "like to do," just as Rilke has chosen gern rather than moegen.

10) Draengen -- "pressing, urgent, pushing, crowd, crush, pressure, insistence, urgent request." Rilke is playing these meanings off against his pun on geballt (lit. "balled") -- i.e. both the shape of the fruit and the clenched fist. In view of this, Draengt has been translated as "thrust" -- an expression like "thrust a fist into someone's face" is obviously desired here. The expression "thrusts this fruit" would be awkward, if not ridiculous. Hence the order of Draengt (thrusts) and geballt (clenched) has been reversed in the English translation.

11) bei den Wurzeln schlafen -- Rilke is here constructing a pun between bei ... schlafen ("to sleep beside") and beischlafen


("cohabitation, coition, sexual intercourse"). In this sense the offspring of the "dead" and the "roots" are "flower, vine-leaf, fruit" -- the "speech of the year." Yet the lovers and their offspring belong not only to the vegetable world, although that is the ground of the image. (See note 12 below.)

12) "surfeit" -- etymologically (lat.) sur ("over") and facio ("do"). The product of this union thus produces something more than the carbon cycle or "fertility ritual." Following the previous three sonnets, and bearing in mind that it is Rilke's endeavour to write sonnets to Orpheus, it is clear that what this surfeit is, is the revelatory power of story and the intellect it contains -- "they" pass on not only the "natural" world, but also those faculties which may imaginatively perceive it and its divinity -- the very gift granted Orpheus himself. In that this gift is not necessary to continue the life cycle, it is in fact a surfeit of that cycle -- it steps beyond it into the light of the imagination. It is to the origin and nature of this surfeit that the sonnet addresses itself.

13) Zwischending -- literally "thing between." However, in view of the overtones of "offspring" suggested by lines 12 and 13, and in view of the metaphorical use of "fruits" throughout the sonnet, the botanical word "hybrid" has been chosen in order to maintain the tightness of the imagery. Also, a hybrid is an "offspring of two animals or plants of different species &c." -- i.e. here "the dead" and the "roots." Biologically, a hybrid is usually stronger than either of its two parents. Orpheus, the man with the divine gift, steps beyond the realms of the human and the divine -- in life he is slain by the human because he is beyond them, and in death his oracle is shut up by

Apollo because it is more popular than the god's.

14) All the previous translators translate stummer as "dumb," yet the word may be translated equally well as "mute." The latter is a far better choice in that the pejorative connotations of "dumb" have no place in an image which presents gifts or offspring of the dead in a realm above even the regeneration of living physical forms. "Mute" retains the quiet dignity and power of the love the dead may have for the living.



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

... Wenig Musik nur, ein Stampfen, ein Summen - :

Maedchen, ihr warmen, Maedchen, ihr stummen,

tanzt den Geschmack der erfahrenen Frucht!

Tanzt die Orange. Wer kann sie vergessen,

wie sie, ertrinkend in sich, sich wehrt

wider ihr Suess-sein. Ihr habt sie besessen.

Sie hat sich koestlich zu euch bekehrt.

Tanzt die Orange. Die waermere Landschaft,

werft sie aus euch, dass die reife erstrahle

in Lueften der Heimat! Ergluechte, enthuehlt

Duefte um Duefte! Schafft die Verwandtschaft

mit, der reinen, sich weigernden Schale,

mit dem Saft, der die glueckliche fuellt!

I - 15

<sup>1.</sup> Stay ..., <sup>2.</sup> that taste ... <sup>3.</sup> Already in flight.

... <sup>4.</sup> A scrap of music, a stamping, a humming - :

Maidens, warm, maidens, mute

dance the taste of experienced fruit! | 5.

Dance the orange. Who can forget her,  
 how, drowning into herself, she struggles  
 against her sweetness. You have possessed her.  
 In her exquisite windings <sup>7.</sup> turns your proselyte. | 6.

Dance the orange. That warmer landscape,  
 cast it from you, that the ripeness may stream  
 in its native <sup>8.</sup> airs. Disclose, <sup>9.</sup> radiance,

fragrance round fragrance. Create kinship  
 with the pure, resistant rind,  
 with the juice that fills <sup>10.</sup> this one so blessed!

- 1) What is needed here is a dramatic imperative, since we are presented with a group of persons having a spokesman straining to hear fragments of mysterious sounds. The word "wait" which is a literal translation of Wartet will not do in this case, since it does not specify how to wait. "Stay" on the other hand does contain that image of a sudden attentive arresting of motion in mid-step.
- 2) das schmeckt -- while the literal translation of this phrase is "that tastes," it is inadequate, since the English phrase does not focus heavily on the sensation itself, but demands a completion such as "that tastes good" (Herter Norton and MacIntyre), or "that tastes strong" etc., whereas the German phrase is completely self-sufficient and common. However, the phrases "that tastes good / strong" are misleading because they add a modifying qualitative condition to "taste" which is not present in the original, purely quantitative phrase -- the persona's attention is drawn to the experience of taste itself as a sudden discovery, not to how that thing tastes. The phrase "that taste ..." holds the surprise of the original in that it indicates only the presence of a particular sensation without modification or description.
- 3) The pun on "to flee" and "to fly" that the word "flight" creates is operative in German as well as in English.
- 4) The quantitative metric structure (of syllables) in this German phrase has occasioned the use of the use of the non-literal "scrap." Rilke uses three words: the first ~~is~~ made up of two syllables -- the former of long, the latter of short duration; the second is made up again of two syllables, both short; the third is made up of one syllable of short duration. The effect of this structure is to



create a fragment broken off -- it begins slowly and ends abruptly. Since the phrase concerns music, this kind of "measure" is not out of place here. A straight literal translation of the phrase "A little music only" is too weak toward both ends -- the metric is loose and fades. For this reason the content of the phrase has been modified with the addition of the image "scrap" to recreate the fragmentary, torn-off metric of the original form.

5) The rhyme of "mute" with "fruit" is intentional on my part, and is meant to draw together the narrative tie between sonnets I - 14 and I - 15. In the previous sonnet, the "fruit" of the "dead" and the "roots" is imagined as a "hybrid" of mute strength and kisses. Here, the condition in which the maidens are to dance the fruit is one of warmth and muteness -- i.e. the language of the dance is not to be a human one, but is to be the language of the fruit itself through the medium of the human form. As we see in stanza 2, the maiden who dances "the taste of experienced fruit" actually becomes that fruit. through an identification of the form her dance makes and the form of its subject. Again we have a clear instance of Rilke's understanding of the Orphic -- that Orpheus' music is the making of a language of the non-human world intelligible to human perception, be it visual or auditory. To the uninitiated, both the steps of the dancing maenads and their cries remained unintelligible.

The reader must remember that participation in divine process is always imagined as greater than the human, and that it is Orpheus who, through his gift of music and poetry, gives to man a vocabulary to deal with those instances of divine participation. So in this poem we are presented with first, a fragmentary taste, music, dance step and

song, which gradually coheres, until by metamorphic degrees the fruit, the one dancer, and the community of dancers merge and create a landscape of forms in which the spiritual identity can take place. Also, the metric and rhyme of these two lines demonstrate that the fragments of the previous two lines are beginning to form a coherent whole in the dance.

6) Orange in German is feminine. Because of the fact that the sie of this stanza is ambiguous, i.e. its antecedent may be found in the Maedchen dancer(s) of stanza 1, or in Orange, or both, Rilke creates a metamorphic identity between the dancer and the subject of the dance. Since in English the word "orange" is neuter, I have personified the fruit in order to recreate the ambiguity of the German -- the vehicle through which the metamorphic identity is achieved.

7) Literally, "she has exquisitely converted herself (in)to you." The problem here is of course bekehrt which contains an explicit image of "turning toward" (etym. bei kehren, correspondent to the lat. convertere -- "to turn about") which the English "to convert" has almost entirely lost. "To convert" usually means, in English, the change of one thing into another with a corresponding loss of the former identity -- not the turning of one thing toward another with the maintenance of both identities: the path or way having become the same. Rilke's play on the pronoun sie in this stanza allows such a maintenance of both identities -- one can read the stanza as referring to the "dancer" or the "orange" or both simultaneously. The ground of the identity here is a shared ground (they meet in the forms of the dance) -- the vocabulary of the dance which is common to both the subject of the dance and the agent of that subject. Only

in the specifically religious use of the word "convert" does the English language retain that notion of one identity striking up the same path or movement with one or more entities. For these various reasons I have chosen to translate the line as "In her exquisite windings turns your proselyte," where the words "windings" and "turns" reveal both the shape of the orange and the shape of the dance, and the word "proselyte" retains the religious sense of this turning on a common ground, which is present in the German as well as the English.

8) The auditory pun on "airs -- heirs," while not present in the original, accomplishes three functions in the sestet: a) it replaces the possible auditory pun on die reife in the previous line, which can be heard as meaning both the ripeness of the fruit or the dancer(s), (in the sense that the dancer(s) are "full" of their subject); b) it makes the dancers (maenads, or here, Vera, their collective body) true heirs to that "sentient south" of sonnet I - 7, which is the Urlandschaft of the Orphic myths, and finally; c) it creates the methodology whereby the "kinship" of the following line is achieved.

9) At this point in the poem the activity of the dancers has become a "thing itself" -- a radiant landscape in the process of revealing itself. The activity is thus given the form of a noun, since it is the activity itself, the radiant Figur or "image" of the dance, which now reveals its objects and agents as constituent parts or poles of its landscape. The metamorphic identity is complete in that the work of the artist has moved beyond him / her self to the point where the work gives the author or agent a place. No longer is the dancer the agent of the dance, but the dance has become the agent

of (or "moves") the dancer. This is Possession (maenads), or Dictation (poet). Most of the second part of the sestet does not add to this metamorphosis -- it serves only to imagine this metamorphosis or identity as a "kinship."

10) It is not until the second to the last word that Rilke personifies -- up to this point he is merely playing with the ambiguity of the pronoun sie. However, the phrase die glueckliche is clearly a pun on both the orange and the maiden (dancer, Vera), heavily weighted on the side of the maiden. Die glueckliche usually means "lucky" or "joyful" and the phrase is not often applied to the vegetable world in German. If it is, this usage is always understood as figurative. Unfortunately, the personification in my English version necessarily begins much earlier, since Rilke's ambiguity cannot be duplicated in any other manner. Since I have found the weighting of the human side of this ambiguity unavoidable (because of my use of personification to achieve it), I have weighted the other side with the use of the word "blessed" rather than a word like "lucky, fortunate" or "joyful" etc. in the final line -- i.e. it is more natural for an English reader to imagine an orange as "blessed" than "joyful."

Du, mein Freund, bist einsam, weil ...

Wir machen mit Worten und Fingerzeigen

uns allmaehlich die Welt zu eigen,

vielleicht ihren schwachsten, gefaehrlichsten Teil.

Wer zeigt mit Fingern auf einen Geruch? -

Doch von den Kraeften, die uns bedrohten,

fuehlst du viele ... Du kennst die Toten,

und du erschrickst vor dem Zauberspruch.

Sieh, nun heisst es zusammen ertragen

Stueckwerk und Teile, als sei es das Ganze.

Dir helfen, wird schwer sein. Vor allem: pflanze

mich nicht in dein Herz. Ich wuechse zu schnell.

Doch meines Herrn Hand will ich fuehren und sagen:

Hier. Das ist Esau in seinem Fell.

## I - 16

You, my friend, are <sup>1.</sup> set apart, because ...  
We, <sup>2.</sup> piece by piece, with words and pointing fingers  
make the world <sup>3.</sup> over to our own,  
perhaps its weakest, <sup>4.</sup> most dangerous part.

Who points with his fingers to a smell? -  
Yet of the powers that threatened us,  
you feel many ... You know the dead,  
and you take fright at incantations.

See, now we are left to endure together  
piecework and <sup>5.</sup> fragment, as though it were the whole.  
To help you will be difficult. Above all: plant

me not into your heart. Too quickly would I grow.  
Yet my lord's hand will I guide and say:  
Here. This is Esau in his <sup>6.</sup> own skin.

1) einsam -- usually translated as "lonesome," also "lonely, solitary, secluded, isolated, retired, forlorn." Obviously, since the "you" is here referred to as "friend," the range of meaning we should focus on is not really a "lonesomeness," but a "set apartness" -- of a being which is part of a community but has no defined birthright in that community. If we remember that whatever else the "you" might be, Rilke has attached the antecedent "Esau" to it, we recall that Esau's rightful place as heir to Isaac was displaced twice -- for the first time when Jacob bought his brother's birthright by taking advantage of his hunger (he bought it from his starving brother with a bowl of lentil soup -- the city's granaries substituting for a bad year among the animals of the wilderness), and for the second time when Jacob obtained his brother's blessing from their father (the city's domesticated flocks substituted for the game of the wilderness) via the trick of disguise. ...

In Pompeian wall-paintings and Graeco-Roman sarcophagi it is as a magical musician, with power over all wild untamed things in nature, that Orpheus appears. This conception naturally passed into Christian art and it is interesting to watch the magical musician transformed gradually into the Good Shepherd. The bad wild beasts, the lions and the lynxes, are weeded out one by one, and we are left, as in the wonderful Ravenna mosaic, with only a congregation of mild patient sheep.

(from Prolegomena, J.E. Harrison, Meridian Books Inc., 1960, pg. 457.)

Finally, when Jacob (now bearing the name Israel) returns to the land of his father and is reconciled with his brother Esau through bribery, it is Jacob and his followers who inherit the lands of his father (the fertile valley), while Esau and his followers head off into the surrounding hills. Thus Esau, the "true heir" to Abraham and Isaac, is "set apart" via a systematic deceit, opportunism and trickery on the part of Jacob (Israel) -- the city or nation -- the We of Rilke's

line 2. Rilke sees this banishment of the "hairy man" Esau (--- or Enkidu of the Gilgamesh story -- or Percival of the Arthurian legends) by the smooth man Jacob-Israel (king of the city as in Gilgamesh) as an ongoing historical process finding its Ur-Motif in Jacob-Israel -- (God's covenant with Jacob is that all nations shall be blessed through Israel). However, the Judaic history is unique in the sense that Esau or the "wild man" is born first within the community (being the record or image of Israel as a nomadic landless tribe in the wilderness), and Jacob is born second (being the record or image of Israel as a new landed nation bent on territorial expansion and settlement). The prophesy concerning the two brothers is that the elder (hairy -- wild man) shall serve the younger (smooth -- domesticated man -- favorite of his mother) with his sword, without any claim over his birthright. Born first and within, he is "set apart." ... In the story of Gilgamesh on the other hand, Enkidu is born outside the community -- he begins by being set apart, and the objective of the king (Gilgamesh) becomes how to bring him into the city -- in fact how to heal the decadence of the city by the introduction of the "wild man." The Percival story in the Arthurian cycle operates in much the same way. It is Percival, the "wild man," who attains the holy grail. (What has all this to do with Orpheus?!? -- See notes 5 and 6 below.)

2) The German word allmaehlich, m.h.d. almechlich vgl. algemechliche ("slowly, by and by"), is usually translated as "gradually, by degrees, little by little." Its composite root is primarily physical (all -- "to grow out" and machen -- "to make"), and temporal by implication or extension only -- i.e., to complete a series of doings



(physical), requires an extent of time. Thus, because the emphasis is on the material world here ("what we make our own" and "piecework and fragments" are opposed to "powers" and "incantations" via the bridge "who points with his fingers to a smell"), I have translated the word as "piece by piece."

3) machen ... uns ... zu eigen -- literally "to make over to ourselves," not "to make our own" which would be unser machen. Eigen, the root of Eigentum, always denotes a possessive. Eigentum = "property" (private). Since the subject here is Jacob-Israel -- ("We," who have cheated Esau -- natural man -- wild man out of his birthright,) the ambiguity suggested by the phrase I have used is appropriate: i.e.

a) we have made the world, piece by piece, our private property; or

b) we have deeded the world over to our own kind, the heirs of Jacob-Israel city nation. Anthropomorphism.

4) The ambiguity of this line is as strong in German as it is in the English version: i.e. "its weakest, most dangerous part" is on the one hand "that part of the world we have chosen to make our own," and on the other hand "ourselves -- our own kind." Thus in the scope encompassed by the ambiguity of this one line, we find an image of the entire process of anthropomorphism at work. Narcissistically, we see the world in our own image: Jacob disguising himself in furs is putting himself into, and seeing himself at, the centre of the natural world. Unfortunately, the success of the ruse fools not only Isaac, but himself as well.

5) Teile has here been translated as the non-literal "fragment" to recall the fragmentary opening of the previous sonnet I - 15. In that previous poem, "We" come upon the maenads and watch in

fascination as they dance the natural world. In this poem, "We" return to our own perception of the fragments of the world we have made our property, and search in ourselves for that primeval ground on the basis of which we could participate in the activity of that previous poem. That ground is Esau, the part of us we have necessarily "set apart" in order to see the world as our private property (inheritance). That this "wild man" shares in the worship of the maenads we see clearly in the Satyrs, followers of Dionysos, and the Thracian wild men who constantly surround classical depictions of Orpheus.

Jane Harrison, in speaking of the Greek "Wildmen," says:

The Kouretes need not long detain us. They are the Cretan brothers of the Satyrs, the local Satyrs of Crète. Hesiod knows of their kinship: from the same parent

The goddesses, nymphs of the mountain, had their being,

And the race of the worthless do-nothing Satyrs,

And the divine Kouretes, lovers of sport and dancing.

Hesiod's words are noteworthy and characteristic of his theological attitude. The Satyrs, as we have seen (p. 379) are Satrai, primitive Dionysos-worshippers of Thrace and Thessaly. Seen through the hostile eyes of their conquerors they have suffered distortion and degradation in form as in content, they are horsemen, worthless, idle. The Kouretes have just the same beginning in actuality, but their mythological ending is different. They are seen, not through the distorting medium of conquest, but with the halo of religion about their heads; they are divine (θεοί) and their dancing is sacred. It all depends on the point of view.

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The Kouretes then are, as their name betokens, the young male population considered as worshipping the young male god, the Kouros; they are "mailed priests" because the young male population were naturally warriors. They danced their local wardance over the new-born child, and, because in those early days the worship of the Mother and the Son was not yet sundered, they were attendants (πρὸς πόλο) on the mother also. They are in fact the male correlatives of the Maenads as Nurses (τίθνα).

The women-nurses were developed most fully, it seems, in Greece proper; the male attendants, in Asia Minor and the islands.

It is the more interesting (than the Pompeian wall paintings and Graeco-Roman sarcophagi passage quoted on pg. 101 above, which present us with the Roman "degeneration" of the image of Orpheus - trans. note, K.S.) to find that on black and redfigured vase paintings (i.e. on genuine Greek artifacts - trans. note, K.S.), spite of this literary tradition (the Roman one mentioned above - trans. note, K.S.), the power of the magical musician is quite differently conceived. Orpheus does not appear at all on black-figured vases -- again a note of his late coming -- and on red-figured vases never with the attendant wild beasts.

On a vase found at Gela and now in the Berlin Museum, ... we have Orpheus as musician. He wears Greek dress and sits playing on his lyre with up-turned head, utterly aloof, absorbed. And round him are not wild beasts but wild men, Thracians.

(from Prolegomena, J.E. Harrison, Meridian Books Inc., 1960, pg. 498, pg. 499, pp. 457 and 458.)

6) Jacob gains his father's blessing and inheritance (intended for Esau) by disguising himself in the furs of domestic animals, the flesh of which he feeds to Isaac. Thus is Isaac twice deceived. Not only is he presented with the domesticated skins of the smooth man Jacob (rather than with the real wild skin of the hairy man Esau) but he is also tricked into acquiring his sustenance from the domestic animals (that part of the world "we have made our own," rather than from the full bounty of the natural world -- wilderness). This poem is an attempt to reinstate the true heir to mankind ("Esau in his own skin") by one of the descendants of the false heir, Jacob. Isaac, the father, is blind. His hand must be guided to his true heir. This is the job of the poet, Orpheus. Again we are forced to confront Rilke's understanding of that function -- Orpheus is not someone who tames the wild beasts with his music by anthropomorphosis of the world --

but one who makes the non-human world intelligible to man -- who constantly rejoins the hand of man to his progenitor. As such it is through him that the world achieves a vocabulary (logos) which informs and enraptures man:

On a vase found at Gela and now in the Berlin Museum, ... we have Orpheus as musician. He wears Greek dress and sits playing on his lyre with an up-turned head, utterly aloof, absorbed. And round him are not wild beasts but wild men, Thracians. They wear uniformly the characteristic Thracian dress, the fox-skin cap (wild beasts, not domestic ones - trans. note, K.S.) and the long embroidered cloak ... . . . These wild Thracians in the vase painting are all intent on the music; the one to the right looks suspicious of this new magic, the one immediately facing Orpheus is determined to enquire into it, the one just behind has gone under completely; his eyes are shut, his head falling, he is mesmerized, drunken, but not with wine.  
(from Prolegomena, J.E. Harrison, Meridian Books Inc., 1960, pg. 458.)

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It is necessary at this point to make a final statement on the previous translators of this sonnet sequence. Final, because from here on, of not from the very beginning, our ways diverge completely. Rilke wrote to his wife on April 23, 1923 that sonnet I - 16:

... one has to know -- or guess -- is addressed to a dog; I did not make a note, just because I wanted to take him completely into the whole. Any indication would only have isolated him again, singled him out.

The important phrases are "or guess," "I wanted to take him completely into the whole," "is addressed to" and "any indication would only have isolated him again, singled him out." Explicitly then, we are dealing with what is given in the poem, which is Esau, and it is to that story that the scholar's primary responsibility lies. Once we have mastered that story and seen how it is made operative in the poem,

then we may turn to the implicit focus or implied image of that story in the poem -- the dog. We merely guess at the possibility that Rilke is addressing a dog here -- he has gone out of his way not to make it explicit, so that if we can re-approach the story of Esau -- the banishment and then the taming of the "wild man -- wilderness" by the human anthropomorphic community through the image of a dog, we may bring an added dimension to the poem. MacIntyre and Herter Norton do the exact opposite of what Rilke indicates in this letter. Failing to take the Biblical story of Esau into account, they concentrate on the externals -- the fact that Rilke has said in a letter that guessing that this poem is addressed to a dog helps in the understanding of its content. Indeed, MacIntyre gets quite carried away with this fixation in his annotations:

M.D. Herter Norton's note on this piece is particularly informative, and Professor J.B. Leishman, with his customary scholarly astuteness, presents a whole dog-show in his annotation.

This would all be quite humorous were it not for the fact that MacIntyre then presumes to judge the poem,

There is a better dog poem in N.G. "Der Hund" ...

not on the basis of itself (it is explicitly a poem "about" Esau -- nowhere is there any mention in the poem about a "dog"), nor even on the basis of the narrative structure of the sequence (which is not taken into account at all), but on the very tenuous basis of a scholarly accretion built on an aside in one of the poet's letters. The whole matter becomes much simpler if we remain with the subject at hand -- the information the poem itself offers, and recognize in the story of Esau the entire range of the problem of the expulsion and / or taming of the "wild man" or animal by the human community.

This stance is substantiated by Rilke's images of the "Horseman" and the "Horse" in sonnets I - 11 and I - 20 respectively. (See notes on the origin of the Satyrs and Centaurs -- "wild men" -- , sonnet I - 20.) That Rilke sees in the dog a continuation of this process is, as he himself says, of mentionable importance. It remains, however, in the context of this poem, of incidental importance, as his statement in the letter clearly reveals. However, this total unwillingness to accept responsibility for the literal content of the individual poems, much less the movement of the narrative structure, is evident not only in the former translations of this poem but also in those of other key poems, as the following excerpt from MacIntyre's notes on sonnet I - 15 illustrates:

This study of the nutritional and aesthetic value of orange juice is too precious to have much poetic merit.

I find this statement especially baffling since in the same breath MacIntyre offers a scrap of scholarly information which should allow him to produce at least a kinder, if not more accurate reading:

Valery's essay, L'Ame et la danse, maintains that the dancer is "the pure act of the metamorphosis."

Zu unterst der Alte, verworren,  
all der Erbauten  
Wurzel, verborgener Born,  
den sie nie schauten.

Sturmhelm und Jaegerhorn,  
Spruch von Ergrauten,  
Maenner im Bruderzorn,  
Frauen wie Lauten ...

Draengender Zweig an Zweig,  
nirgends ein freier ...  
Einer! o steig ... o steig ...

Aber sie brechen noch.  
Dieser erst oben doch  
biegt sich zur Leier.

I - 17

<sup>1.</sup> Undermost the <sup>2.</sup> ancient, <sup>3.</sup> entangled,  
 of all the <sup>4.</sup> created  
 the root, hidden spring,  
where there <sup>5.</sup> is no witness.

Helmet and hunter's horn,  
 Lays of ~~the~~ greybeards,  
hate breaks those <sup>6.</sup> as brothers born,  
and the lute-like ladies <sup>7.</sup> ...

Crowding branch on branch,  
 nowhere is but one free ...  
 One! oh climb ... oh climb ...

But still they break.  
 This one <sup>8.</sup> born uppermost yet  
 bends himself to a <sup>9.</sup> lyre.



1) zu unterst -- literally "at the bottom (underneath)." "Undermost," as a compound word, retains the desired brevity of the original. It also reconstructs the parallelism zu unterst - erst oben of the original by playing off against the word "uppermost" in line 13.

2) Rilke's use of der Alte, rather than das Alte indicates that he wants to focus very particularly on Alte as a self sufficient noun, not as an adjective-made-noun. das Alte is a category implying a referential content, whereas der Alte is a single thing, operating much like a name. Thus, while a literal translation of the words, der Alte, would be "the old," a translation of the linguistic function of the phrase is more accurately rendered by the phrase "the ancient." The English construction, like the German, almost creates a personification.

3) verworren -- used today usually as an adjective, the word verworren is originally the second participle of the once strong verb verwirren. The root of wirren is probably the Indo-European root of Wurm having the original meaning of "to turn, to tangle." We have all seen how the roots of a tree may surround and entangle an artifact, a stone or any other such thing that it may grow upon.

4) Erbauten -- literally "built up, constructed, erected, raised." Figuratively, it also means "edified." This recalls the tree of sonnet I - 1, the erected stone of sonnet I - 5, and the edifice of the sonnet sequence itself up to this point. Since this poem draws together all of those elements into a unified image of a tree in whose branches the world appears as a historical and spatial image of movement, I have used the word "created," which does not draw a distinction between what has been created by the "world" and what has

been created by "man." (See also note 8 below.)

5) den sie nie schauen -- schauen means not merely "to see" or "to look," but "to perceive, behold, view, look at, look upon, take as a model." In view of this, the English word which comes closest to this notion is the word "witness." Now a translation of this phrase something like "to which there is no witness" would be wrong, since the whole tree in its upward movement to its final turning, back toward the root, is in fact a witness to that hidden spring. Thus the phrase has been translated as "where there is no witness" -- this creates the necessary tension in that upper branch, the downward curve of which is the constantly recurring desire on its part to be a witness to that primal hidden spring. (See also note 8 below.)

6) Maenner im Bruderzorn -- the construction im Bruderzorn is similar to the English construction "in hatred." Rilke here wants the reader to see the "men" caught up in a landscape of battle -- the fraternal strife being the subject, the "men" the object. Bruderzorn literally means "brother-anger" (sic), and presents a much more particular image than the usual translation "fraternal strife." For these reasons the active image "hate breaks those as brothers born" has been chosen as a translation. The word "breaks" as opposed to "wrecks, divides, etc." has been chosen for two reasons; a) in order to continue the alliterative "B" sound which cuts across the lines of the poem in order to create a rapid recurring movement downward, duplicating the pace achieved by Rilke's short lines which almost "list" the content of the sonnet, and b) since the entire poem consists of a conceit where the world is seen as the branches of a tree, the word "break" (as in breaking a branch) continues and keeps the

event within the metaphorical structure. (See also note 8 below.)

7) The words "and the" have been added for several reasons. Line 8 must close the octave completely, both in terms of content and metric, in order for the shift of line 9 to take place. Now line 7 has necessarily been lengthened (see note 6 above), which means that for the stanza to unwind itself as Rilke's three dots suggest, line 8 cannot contain merely four perfectly symmetrical syllables. Rilke's can, because his lines 5 and 6, and 7 and 8 are parallel. Furthermore, if "lute-like ladies" is not tied tightly to the long preceding line, there is a tendency to read it in conjunction with the short following line, which is both metrically and imagistically undesirable. Also, the preceding line is very harsh both in terms of content and metric, ending with two hard stresses. The metric of "lute-like ladies," alternating hard and soft stresses, would give the line an abruptness which would be completely inappropriate, since this line is meant to contrast in its implied softness to the harshness of the preceding line, just as the "Lays of the greybeards" in line 6 is meant to contrast in its implied slowness with the speed of the hunt in the preceding line 5. All of this is necessary of course, because line 7 has been extended, contrary to Rilke's parallel structure.

8) This poem is constructed in such a way that as one reads down the page, a tree unfolds growing up. Stanza 1 begins with what is under the tree -- the hidden spring and the root. Stanza 2 is the trunk with its strong limbs, stanza 3 is the ~~upper~~ branches, stanza 4 is the topmost branch. Within this tree we find "all the created" -- the invisible origin, lines 1 to 4; the fragments of Norse saga preserved in the few remnants of the Eddas, lines 5 and 6; the

feuding barons and troubador tradition of the medieval Minnesaenger, lines 7 and 8; the present, as is manifest when the poet's voice breaks through with "oh climb ... oh climb ...;" and the future, the invisibility of which partakes of the invisibility of the origin it seeks to return to. This is not merely history -- this rise and descent partakes of any process one wishes to follow in the imagination. This tree whose topmost branch reaches down by virtue of the fact that one of its roots is actually "rooted in heaven," and on the branches of which hangs all the world, is of course Yggdrasil. One imagines the curling root growing up and the curling branch growing down so they form a shape like the two arms of a lyre -- the strings of the lyre would thus be the branches between, which are strung and tuned in heaven, and which are fixed at the other end to the trunk of the tree -- the sound board or box. Odin, god of the poets, so the "Lays" tell us, hung from this tree for nine days to learn wisdom. Thus we now know that when Rilke begins the sonnet sequence with "There rose a tree ...," he is speaking of a world, whose musical unfolding we participate in as we read the sonnets. We also know that the narrative structure of the sonnet sequence cannot be linear, but is in fact a harmonic (see note on harmony, sonnet I - 1) or poly-tropic creation of space where we continually return to the centre and begin again to go "out on a limb." However, all is not luxuriant growth in this tree. Odin's horse continually feeds on its branches. To this we will return in our notes on sonnet I - 20. Suffice it to say at this point that we begin to understand what Rilke means when he says "they speak the speech not only of the year" -- they speak the speech of the world.

9) "born uppermost" -- "born" in the double sense of "carried upward" by the tree, meaning both the branch itself and Orpheus carried by the branch, and in the sense of "given birth to" in the highest place. "Uppermost" creates a parallelism with the word "undermost" in line 1. (See also note 1 above.)

10) The ambiguity of "to," i.e. either "toward" or "into" duplicates the ambiguity of the original. Rilke's use of zur here can either mean zu der or zu einer.

Hoerst du das Neue, Herr,  
droehnen und beben?  
Kommen Verkuendiger,  
die es erheben.

Zwar ist kein Hoeren heil  
in dem Durchtobtsein,  
doch der Maschinenteil  
will jetzt gelobt sein.

Sieh, die Maschine:  
wie sie sich waelzt und raecht  
und uns entstellt und schwaecht.

Hat sie aus uns auch Kraft,  
sie, ohne Leidenschaft,  
treibe und diene.

I - 18

Do you hear the <sup>1.</sup> New, <sup>2.</sup> Lord,  
how it shakes <sup>3.</sup> and roars?  
A <sup>4.</sup> gathering of heralds  
exalt <sup>5.</sup> it.

Though no hearing is whole  
in that <sup>6.</sup> din,  
yet the <sup>7.</sup> strident turn of metal  
now <sup>8.</sup> pretends to praise.

Look at the machine:  
how it wallows, vengeful  
how it disfigures and weakens us.

Though <sup>9.</sup> its strength is taken from us,  
drive it and serve it,  
without <sup>10.</sup> passion.

1) Rilke has taken an adjective (neue) here and turned it into a noun. In German, this means that the first letter of the word is automatically capitalized, as it is with any noun. In the equivalent English version "New" has been capitalized for three reasons: a) Rilke wishes to emphasize this word as a "thing," a noun, as the comma immediately following it indicates; b) because in English the article does not agree with gender (in this case, that of "Lord"), a small "n" on "new" might lead the reader to see the line as "the new lord," rather than "the New, Lord;" and c) Rilke is using this word to characterize an entire age, wherein the questionable benefits of the machine are so pervasive that they obscure the "old" and "ancient" patterns which are more than merely mechanical.

2) Herr may be translated as either "master" or "lord." "Lord" has been chosen in order to remain consistent with the "Lord" of sonnet I - 16, since the same persona is probably being addressed here.

3) droehnen und beben -- this phrase translates literally into the gerunds "roaring and shaking." However, Rilke is focusing throughout the sonnet on the sound of machines, which insistently drowns out not only the delicate music of the lyre, but also the wild cries of the maenads' dance. He achieves this pervasive deafening insistence in the first stanza by the use of a rather pounding metric -- two heavy stresses per line. Thus in each of the two line sentences we have the rhythm of a four cycle engine -- the most common of machines. There is no subtle interweaving of patterns here -- only the repetition of eight heavy beats which crush the lines into place. Since this pattern cannot be duplicated while retaining a precision of content, the rather weak gerunds have been changed into strong verbs.



- 4) Kommen Verkuendiger -- This construction in German demands of the reader that he understand that the word Es is "understood" immediately preceding the word Kommen. The natural word order is Verkuendiger kommen and this cannot be inverted without being preceded by Es, even though it is often only "understood" as present. Now the construction Es kommen Verkuendiger (approximately "it comes heralds" (sic)) is impossible in English, and is therefore best translated by the image "A gathering of heralds" in which the reader sees the threatening mass actually grow.
- 5) erheben -- literally "lift up," also "elevate, exalt, extol, ascertain, investigate." The context of the poem (praise) requires the use of either "exalt" or "extol" for an accurate translation.
- 6) Durchtobtsein -- literally "being roared through." "Din," though it comes closest to the intended meaning, is neither specific nor strong enough imagistically to hold the original meaning. For this reason the following line has been completely remade. (See note 7 below.)
- 7) The word Maschinenteil has been replaced by the phrase "strident turn of metal" for a variety of reasons, the most significant of which is the necessity to reinforce the word "din" in the preceding line. The word "strident" reintroduces some of that shrill insistence of the toben that leaves "no hearing whole." The phrase "turn of metal" introduces an image where Rilke uses the noun Maschinenteil (literally "machine-part") for several reasons: a) the English words "machine-part" are awkward in a way Maschinenteil is not; b) Rilke uses the word Maschinenteil doubtless because he wants the reader to notice the completion teil ("part"), and understand that it

is only a small part of the world, rather than the whole which now demands the praise once lent to the gods in creation; c) the word "turn," while making the "metal" into a "machine," also serves to re-introduce that notion of a turning order or winding path, so that the machine is seen as one more turn or part in the helix of creation; and finally, d) "turn" is used in this case in that loose sense of "it is the machine's turn ("time," "historical place") to demand praise," which implies of course a past and a future in which it is not a central matter of concern. The entire poem is an attempt to place or see the machine in a historical or cosmological context, despite its deafening and insistent demand that it be seen as some kind of new answer, as some technocrats still want us to believe. Witness sonnet I - 19, in which all accomplished things "return to the ancient."

8) will jetzt gelobt sein translates literally as "wants now to be praised." The non literal "now pretends to praise" has been chosen for two reasons: a) the alliteration of this line balances against an alliterative line 5 and thus compensates for the loss of Rilke's balanced scheme for this stanza; and b) the pun on "pretends" is appropriate since it is clear from the context of the sonnet that the demand to praise the machine in itself, and not the inventiveness that gave it birth or the intelligence involved in its use, is a false demand. Rilke ends the poem with the admonition to deal with the machine "without passion."

9) Hat sie aus uns auch Kraft -- this phrase hinges on the word aus meaning "out of" or "from," and thus contains an unusual image, wherein the strength of a machine is seen as having been cut out of or

taken away from the strength of man. Thus it modifies or more accurately elucidates the previous line in that it shows both how and why we are "disfigured" and "weakened" by the machine -- it demands its "pound of flesh." For this reason it has been translated as "though its strength is taken from us."

10) Lines 11 and 12 rhyme for two reasons: a) in order to draw the reader's attention to the interrelation of the content of the two lines, and b) in order to draw the two stanzas of the sestet together, which Rilke does by rhyming lines 9 and 14. This drawing together is necessary since the octave merely presents the landscape of industrialized world -- the sestet, beginning with the line "look at the machine," demands of the reader that he step out of the narrowness of his historical place and see his world without the narrowing auditory "blindness" of his historical age.

11) This line, like the original, is intentionally ambiguous. Rilke achieves this ambiguity in part by removing the pronoun from the proximity of the activity it is a part of and inserting "without passion." Since this reversal would sound hopelessly awkward in English, normal syntax has been retained, all of the ambiguity now being initiated by the repetition of the pronoun "it" and the comma at the end of line 13.

Wandelt sich rasch auch die Welt  
wie Wolkengestalten,  
alles Vollendete faellt  
heim zum Uralten.

Ueber dem Wandel und Gang,  
weiter und freier,  
waeht noch dein Vor-Gesang,  
Gott mit der Leier.

Nicht sind die Leiden erkannt,  
nicht ist die Liebe gelernt,  
und was im Tod uns entfernt,

ist nicht entschleiert.  
Einzig das Lied ueberm Land  
heiligt und feiert.

I - 19

Though the world may <sup>1.</sup> transform itself  
<sup>2.</sup> quick as a cloud's <sup>3.</sup> countenance,  
 each <sup>4.</sup> accomplishment falls  
 home to the <sup>5.</sup> ancient.

Over the <sup>6.</sup> whirl and stride,  
 wider and freer,  
 your prelude <sup>7.</sup> still presides,  
 god with the lyre.

Sufferings are not recognized,  
 neither is love learned,  
 and what removes us in death

<sup>8.</sup> has not been unveiled.  
 The song <sup>9.</sup> alone over the land  
 sanctifies and <sup>10.</sup> praises.

- 1) The use of the word "transform" to translate Wandeln here is intended to recall the "transforming song" of sonnet I - 10, since at this point in the sequence the world itself has become such a "meandering stream." With the images of clouds and rain -- alles Vollendete faellt / heim zum Uralten -- creating a vertical circle of water around the earth, we are within the realm of Hesiod's "River Ocean" to which and from which all things appear.
- 2) "Quick" has been chosen over and above "Quickly" for two reasons, even though it is less grammatical than the latter. a) "Quickly" introduces a slowness (as most adverbials do since they extend the duration of the verb both in content and metric) into the metric which is undesirable here, and b) we know by following the development from sonnet I - 1 through I - 17 that the world is imagined as a living tree, thus the pun on "quick" -- "alive" is quite appropriate.
- 3) Literally, Wolkengestalten translates as "cloud forms" or "cloud figures." However, these English constructions, being two words, tend to remove the form or figure from the cloud creating a relational separation that the German, being one word, does not produce. In order to give those forms or figures back to the clouds in an immediate place of identity, the clouds have been personified. "Countenance" has been used rather than "face" to make the personification less anthropomorphic. Also, if we see the first stanza as an image of "River Ocean" (see note 1 above), then the clouds become a "mirror of the world" wherein all things are reflected, much like the "child's countenance" of sonnet I - 13 which bears witness to the activity of the entire sonnet.
- 4) Vollendet is quite often translated as "perfected," which is

one of its special meanings. However, literally it means "full-ended," "completed" or "accomplished." "Accomplished" has been used here for a variety of reasons, all of which centre on the previous poem, sonnet I - 18. The word "perfected" indicates a finality of completion which is not desired here, since Rilke is speaking of a number of things all of which constitute the shaping of an ongoing whole. In the preceding sonnet, not the machine and its age are rejected, but the belief that the machine age is the final culmination of history -- that in its age all things will be resolved and brought to a conclusion. Rilke stresses "the New" in sonnet I - 18, yet in sonnet I - 19 he states that "each accomplishment falls / home to the ancient." This is a particular imagination of history which does not attack a historical event as such (each age is seen as necessary and useful -- in sonnet I - 12 he makes use of a metaphor derived from radio technology to get at an image of the invisible), but constantly seeks to place that event within a larger cosmological order. Finally, the whole world is seen as metaphor. It is significant that the machine sonnet is placed between sonnet I - 17, where the topmost branch of the tree (among other things an image of the historical present) bends itself down to a lyre, and sonnet I - 19 where he says "each accomplishment (i.e. the machine or present age) falls home to the ancient." When Rilke says in sonnet I - 19 that "sufferings are not recognized / neither is love learned / and what removes us in death / has not been unveiled" he is indirectly responding to the false optimism of the heralds of the machine age in the previous sonnet. Sonnet I - 19 then, is a perfect "exemplum" of Rilke's narrative methodology. Each poem is written to be read (both completely autonomously and / or also) in relation to

those preceding and following it.

5) Uralt -- literally "originally or primally old." "Ancient" comes closest to the German meaning.

6) The phrase Wandel und Gang reintroduces Rilke's concern with the turning or meandering way. Gang stresses the "feet" or metric of this "way" as the world or poem follows it. As in previous translations of wandeln, some form of turning or circular motion was required, and "whirl" was chosen in order to maintain a congruence of image with the changing countenances of the clouds. "Stride" was chosen to translate Gang ("walk" or "gait") to maintain the image of metric process.

7) The pun on "still" is intentional here. Rilke's use of the word wahrt ("maintains," "endures" etc.) indicates that within and throughout these metamorphosing cloud shapes that are the world, resides the ordering principle of Orphic song. With the selection of the word Vor-Gesang ("prelude") we are again in a realm of process rather than platonic forms. A prelude without an accompanying piece of music of which it is the mode is at best a delicate absurdity.

8) The phrase "is not unveiled" would constitute a more literal translation of the tense of the original. However, Rilke's phrase seems to imply a worden after entschleiert. In any case, the German entschleiert always denotes the action of removing a veil which is first present, whereas the English "unveiled" may mean a thing which has never been concealed by a veil. For these reasons the tense of the English phrase has been changed to "has not been."

9) Einzig is usually translated as "only." However, the "oneness" of the song among the manifold transformations of the world is heavily stressed by Rilke's use of Einzig, and the word has therefore been



translated as "alone."

10) Feiern usually means "to celebrate," but may also mean "keep, observe, commemorate, honour, extol" or "praise." "Praise" has been chosen to echo the first line of sonnet I - 8 "Only in the realm of Praise may Lament walk," to which this sonnet bears a close relation in content. Also, since the German line is in natural syntactical order, the word "alone" has been moved to achieve the same confidence and ease with which the original is presented.

Dir aber, Herr, o was weih ich dir, sag,  
der das Ohr den Geschoepfen gelehrt? -  
Mein Erinnern an einen Fruehlingstag,  
seinen Abend, in Russland -, ein Pferd ...

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 gehemmtten Galopp.  
Wie sprangen die Quellen des Rossebluts!

Der fuehlte die Weiten, und ob!  
der sang und der hoerte -, dein Sagenkreis  
war in ihm geschlossen.

Sein Bild: ich weih's.

But to you, Lord, oh what shall I dedicate, tell me,  
you, who have taught the ear to all creatures? -  
My remembrance of a spring day,  
its evening, in Russia -, a horse ...

Out of the village came the pale horse alone,  
a stake on the front fetlock,  
to be on the meadows that night alone;  
how his mane's trammels beat

at the neck in haughty measure,  
to the rough and fettered gallop.  
How the springs of steed's blood leapt!

He felt the distances, and how!  
he sang and he listened -, your cycle of legends  
was closed in him.

I know: - this scene.

1) The addition of the extra personal pronoun "you" in this position is necessitated by the possibility of reading the last two words of line one in conjunction with line two in its entirety without a break ("tell me who have taught the ear to all creatures?"), creating an alternate possibility of meaning that the original German syntax will not allow.

2) das Ohr den Geschoepfen gelehrt -- this phrase means both "schooled the ear of all creatures" and "taught the ear to all creatures" (i.e. "on the subject of," or "the function of"). The second of these alternatives is most appropriate for two reasons: a) the overall narrative of these poems, especially sonnet I - 1, makes it clear that Rilke is interested in structure and function, hence image, in connection with the ear as an organ which "mirrors the world" rather than receives causal information which is acted upon (that action becoming the "effect" of sound); and b) the phrase "taught the ear to all creatures" when read figuratively, can also mean "schooled the ear," since the ear is obviously already present, but unknown in its full capacity.

3) Herueber vom translates most exactly either by the phrase "over from" or "hither from." However, both of these phrases would create a metric of one strong stress followed by three weak syllables until the next strong stress on the first syllable of "village" is reached. Rilke's intention in this stanza, however, is clearly to create a regular galloping metric as the horse emerges both from the village to the meadow and from out of forgetfulness into the ear of memory. (Witness the broken, searching last line of stanza one before the clear image emerges.) Thus the English phrase used here, "Out of,"

while being slightly less precise in content, nevertheless creates a precision of metric which more than compensates for the slight clouding of the sense.

4) Schimmel means literally "mould," and has come into usage as a classification for a certain kind of horse, i.e. a "pale" or "white" one. Thus the translation of this word as "pale" rather than "white horse" retains some of the faint threatening power Rilke has constructed the image with.

5) Fessel usually means "fetter" or "shackle," but when specifically applied to horses it also means "fetlock." The English word "fetlock" retains this punning ambiguity, though to a much lesser extent, through the second syllable, "lock." This pun begins, both in the German and the English version, a long series of puns intended to create an image of restrained power and beauty, recalling the line gejagt und dann gebaendigt of sonnet I - 11, that former poem containing the first image of the "horse" or "centaur" or "satyr."

6) Gelock -- literally "curliness" or "lockiness." This word is based on the root "locken," which means either "curls" or "to entice, to snare." With this one central word, Rilke is constructing a nexus of power within the poem. The issue is the attraction of this mysterious image, which beckons his memory so many years after the event, and which in fact draws this series of poems to Orpheus into itself as one of its central images. Rilke begins the sonnet with a desire to dedicate, and the image draws his memory to itself like a snare until, at the end of the poem, the dedication has suggested itself without conscious effort on the part of the poet. Here again we have an instance of "dictation" -- a concentration upon a field within

which memory (Hesiod says, the Muses are "daughters of memory") constructs images. In order to retain both the image of a mass of curls and the very important image of a "snare," "trammels" has been chosen for the translation. Webster's Second International Dictionary ascribes these meanings to the word "trammel:" "A kind of net to catch birds, fishes, etc. A rectangular net of three layers, the middle one slack and of fine mesh, the outer ones stretched and of coarse mesh, so arranged that fish attempting to pass in either direction carry some of the fine net through the coarse and are thus pocketed." "A kind of shackle used for regulating the motions of a horse and making him amble." "Often plural. Hence, something impeding activity, progress, or freedom, as a net or shackle; restraint; check." "Plural -- braids or plaitings of a woman's hair; also, locks; tresses."

7) Uebermut -- literally "over-courage," usually translated as "wantonness, high spirits, sportiveness, frolicsomeness, insolent, cocky." Of all of these, "wantonness" comes closest, but unfortunately has too many sexual connotations to be of much use. Since none of the other alternatives has either the power or dignity that the poem suggests, or the connotation of "over" or "high," the word "haughty" has been chosen.

8) gehemmten -- literally means "restricted." However, since lines 6 to 10 inclusive all contribute in some measure to the duality Rilke is achieving through pun and association, the word "fettered" has been chosen to draw these lines together as a unit. This drawing together is achieved by the relation of the word "fetlock" in line 6 to the word "fettered" in line 10.

9) fuehlte die Weiten -- This phrase has been translated as "felt

the distances" for two reasons: a) to place this phrase in congruence with the phrase Neue Weite of sonnet I - 11 (see note 11 on sonnet I - 11 for the translation of Weite as "distances"), since in this case there is no question that the "distances" are those "open spaces" referred to in sonnet I - 11; and b) in order to bring into congruence lines 6 and 7 of sonnet I - 2 "the trees beheld in wonder, this / tangible distance, the meadow's touch," with the Neue Weiten of sonnet I - 11, and the "felt distances of the meadow" in this sonnet, I - 20. The reader is intended to notice by this congruence a relation of open (Neue) space (Weite) to the tree, the mysterious horse (in sonnet I - 11 it is seen in the heavens, in sonnet I - 20 it appears "pale" and strangely out of place, yet exactly placed), and an image of man (Orpheus). This congruence creates an image of the world as an open field, the central images of which begin to be seen as Yggdrasil, Orpheus, and the shaman. (See also note 11 below.)

10) In the image of this poem Rilke sees an accomplishment or fulfillment of the Orphic legends. As illustrated in note 9 above, this poem serves to draw all the central images, including that of song and hearing (der sang und der hoerte) together by echoing key words and phrases in previous poems. This echoing, since the poem achieves its birth through a sudden appearance of memory, defines the nature of memory itself while using it to initiate a larger narrative structure occurring simultaneously with the content of this individual poem. Rilke's phrase for this "accomplishment" or "closing" is dein Sagenkreis war in ihm geschlossen. The word geschlossen recalls those doubling images of freedom and restraint in lines 6 through 10 and indicates the freedom and restriction that each accomplished thing or

image achieves, thus echoing the lines of sonnet I - 19, "each accomplishment falls / home to the ancient." It is because this image, appearing magically from memory, presents itself as such an accomplished form, that Rilke can let it "fall / home to the ancient" -- dedicate it to Orpheus.

11) Sein Bild: ich weih's translates literally as "His picture: I dedicate it." However, this literal translation completely misses both the relation of this line to line 11 of sonnet I - 9, and the pun on weih's (weihe es) and weiss (know). As is abundantly clear from note 6 on sonnet I - 9, the translation of the word Bild as "picture" is inadequate, if not false in this instance. Rilke is speaking not of a picture but of a memory of a scene complete with movement in a three dimensional space. It is the entire movement or incident he wishes to dedicate, which includes how the horse moves, where it goes etc., not merely a static picture. The word "scene" has also been chosen, however, to create a homonym with the word "seen" of sonnet I - 9, since line 11 of sonnet I - 9 Wisse das Bild is obviously an inversion of Sein Bild: ich weih's (weiss es). By the time the poet and the reader have moved from that admonition of sonnet I - 9, through the treatment of Figur or "image" in the intervening sonnets, to the statement of sonnet I - 20 here, Sein Bild: ich weih's (weiss es), the "seen" has indeed become "known" in its larger context (cosmology), and this image of a cosmology which incorporates all of the fragments of vision can now be dedicated to Orpheus as an "accomplishment." As has been pointed out earlier, this poem draws together all the significant moves of the preceding sonnets in a single image. The horse, though it has broken free of the village and its entrappment there



("he obeys in that he oversteps," sonnet I - 5), carries the stake tied to his fetlock -- the tie which binds him to the earth no matter how far beyond his spirit may take him -- even into the constellations of the heavens. Like Orpheus he is not divine, even though he may aspire to and participate in a realm which is beyond the mortal. For these reasons I have inverted Rilke's last line, which is, incidentally both inside the sonnet (via the rhyme in German, and the relation of the content to the first line in the English) and outside of the sonnet (it is placed below and towards the centre) -- itself a formal image of the double realm Orpheus and an orphic initiate achieves; and have made the implicit meaning of the pun explicit (wissen -- to know), and the explicit meaning of the pun (weih es -- dedicate it) implicit. It remains now to ask why Rilke dedicates this particular image to Orpheus. Let us begin where Rilke begins -- with an image of a tree as it takes shape in sonnet I - 1, up to its full realization as the Nordic tree Yggdrasil in sonnet I - 17. This is Rilke's landscape -- northern Europe, and he makes his way or entry into the imagination through that particular mythos. That this tree is Yggdrasil is illustrated by the following summary:

There is still another tradition ... which is nevertheless familiar to all Norse poets: namely, the tradition that depicts the entire world as a tree of prodigious dimensions. This tree whose foliage was always green was the ash tree Yggdrasil. One of its roots reached down into the depths of the subterranean kingdom and its mighty boughs rose to the heights of the sky. In the poetic language of the Skalds Yggdrasil signified the "Steed of the Redoubtable" (Odin) and the gigantic tree received its name because, they said, Odin's charger was in the habit of browsing in its foliage. Near the root which plunged into Niflhel, the underworld, gushed forth the fountain Hvergelmir, the bubbling source of the primitive rivers. Beside the second root, which penetrated the land of the giants, covered with frost and ice, flowed the fountain of Mimir, in which all wisdom dwelt and from which Odin himself desired to drink even though the price demanded

for a few draughts was the loss of an eye. Finally under the root of Yggdrasil -- which according to one tradition was in the very heavens -- was the fountain of the wisest of the Norns, Urd. Every day the Norns drew water from the well with which they sprinkled the ash tree so that it should not wither and rot away. (from New Larousse Encyclopedia Of Mythology, Paul Hamlyn, Toronto, 1968, pg. 251.)

In Gods And Myths Of Northern Europe, H.R. Ellis Davidson traces the extent of this image:

It is developed with rich abundance of detail in the mythologies of the peoples of northeastern Europe, northern and central Asia, and even further afield, in the regions where shamans are trained to cultivate the mantric trance, and claim to have the power to send their spirits out of the body for long journeys to the other world. In these various mythologies, the tree which links the different regions plays an essential part. (from Gods And Myths Of Northern Europe, H.R. Ellis Davidson, Penguin Books, U.K., 1964, pp. 191 - 192.)

This ability of the shaman to "overstep the boundaries" (sonnet I - 5) into a realm where,

Ull will grace him, the gods also,

Who first reaches the flame:

Open to the gods will all worlds be:

When the cauldrons are carried off.

(The Elder Edda, Lay of Grimnir, stanza 41.)

is what is learned by Odin when he hangs himself upside down on a branch of the tree for nine days. Here we have an image of that uppermost branch of sonnet I - 17 bending down to the roots. The reason Odin hangs himself is of course to gain knowledge in the form of runes which are charms -- charms to cure illness, to lay curses, to travel among the worlds, and primarily to sing. Odin is the god of poets. It is curious that Orpheus' songs are also always imagined as charms which shape the world and go beyond the boundaries of death and the human into that open world of the flame. The real key to Rilke's connecting of the Yggdrasil stories to the Orphic legends emerges

when one looks at the etymology of the word Yggdrasil:

Ygg (the terrifier, awe inspirer) is one of Odin's names and drasill is a common word in poetry for a "horse." In spite of arguments to the contrary, the compound Yggdrasil can hardly mean other than "Odin's horse."

The metaphor is carried further. Men swing on the gallows, and the verb rida means "to swing" and "to ride." Therefore, Sigvat said in his lay in memory of St. Olaf, "men ride to the world of death on Sigar's horse" (rida ... til Heljar sigars hesti). We may also remember that the horse was a symbol of death, carrying men to another world.

(from Myth And Religion Of The North, Turville-Petre, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1964, pg. 48.)

Stanzas 52 and 53 of the Lay of Grimnir seem to substantiate this etymology:

"Soon shall Ygg have your sword struck corpse,  
Your life's race is run:  
Hostile are the incubi, Odin can see,  
Draw on me if you dare.

I am now Odin, I was Ygg before,  
Thud my name before that,  
Wakeful and Heavens-Roar, Hanged and Skilfing  
Goth and Jalk among gods  
Unraveler, Sleep-Bringer: they are really one,  
Many names for me."

Thus the tree, and the horse which feeds on the tree, are interchangeable. As Ygg, the god rides the tree upside down in death, bringing forth runes or charms of life. (The lays all stress that most of the runes are "beneficial.") As Odin, the god rides an eight legged horse which nibbles on the branches of the tree dealing out fate:

"Glad and Gyllor, Gler, Skeidbrimir,

Silfrintop and Sinir,  
 Gisl, Falhofnir, Gulltop, Lettfeti,  
 Are the steeds astride which the gods  
 Ride each day to deal out fates  
 From Yggdrasil the ash tree."  
 (Lay of Grimnir, stanza 30.)

Now the reason that the horse is a Schimmel (Mould), a "pale horse" becomes terrifyingly clear. The boundary or "herm" or "grandfather" (in each age the boundary between the living and the dead -- see notes on sonnet I - 5) which the horse has "overstepped" or "outlived / sometimes by a couple of days" (sonnet I - 5), is death itself. Yet always there is a return -- the boundaries are overstepped, but never transcended. Like the shaman, Odin and Orpheus travel "between the worlds." When Rilke begins the sonnet sequence with the line "There rose a tree" he is in fact raising the shaman's ladder:

Sometimes it was symbolized in shamanistic ritual by a post with steps cut in it, a ladder, or a small birch tree, up which the shaman climbed to indicate his ascent to the heavens.  
 (from Gods And Myths Of Northern Europe, H.R. Ellis Davidson, Penguin Books, U.K., 1964, pg. 192.)

That this return from the realm of the dead and the ancestors is always implied becomes clear from sonnet I - 9, where the poet speaking through the persona of Orpheus says

"Only he who has raised the lyre  
 even among shades,  
 may present the intimations  
 of endless praise."

The horse then is the tree, the life and movement of the centre -- the poet is the horseman, or shaman or Orphic voice through which this movement or world is seen or heard as Figur or image (sonnet I - 11).

How then do we move this imagination of a cold northern landscape into that "warmer landscape," that "sentient south" of Orphic legend?

Again Ellis Davidson is very helpful:

The study of the horse cult is complicated by links not only with Celtic practices, but also with customs recorded in south eastern Europe and the steppes ...

(from The Chariot Of The Sun And Other Rits And Symbols Of The Northern Bronze Age, H.R. Ellis Davidson and Peter Gelling, J.M. Dent, London, 1969, pg. 167.)

Now the "horse people" of south eastern Europe or northern Greece are clearly Satyrs or Centaurs of Greek myth. Jane Harrison says:

The Satyrs ... are (what else should they, could they be?) the Satrae; and these Satrae-Satyrs have many traits in common with the more mythological Centaurs.

\* \* \*

This interchange of types, Satyr and Centaur is evidence about which there can be no mistake. Satyr and Centaur, slightly diverse forms of the horse-man are in essence one and the same. Nonnus is right: "the Centaurs are of the blood of the shaggy Satyrs." It remains to ask -- who are the Centaurs?

\* \* \*

We are apt to think of the Centaurs exclusively somewhat as they appear on the metopes of the Parthenon, i.e. as splendid horses with the head and trunk of a man. By the middle of the 5th C. B.C. in knightly horse loving Athens the horse form had got the upper hand. In archaic representations the reverse is the case. The Centaurs are in art what they are in reality, men with men's legs and feet, but they are shaggy mountain men with some of the qualities and habits of beasts; so to indicate this in a horse-loving country they have the hindquarters of a horse awkwardly tacked onto their human bodies.

(from Prolegomena To The Study Of Greek Religion, Jane E. Harrison, pg. 379, pg. 380, pg. 381.)

Although Jane Harrison's identification of the Satyrs with the Centaurs, and both of these with "wild men," is invaluable here, I believe her account of how the composite image of these Satyrs and Centaurs arose is somewhat of a rationalization for two reasons: a) I do not believe that both in the case of the Satyrs and the Centaurs, the association of specifically the horse with these "wild men" would

be quite as arbitrary as: "the Athenians happened to like horses," i.e. there must have been some intrinsic connection between these "wild men" and "horses;" and b) even if the Athenians had wished to attach an image of bestiality to these wild men, they probably would not have used the horse, an animal they held in high esteem, unless there already existed an inescapable reason for this association. Rilke's sonnet I - 11, in which he presents us with an image of horse and rider inextricably united "the two are one. / But are they?", points in a more rewarding direction, (a direction continued in sonnet I - 20, where the only connection of the rider to the horse is the direction from which it comes, "village," and the stake tied to its fetlock) and substantiated by Robert Graves' analysis of the centaurs:

Both Lapiths and Centaurs claimed descent from Ixion, an oak-hero, and had a horse cult in common. They were primitive tribes in Northern Greece, of whose ancient rivalry the Hellenes took advantage by allying themselves first with one, and then with the other. (from The Greek Myths, Robert Graves, Pelican, 1966, Vol. 1, pg. 361.)

Now we know that Orpheus reformed the savage chthonic rites of Dionysus (about whom Jane E. Harrison says, "With him are always his revel rout of Satyrs and of Maenads") with the lyre, sacred to Olympian Apollo. Again the horse appears, this time as the beasts which draw the chariot of Helios, Apollo's aspect as the Sun, across the sky each day. Thus these two so divergent deities between which Orpheus stands share this image of the horse. Furthermore, the most important cult sanctuary in Greece, Delphi, where the "navel stone" marks the "centre of the world" is shared by both Apollo and Dionysus:

But the Olympian religion never repudiated or rejected the terrestrial but always acknowledged its sacredness. This is why the most important impulses to vitalize the Dionysiac cult issued from the Apollo of Delphi. What is more, Dionysus, himself, lived in Delphi with Apollo, and it could even seem that he not only

enjoyed equal rights with him but was the actual lord of the sacred place.

Apollo shared the Delphic festival year with Dionysus. In the winter months the Dionysiac dithyramb was sung instead of the paeon. But Dionysus also received high honors in Delphi in times other than winter. The pediments of the temple of Apollo portray on one side Apollo with Leto, Artemis, and the Muses, and on the other side Dionysus and the thyiads, in short, the raging god. As well-informed a witness as Plutarch states that Dionysus played no smaller role in Delphi than Apollo. One could even maintain that Dionysus had been in Delphi earlier than Apollo. A vase painting of about 400 B.C. shows Apollo and Dionysus in Delphi holding out their hands to one another. Many other examples could be cited for the close association of the two gods. And finally, theological speculation even identified the one with the other. (from Dionysus Myth And Cult, Walter Otto, trans. R.B. Palmer, Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington and London, 1965, pg. 203.)

Thus what this sonnet does, is to draw together in a single, central, and accomplished image all of the elements raised in the preceding nineteen poems. This image as we can see by the slow opening movement of the poem, arises unheralded out of memory. Rilke says, about the occurrence of the sonnet:

And imagine, one thing more, in another connection ... I wrote, made, the horse, you know, the free happy white horse with the hobble on his foot, who once towards evening on a Volga meadow came bounding in our direction at a gallop -- :

I did make him as how an "ex-voto" for Orpheus! -- what is time? -- When is present? Across so many years he sprang, with his complete happiness, into my wide-open feeling. (February 11, 1922)

Isn't it lovely that the white horse ... I "experienced" with Lou on a meadow in Russia in 1899 or 1900, bounded through my heart again?! That after all nothing is lost! (April 23, 1923)

We notice immediately that this is neither a "picture" -- Rilke clearly says the horse he "experienced" (i.e. as a wholeness, as a Figur or "image," an emotional and intellectual construct in an instant of time); nor is it merely a "record" -- he "made" the image in dedication to Orpheus; nor is it merely a "personal" memory. Rilke is making this image in the Steppes of Russia -- the ancient centre of

all Indo-European culture. As such the horse (or tree) which emerges from memory at the centre of the world and reaches out in the imagination to both Yggdrasil and Orpheus is in fact the oldest and largest Ur-Motif of Memory in western culture. Rilke's memory and re-cognition of this most ancient of images is what allows him finally to dedicate it to Orpheus. These sonnets are written to Orpheus, not about Orpheus, and therefore are not bound by the strictly legendary Orphic material. In fact, the tree, the horse, the constellations and a myriad other visionary images throughout the sequence are brought to Orpheus, the image in which Rilke sees a final culmination of thought and memory. Odin, in the guise of Grimnir, sings in his Lay to the drunken men of the hall:

Thought and Memory each morning fly

Over the vast earth:

Thought, I fear, may fail to return,

But I fear more for Memory.

(Lay of Grimnir, stanza 20.)



Fruehling ist wiedergekommen. Die Erde  
ist wie ein Kind, das Gedichte weiss;  
viele, o viele ... Fuer die Beschwerde  
langen Lernens bekommt sie den Preis.

Streng war ihr Lehrer. Wir mochten das Weisse  
an dem Barte des alten Manns.

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

Erde, die frei hat, du glueckliche, spiele  
nun mit den Kindern. Wir wollen dich fangen,  
froehliche Erde. Dem Frohsten gelingtts.

O, was der Lehrer sie lehrte, das Viele,  
und was gedruckt steht in Wurzeln und langen  
schwierigen Staemmen: sie singts, sie singts!

I - 21

Spring has come again. The earth  
 is like a child that knows poems;  
 many, <sup>1.</sup> so many ... For <sup>2.</sup> labour  
 of long learning she receives the prize.

<sup>3.</sup> Harsh was her teacher. We loved the white  
 of the old man's beard.  
 Now, we may ask the name,  
 of the blue, of the green: she knows, she knows! <sup>4.</sup>

Earth, <sup>5.</sup> out of bondage, play  
 with the children. <sup>6.</sup> Joyful earth,  
 we would catch you. <sup>7.</sup> The most mirthful may.

Oh, what her teacher has taught her, so much,  
 and what <sup>8.</sup> stands printed in roots and long  
 arduous <sup>9.</sup> limbs: she sings, she sings!

- 1) o viele -- literally "oh many." There is a possibility of reading this phrase in English with a certain weariness or "ennui" which the original does not intend. In usual English usage, the phrase would be translated as "oh so many" or simply "so many." The latter alternative has been chosen to bring this phrase into congruence with the phrase das Viele which is impossible to translate literally ("the much"), and has therefore been rendered as "so much."
- 2) Beschwerde -- this word recalls the weight and gravity of sonnet I - 4, and is usually translated as "burden, hardship, trouble, annoyance, complaint, ailment, discomfort, infirmities of old age," etc. It has been translated as "labour" to retain the notion of heavy work, but also to suggest an image of birth, which is implied by the imagery of spring.
- 3) The word Streng in German is most often translated as "strict." However, this translation is inadequate, since what is needed here is a word that may apply to a person as a teacher, but also, and what is more important, to a personified season as a teacher: "We loved the white / of the old man's beard." Now the word streng does apply to the severity of a season -- the phrase strenger Winter is as common in German as "harsh winter" is in English. For these reasons the word streng is translated as "harsh." It is also quite clear that the personification of the season, winter, as a teacher, is not merely Rilke's personal invention. Sagittarius, the Centaur or Satyr of November is seen in astrology as:

Cosmic Progress, or the truth that all things move to higher and higher conditions of physical, affectional, and intellectual unfoldment. Hence arise the virtues of progressiveness, hopefulness, and faith. The delusion that corresponds is restlessness, or the love of novelty for its own sake, with such faults as inconstancy, lack of perseverance, wastefulness, over optimism, and prodigality.

To this sign we may also relate the principle of Cosmic Abundance, or the truth that there is potentially more than enough for all the needs of humanity. This, perverted, gives rise to prodigality, which tends to produce the last three of the above faults.

(from The Zodiac And The Soul, C.E.D. Carter, The Theosophical Publishing House, London, Ltd., 1968, pp. 29 - 30.)

This duality of the Centaur reproduces the tension of the images of the "Horse" in sonnet I - 20 and the "Horseman" in sonnet I - 11, and is underlined by the following statement:

So this house today is viewed as higher and lower mental, the lower part being involved in matter coming from Mars and Saturn, and the higher under Jupiter free from it, with the symbolism of the double triangle thus shown in the five lower divisions of the plane.

(from Astrology Of The Mysteries, W.P. Rigg, The Theosophical Publishing House, London, Ltd., 1959, pg. 101.)

Now in the Saxon calendar, November (Sagittarius)

... was the month of greatest Festival. It was "Blotmonath," "the month of Sacrifice."

(from Astrology Of The Mysteries, W.P. Rigg, The Theosophical Publishing House, London, Ltd., 1959, pg. 104.)

Thus in the image of the Centaur Sagittarius (Apollo's aspects are the bow and lyre) we have an image of an Orphic union of the wild followers of Dionysos with the "higher mind" of Apollo. Cheiron the Centaur, and Apollo, taught Asclepius the art of healing, at which he became so good that he even began to bring the dead back to life. Thus the "Horseman" (Centaur) of sonnet I - 11, and the "pale horse" (whiteness of death and winter, Sagittarius) of sonnet I - 20, have clearly "healed" and "taught" the earth, blooming forth in spring in this sonnet.

4.) Since we know from sonnet I - 11 that the "name" binds the "ideal" with the "real," or the imagination of a thing to its objective presence, "nameless already table and meadow divides them;" and since the earth's ability to bring forth "things" is here tied to her

ability to name those things; and finally, since the last stanza of this poem (as the culmination of the entire movement of the poem) accomplishes an absolutely interdependant relation of objective and imaginative reality, the English translation of this sentence has been constructed in such a way that even the grammar makes it clear that the earth's ability to offer the names of the "green" and the "blue" is completely dependent on her experience of their nature inside herself, or more accurately, her renewed participation in their nature through their names:

Such emphasis on the mot juste for a thing, according to the speaker is an example of Germanic name-magic, associated with the primitive belief that knowledge of the proper name for a thing gives the knower the ability to evoke the object, or its power.

Riddles also suggest the Nordic fascination with the apparent relationship between the structure of the language and the structure of the cosmos. For the Scandinavians the wisest man -- he who knows the most of the structure of the cosmos -- is also the most skilful poet.

There is in the Nordic mind a subtle relationship, and a necessary one, between an event and the language with which it is described or anticipated. Questions and answers, then, seek to put into harmonious relationship man's thought and the facts of the world about him which he cannot fully comprehend or control.  
(from The Elder Edda, Taylor and Auden (trans.), Vintage Books, N.Y., 1970, pp. 21 - 22.)

5) die frei hat means literally "that has free (freedom)," but that particular freedom is limited by time and implies a previous bondage. It is very similar in construction to the English "has time off." Now in the previous poem, sonnet I - 20, we are met on a spring evening by a pale horse, which has obviously just pulled up its stake and broken free of the village. As the notes to that poem extensively delineate, this is an image of the "accomplished" world (or "year"), and as such

an accomplished image or thing it is dedicated to Orpheus, where it, according to sonnet I - 17, "falls home to the ancient." Thus sonnet I - 21 is an image of the world restored or "re-turned" -- she has broken out of old forms, old imaginations, which bound her, and she begins to name things anew again. In order to maintain this spectrum of meanings, the phrase has been translated as "out of bondage."

6) The words glueckliche ("lucky, fortunate") of line 9, and froehliche ("mirthful, joyous") of line 11 have been translated together as "joyful" (which covers both ranges of meaning), and placed between the lines of their occurrence, in line 10. This was done to avoid repetition in a stanza already united by the rhyme of "play" (line 9) with "may" (line 11), which is not present in the original. (See also note 7 below.)

7) Dem frohsten gelingts -- literally "The most mirthful (joyous) is able (will be able) to accomplish it." It has been translated as "The most mirthful may" for three interrelated reasons: a) the word "may" retains the ambiguity of tense raised in the German between "is able to" and "will be able to;" b) the word "may" creates a pun on the month of May which is not present in the original but is necessary for the construction of an intentional rhyme between "play" and "may," while remaining within the boundaries dictated by the movement of the poem -- (the earth is seen as emerging from the burden of winter into the full bloom of spring in the month of May, the Feast of May being the day on the Saxon calendar when the coming of spring was celebrated); and finally c) the rhyme of "play" with "may," bearing in mind the pun involved on "May," is intended to recapture some measure of the joyous energy of the poem, a great deal of which is lost in the

translation.

8) gedruckt steht has been translated literally as "stands printed" because the usual English translation for this phrase ("lies written") would create a completely opposite meaning to the one Rilke intends here. It is necessary to maintain the literal meaning for two reasons: a) this new world tree ("spring") "stands" -- it is erected; and b) Rilke is here presenting a synthesis of what is learned through teaching (i.e. from books and stories) and what is learned through seeing (outside world), creating a reality in which there is no difference between "objective" reality and "imaginative" reality. In this poem we understand what Williams meant by the phrase "no ideas but in things." We are in a world where thought and memory, intellect and emotion occur in a simultaneous instant of time, creating a construct or world which is recognized and named -- where everything is instantly Figur or "image" -- "the earth / is like a child that knows poems; / many, so many." Or as Charles Olson says of the poem in his essay Projective

Verse:

ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION. It means exactly what it says, is a matter of, at all points (even, I should say, of our management of daily reality as of the daily work) get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, the split second acts, the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can, citizen. And if you also set up as a poet, USE USE USE the process at all points, in any given poem always, always one perception must must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER!

Rilke achieves this synthesis quite simply by letting the print implied in line 12 become explicitly visible in the external world (tree) of lines 13 and 14.

9) Staemmen -- literally "stems." It has been translated as "limbs" to maintain the personification of the earth or tree (i.e. if the

"earth" is the "tree" then what she sees printed in the trees is printed both inside herself and outside herself in the trees, just as in the first sonnet the tree is both inside and outside the ear); and to echo the alliterative "l" sounds of "labour of long learning" with "long arduous limbs," which is necessary because Beschwerde and schwierig share the same root -- schwer. The image of "trunk" or "stem" lost in this translation of Staemmen is partially regained by the word "stands" in line 13. (See also note 8 above.)



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 - 22

We are the drivers, <sup>1.</sup> relentless.

But the stride of time,

take as a <sup>2.</sup> trifle

in that which <sup>3.</sup> abides.

All that which hastens

shall yet pass <sup>4.</sup> before us;

the <sup>5.</sup> enduring

<sup>6.</sup> alone <sup>7.</sup> initiates.

Oh <sup>8.</sup> youth, cast not courage

into haste, nor

into <sup>9.</sup> attempted flight.

All things rest in <sup>10.</sup> balance:

darkness and light,

<sup>11.</sup> blossom and book.

1) die Treibenden translates literally as "the drivers," but the English word "drive" has lost much of its connotation of relentless pursuit -- its relation to such activities as "herding" etc., through its indiscriminate application to things like the automobile, creating rather passive phrases like "take a drive" or "drive home" etc. For this reason the word "relentless" has been added to the literal rendering of the phrase. A similar lessening of the insistent power of the German word has not taken place in contemporary usage. For example, if we take a wagon hitched to a team of horses, in English one would "drive the wagon" and "drive the horses," whereas in German one says fuehr ("guide") den Wagen, but treib ("drive") die Pferde.

2) Kleinigkeit -- literally "smallness," as applied to both size and importance. The English word "trifle," since it also covers both of these meanings, comes closest to the original.

3) im immer Bleibenden -- literally "in that which always remains (stays)." "abides" has been chosen for two reasons: a) as one word equivalent to the two words "always remains," it maintains the desired brevity of line suggested by the original; and b) it forms a partial rhyme with the word "stride" in line 2, thus creating a balance of opposition between movement and rest suggested not only by Rilke's first stanza, but the entire sonnet. It should be noted additionally that Rilke's use of Bleibenden clearly indicates a relation of this sonnet to sonnet I - 7, where we find the "abiding" or "enduring" defined as Orphic harmony -- poetry. Since it is imperative that Rilke's own definition of the "enduring" be retained to inform this poem through this word, it has been used to translate the word Verweilende of line 7. (See also note 5 below.)

4) The word vorueber means both "to go past, to cross the field of vision" and "to pass, to pass away or be concluded." The pun on the words "pass before" (i.e. "to cross in front of" or "to disappear before something else disappears") is intended to hold these two meanings.

5) Both Bleibende and Verweilende may be translated as either "the abiding" or "the enduring." In sonnet I - 3, Rilke says "to sing within truth is a different aspiration." In sonnet I - 7 he presents us with an instance of one who "sings within truth" -- Orpheus, whom he names as "one of the enduring messengers" (Einer der bleibenden Boten). Thus, when Rilke uses Bleibenden in sonnet I - 22 here, he is doubtlessly echoing that Orphic "message" which runs throughout the sequence. Since, for reasons delineated in note 3 above, Bleibenden has been translated as "that which abides," the word Verweilende in line 7 here has been translated as "the enduring" in order to bring over the image from sonnet I - 7.

6) erst creates a similar problem for the translator here to the one created by the use of einzig in sonnet I - 19. It means literally "first," but only in the sense of "prime mover" or "first step." The implication here is that once one has turned one's back on the haste of progress, one may be initiated into a vision or imagination in which the elements of the world no longer catch one up and tear one away as in a flood, but from the still point of which one may see an enduring order permeating all movement. Since we have already established, through Rilke's use of the word Bleibenden, that this central order is the shape of the imagination as present in Orphic harmony, the word "alone" has been used to translate erst in order to

bring over those lines from sonnet I - 19; "The song alone over the land / sanctifies and praises."

7) Rilke's phrase weiht uns ein, which has here been translated as "initiates," means literally "dedicates us in(to)." There is no conflict of meaning here, since an "initiate" is "one dedicated to ..." in some sense. Rilke's use of the phrase here serves to illustrate again that this sequence of sonnets is written to initiate into a cosmology not only the dead girl Vera, but also man, and ultimately the world itself. Beginning after the accomplished image of sonnet I - 20, (up to and including which all the elements of the imaginative construct have been built) the returned or reborn world is questioned and begins to speak. Sonnets 22 through 26 are thus an attempt to align this reborn or re-turned world, now in the age of flight both historically and imaginatively, with those ontological and abiding images which construct the beginning of the sequence, sonnets I - 1 through I - 20.

8) Rilke's use of the word Knaben, which is usually translated as "boy, lad," or "youngster," has here been translated as "youth" (which may and should be read as plural here) in order to echo the "youth" of sonnet I - 3. In both cases, the poet warns against an impetuosity and infatuation with passing attachments, whether they be the particular personal love lyric of sonnet I - 3, or the larger attempt at hasty flight based on mechanical or technical ability. In terms of a poetics of the imagination, Rilke here takes issue with a kind of poetry, though accomplished in technique, yet not informed by the content of an "abiding" or "returning" world: "blossom and book."

9) The pun on "flight" (to fly) and "flight" (to flee) is intent-

ional here, and moves on the precedent of line 1, sonnet I - 15: schon  
ists auf der Flucht. As is clearly illustrated by the following poem,  
 sonnet I - 23, Rilke is not warning about the phenomenon, process or  
 activity of flight itself, either in the realm of the imagination or  
 in the world of things (which we have seen he is attempting to bring  
 into alignment). Rather he is speaking of the kind of flight which  
 conquers the earth, the kind of flight that seeks to escape or trans-  
 cend the earth's and the imagination's turning centre -- the kind of  
 flight heralded by those whose naive faith in technical ability  
 (sonnet I - 18) see in this new activity the promise of "escape" from  
 the earth's bondage -- the promise of cutting the root or removing  
 the stake tied to the horse's fetlock. By 1920, the discoveries that  
 characterized the "new age" of the twentieth century had clearly re-  
 vealed, at least to Rilke at the time of the writing of Sonnet To  
Orpheus, their glaringly ambivalent nature. The invention and perfect-  
 ion of the airplane opened a new material sphere of discovery -- the  
 "airs and the spaces," while the work of people like Freud had re-  
 opened the validity of the record of the flight of the imagination,  
 primarily as it is found in the Greek myths. It is after all to Freud  
 that we owe the debt of gratitude for his recognition or formal  
 assertion of the fact that stories long considered fanciful embellish-  
 ments actually bear a vital and real relation to the imaginative forms  
 of each individual. Finally, Einstein had discovered that energy and  
 matter were metamorphic -- that each particle of matter was in fact a  
 concentration or "whirl" of energy. What Rilke warns against here, is  
 the hasty impulse to see flight as the conquest of the last frontier  
 of man, rather than to envision it as a new way to circumnavigate the

earth, on a new ocean; to see in the discoveries of Freud a final answer or solution to the problems of the imagination, rather than to envision his work as a new way of reading the ancient legends; or to see in the discoveries of Einstein the possibility of manipulating the cosmos, rather than to envision anew the necessary relation of the visible to the invisible.

10) Alles ist ausgeruht. Had Rilke intended to say "all things rest," he would have used the phrase alles ruht. Ausruhen always implies a "rest" of sufficient time to recover from whatever has gone before -- hence it implies a restoration of a "balance" of some kind. In terms of the sonnet sequence, the past is being weighed against or balanced with the future; in terms of Vera, her life ("light") with her death ("darkness"); in terms of the poetics, imagination ("book") and reality ("blossom"); in terms of this sonnet, movement and rest. In order to clarify this weighing of dualities, the words "in balance" have been added to the line.

11) The words "flight" and "light" rhyme here in order to establish a relation between "flight" and the wheeling path of light which the creative imagination follows, and which Rilke develops extensively in the following sonnet, I - 23. Since the winding path that the creative imagination follows is clearly the shape of "the abiding" or "the enduring," the rhyme in this sonnet avoids a reading of the word "flight" as apart from that "way."

12) Blume has been translated as "blossom" rather than the more literal "flower" to maintain the alliterative balance of the final line of the original.

O erst dann, wenn der Flug  
nicht mehr um seinetwillen  
wird in die Himmelsstillen  
steigen, sich selber genug,

um in lichten Profilen,  
als das Geraet, das gelang,  
Liebling der Winde zu spielen,  
sicher schwenkend und schlank, -

erst wenn ein reines Wohin  
wachsener Apparate  
Knabenstolz ueberwiegt,

wird, ueberstuerzt von Gewinn,  
jener den Fernen Genachte  
sein, was er einsam erfliegt.



I - 23

Oh only then, when flight  
 no longer for its own sake  
 shall <sup>1.</sup> scale the heavens'  
 stillnesses, sufficient in itself,

in profiles <sup>2.</sup> of light,  
 as the beloved instrument | <sup>3.</sup>  
 of the play of winds,  
<sup>4.</sup> wheeling, certain and slight, -

only when a pure where-to,  
inscribed in glyphs <sup>5.</sup> of apparent forms  
 outweighs pride of youth,

shall, <sup>6.</sup> felled by victory,  
 he who has <sup>7.</sup> neared the far distances  
<sup>8.</sup> be, where his lone flight aspires.

1) "scale," as it is used here, creates a punning range of meaning which, while not explicitly present in Rilke's word steigen, is nevertheless quite apparent throughout this poem as well as the entire sonnet sequence. This range of meaning is created in spite of the fact that "scale" is an exact and literal translation of the word steigen as it is used in this instance. The expressions "to scale a ladder, the wall, the heavens," creates an image of a much steeper and exacting ascent than the word "climb" does. There are basically three images inherent in the use of this word, all of which are interrelated. The first is the literal meaning "to ascend," which refers not only to the spiralling flight of this sonnet, but also to the ascent of the tree in sonnet I - 1. The second is an image of measurement, wherein one sees the "heavens' stillnesses" graduated in ascending circles. The third is an image of musical measure or musical scales, which lends an Orphic mode to the previous meanings of direction and measure. Rilke's use of the word steigen achieves the same end here, but not through the obvious use of a pun, but rather through a more subtle echo of memory -- the word relates back to the phrase Da, "stieg" ein Baum of sonnet I - 1, carrying with it the Orphic "scales" initiated by that opening poem. Thus, with this one word, we immediately realize that we are concerned here with the flight of the imagination. Certainly, the poem also contains the metaphor of the airplane, which is the historical manifestation of flight, yet the airplane is never mentioned (as the "dog" is not in the "Esau" poem) -- it remains invisible as the latest accomplished and therefore passing manifestation of Rilke's central ontological concern -- flight. "Reality" exists only as a metaphor for the invisible. Just as the "youth" of sonnet I - 3 is

admonished not to be snared by the fact that he is in love, but rather advised to turn his craft to the celebration of love sufficient in itself, and just as the youth of sonnet I - 22 is admonished not to "cast courage" into attempts at flight, but rather into "flight, sufficient in itself," so Rilke here moves into the highest orders of the imagination -- he is not interested in a celebration of the flying machine, but in the activity of flight.

2) in lichten Profilen -- with this phrase the poem draws the reader immediately into a methodology of the creative imagination. Each wheeling circle of ascent, each sonnet (insofar as it is such a form) of the sequence is seen as a "profile of light" -- as an outline or "essential image" oriented toward a centre. It becomes impossible to see into the face of the vision -- only the movement of the way, shedding light, is apprehensible.

3) With his use of the word Geraet, Rilke achieves an etymological leap which is impossible to translate -- it must be transformed. Geraet, m.h.d. geraete, a.h.d. girati, meaning "equipment, supply, household effects, tools, advice, to advise, consideration (reflection, thought)," is a compound built on a group of words dealt with under Rat. Following this lead, we find: Rat; a.h.d., m.h.d. rāt, Dutch raad, Anglo-saxon ræd, Swedish råd belongs to a group of words dealt with under raten. It was originally used in the sense of "things necessary for the maintenance of life." Out of this developed a usage in the sense of "obtaining the necessary means (things)" and further, "acquisition, remedy (redress, relief), care (solicitude, attention)." Thus, under raten we find: the Germanic verb m.h.d. rāten, Gothic (ga) rēdan, English "to read," Swedish råda belongs with rat to a group of

words dealt with under Rede. The verb originally means something like "to set something straight in the spirit (mind), to consider (something), to think something out." To this usage is connected also the usage Raetsel, ("riddle"), English "to read," (Anglo-saxon raedan, in the meaning "to read"), which actually means "to decipher or explain runes." Finally, when we turn to Rede: m.h.d. rede, a.h.d. red(i)a, radia meaning "account (render account), understanding, wit, speech and answer, conversation, story telling, speech," based on the Indo-European root meaning "to adapt to, comply with (yield to, submit to, accomodate)." Thus we begin with "things necessary for the maintenance of life," and find these things finally to be the intellect ("understanding") as it is manifested in the ability to read both the world, and the spirit, as they are recorded in runes (decipher runes as an exegetical activity, since they are a magical script, informing about a divine -- Odin's -- knowledge of the world), and finally to tell stories or render account of these things. Thus, in this one word, Rilke offers a complete poetic methodology -- a delineation of the process of the creative imagination. The English translation here offered necessarily divides all of this information into two main parts which sketch in only very briefly this complex of associations. The first part is presented by a translation of the word Geraet as "the beloved instrument of the play of winds." This is only possible through a recognition that in sonnet I - 3, Rilke defines singing "within truth" as "a wind," "a breath about nothing." Thus, flight is here seen as an instrument which "adapts to" or "complies with" the "play of winds," the play of the spirit of the world. This image takes on a larger shape the moment one realizes the pun intended on "instrument"

(i.e. musical instrument, lyre, aeolian harp), a pun the poem has already begun with the word "scale" in line 3. This "instrument" (lyre or harp) thus becomes the beloved voice, speaking the "counsel" of the truth of the spirit. Thus it is to become the spokesman of this truth of the spirit to which the flight of the creative imagination must aspire. -- The second part of this information is dealt with in note 5 below.

4) "wheeling" has been selected from the possible alternative translations of schwenkend to retain the shape of this spiralling flight.

5) wachsender Apparate has been translated rather freely as "inscribed in glyphs of apparent forms" to accommodate the remainder of the information presented by Rilke's earlier use of Geraet. The justification for this comes through the meaning and etymology of the word Apparate: hence -- from the Latin apparatus; "preparation, equipment, tools." These meanings in conjunction give rise, in the beginning of the 19th century to the current meanings "Geraet," Vorrichtung, Ausruestung. Through this bridge, the remainder of the implications of Geraet in line 6 above may be delineated. The phrase "inscribed in glyphs of apparent forms" presents the image of "reading," "the deciphering (explication) of runes," while simultaneously recalling the lines from sonnet I - 21: "and what stands printed in roots and long arduous limbs: she sings, she sings!". The fact that these runes or glyphs are not "invented" by a hasty, impetuous scribe but are a gift of the gods and are thus implicit in creation is shown by Rilke's use of the word wachsender (literally "growing") which has here been translated and substantiated by the word "apparent," having its etymological

root in "to appear."

6) The phrase ueberstuerzt von Gewinn (literally "over-fallen (sic) by, or through, or because of, victory") introduces a veritable storm of information into the poem, generated by the paradox "How is one felled by victory?". Since "flight" is the central "motif" of the poem, the image of Icarus immediately suggests itself here. Daedalus, the most famous craftsman of the ancient world, never at a loss for a mechanical invention, invented wings with which to execute a hasty flight from the prison into which king Minos of Crete had thrown the craftsman and the craftsman's son, Icarus. He fashioned two pairs of wings made of feathers sewn together and held with wax. He warned his son before their "attempted flight" not to fly too close to the sun. Icarus of course, less interested than his father in the escape flight offered him, and more interested in the soaring flight sufficient in itself, "oversteps the boundaries" and ascends to the very height of the sun (Helios - Apollo) itself, where the wax of his wings melts and he falls to the sea.

As they sped away from the island in a north-easterly direction, flapping their wings, the fishermen, shepherds, and ploughmen who gazed upward mistook them for gods.  
(from The Greek Myths, Robert Graves, Pelican, 1966, Vol. 1, pg. 313.)

Thus the aim of flight is Apollo, whom Walter Otto characterizes as:

Die Groesse dieses Homerischen Apollon ist durch Geisteshoheit geadelt. Und so haben die Kuenstler der nachhomerischen Jahrhunderte gewetteifert, in seinem Bilde das Erhabenste, Sieghafteste und zugleich Lichteste vor Augen zu fuehren. Unvergesslich fuer jeden, der ihn einmal gesehen hat, ist der Apollon des Zuestempels in Olympia. Der Kuenstler hat den Augenblick von ueberwaeltigender Grossartigkeit festgehalten: mitten im wuestesten Tumult erscheint ploetzlich der Gott, und sein ausgestreckter Arm befiehlt Ruhe. Hoheit leuchtet aus seinem Gesicht, dessen weite Augen mit der Ueberlegenheit des blossen Anschauens gebieten; um die kraeftigen und vornehmen Lippen aber spielt ein feiner, fast schwermuetiger Zug hoeheren Wissens. Die Erscheinung des Goettlichen in der Wild-

nis und Wirrnis dieser Welt kann nicht hinreissender vorgestellt werden. Auch seine anderen Bilder kennzeichnen ihn durch die Groesse der Haltung und Bewegung, durch die Macht des Blickes, durch das Erhellende und Befreiende seines Auftretens. In den Zuegen seines Gesichts verbinden sich maennliche Kraft und Klarheit im Glanz des Sublimen. Er ist die Jugend in ihrer frischesten Bluete und Reinheit. Die Dichtung preist sein wallendes Haar, das schon die aelteste Lyrik golden nennt. Die bildende Kunst stellt ihn fast immer unbaertig dar und nicht sitzend, sondern stehend oder schreitend.

\* \* \*

Nach Plutarch und anderen bedeutet Phoibos "rein" und "heilig," und ohne jeden Zweifel treffen sie damit das Richtige. So haben Aischylos und andere Dichter nach ihm den Namen verstanden, denn sie verwandten dasselbe Wort zur Charakterisierung der Sonnenstrahlen oder des Wassers. Schon dem Homer war dieser Name so gelaefufig, dass er den Gott nicht nur Phoibos Apollon, sondern auch bloss Phoibos nennen konnte.

(from Die Goetter Griechenlands, Walter Otto, Verlag G. Schulte - Bulmke, Frankfurt/Main, 1970, (italics mine - K.S.), pp. 62 - 63.)

Icarus' flight (unlike his father's which is a horizontal flight of escape) is a vertical ascent, beginning from an island in the middle of the sea, upwards to the "pure" and "holy" (Phoibos) light, and returning back to the "pure" and "holy" (Phoibos) water. This image of Icarus becomes even more informative if we examine the meaning of the wax, which is the substance of both his rise and fall. Again we turn to Robert Graves for the information. Daedalus had an apprentice, Talos, whom he killed in jealousy by casting him down from the Acropolis, because Talos, at 12 years old, had already surpassed him in craftsmanship.

Now, Talos was also the name of Minos' bull-headed bronze servant, given him by Zeus to guard Crete. Some say that he was a survivor of the brazen race who sprang from ash-trees; (in Nordic myth, both Yggdrasil and the tree from which man was fashioned are ash-trees -- trans. note) others, that he was forged by Hephaestus in Sardinia, and that he had a single vein which ran from his neck down to his ankles, where it was stoppered by a bronze pin. It was his task to run thrice daily around the island of Crete and throw rocks at any foreign ship; and also to go thrice yearly, at a more leisurely pace, through the villages of Crete, displaying Minos'

laws inscribed on brazen tablets. When the Sardinians tried to invade the island, Talos made himself red-hot in a fire and destroyed them all with his burning embrace, grinning fiercely; hence the expression "a Sardonian grin." In the end, Medea killed Talos by pulling out the pin and letting his life-blood escape; though some say that Poeas the Argonaut wounded him in the ankle with a poisoned arrow.

(from The Greek Myths, Robert Graves, Pelican, 1966, Vol. 1, pp. 314 - 315.)

Graves' two footnotes on this passage elucidate its significance:

Talos' single vein belongs to the mystery of early bronze casting by the cire-perdue method. First, the smith made a beeswax image which he coated with a layer of clay, and laid in an oven. As soon as the clay had been well baked he pierced the spot between heel and ankle, so that the hot wax ran out and left a mould, into which molten bronze could be poured. When he had filled this, and the metal inside had cooled, he broke the clay, leaving a bronze image of the same shape as the original wax one. The Cretans brought the cire-perdue method to Sardinia, together with the Daedalus cult. Since Daedalus learned his craft from Athene, who was known as Medea in Corinth, the story of Talos' death may have been a misreading of an icon which showed Athene demonstrating the cire-perdue method. The tradition that melted wax caused Icarus' death seems to belong, rather, to the myth of his cousin Talos; because Talos the bronze man is closely connected with his namesake, the worker in bronze and the reputed inventor of compasses.

Compasses are part of the bronze-worker's mystery, essential for the accurate drawing of concentric circles when bowls, helmets, or masks have to be beaten out. Hence Talos was known as Circinus, "the circular," a title which referred both to the course of the sun and to the use of the compass. ... Talos is the son of an ash-tree nymph because ash-charcoal yields a very high heat for smelting. This myth sheds light also on Prometheus' creation of man from clay; in Hebrew legend Prometheus' part was played by the Archangel Michael, who worked under the eye of Jehova.

Poeas' shooting of Talos recalls Paris' shooting of Achilles, also in the heel, and the deaths of the Centaurs Pholus and Cheiron. These myths are closely related. Pholus and Cheiron died from Heracles' poisoned arrows. Poeas was the father of Philoctetes and, when Heracles had been poisoned by another Centaur, ordered him to kindle the pyre; as a result, Philoctetes obtained the same arrows, one of which poisoned him. Paris then borrowed Thessalian Apollo's deadly arrows to kill Achilles, Cheiron's foster-son; and finally, when Philoctetes avenged Achilles by shooting Paris, he used, another from Heracles' quiver.

(from The Greek Myths, Robert Graves, Pelican, 1966, Vol. 1, pp. 317 - 318, italics mine - K.S.)



Within this mass of information, the "motif" crystallizes. We recognize primarily a series of men of deeds, Homeric heroes, pierced in the heel by an arrow, letting the liquid wax or "blood" run out while simultaneously being cast in "shining bronze," the colour of the sun. These are Rilke's "profiles of light" in line 5. They refer to images of heroic deeds which are not characters, but profiles -- men whose lives are images of action. All of these images share a duality which defines that image as originating in a play or tension between two worlds: Achilles is half mortal and half divine; the Satyrs or Centaurs are half bestial, half human; Icarus is suspended between ascent and fall. (Indeed the entire field of sonnet I - 23 is one long suspended flight or sentence held up in twists and turns of syntax.) The arrow of death which accomplishes this transformation of life into an image of life, or action into an image of action, we have already seen in sonnet I - 4:

Oh you blessed, oh you hale,  
 you who appear as the hearts' origin.  
 Bows of the arrows and the arrows' aims,  
 more eternal shines your smile bewept.

Thus the arrow (carried by the Centaur Saggiarius) brings at once death and eternal life, as the death of winter eternally renews the rebirth of Spring. It is Orphic doctrine which brings this image of rebirth into Greek myth. By a tree in the underworld lie two springs from which the initiate drinks: the first is of Forgetfulness, the second is of Memory. Orpheus himself, who is said to have come from Crete, outlives his death not as a man, but as the image of his life -- his severed head still sings and offers oracles from a cave

(centre of the earth) long after his death. It is his lyre, not his body, which is placed into heaven among the stars. Yet it is not only Apollo, the archer and musician, who claims the image of Icarus. Icarus is "felled by victory" like a tree. With this phrase Rilke characterizes the creative imagination, and life itself, with the tragic mode. Aristotle defines tragedy (which has its origin in the Dionysian Dythiramb), as an imitation of an action, and says of the characters of a tragedy that the character exists for the sake of the action. As such, the image of Icarus does indeed become the "beloved instrument of the play of winds (spirit)" here -- he is one who stepped "into that breath which does not mean you / let it divide itself on your cheeks / behind you it trembles united again," (sonnet I - 4), and he continues, again and again ("from time to time") to step into imagination's memory as the Ur-motif of the flight of the "heart's origin." Finally:

Hero of Alexandria in his curious treatise on "Machines moved by air" twice mentions Wheels as in ritual use. "In Egyptian sanctuaries there are Wheels of bronze against the door-posts, and they are moveable so that those who enter may set them in motion, because of the belief that bronze purifies; and there are vessels for purifying so that those who enter may purify themselves. The problem is how to arrange so that when the Wheel is turned the water may flow mechanically so that as aforesaid it may be sprinkled for purifying." The problem which Hero faced mechanically the Orphics solved in metaphor -- how to connect the Wheel with purification. It was not difficult. Bronze, as Hero notes, was supposed to be a purifier; in another section he says the Wheel was actually called Hagnisterion, the thing for purification. Each metal when it first comes into use is regarded as having magical properties.

(from Prolegomena, J.E. Harrison, Meridian Books Inc., 1960, pp. 590 - 591.)

-- The reader may believe at this point that the translator has committed the same scholastic error that he has criticized in the commentary of his predecessors on sonnet I - 16. This is not the case,

however, for three reasons: a) the literal level of the poem (flight, probably mechanical) has been dealt with extensively in the notes to this poem as well as in those for the preceding one; b) Rilke spent considerable time as secretary to the sculptor Rodin, and as such would be well acquainted with the "mysteries of bronze;" and c) the contextual evidence of the sequence bears out the rather extensive digression on bronze here. In sonnet I - 7 Orpheus appears like the "ore out of the stone's silence," and in sonnet I - 25 the dancer (Vera) is cast in that "ore" (bronze).

7) The tension created by the paradox "neared the far distances" duplicates the same movement in the German phrase den Fernen Genachte and introduces the simultaneity of the last line.

8) The English language does not have the facility for the construction of a word like erfliegt. It means approximately "to be in the process (the act of) flying toward ... ." Thus the entire last line creates a simultaneity wherein the persona is what his aim is, merely by being in flight toward that aim. It is neither here nor elsewhere in the sonnets a question of the goal as separate from being on the way toward that goal. As the angel of the Lord says to Faust: "Wer ewig strebend sich bemueht, den koennen wir erloesen." This simultaneity of Rilke's last line has been reproduced in the line "be, where his lone flight aspires," within which there exists a layering of ambiguity -- i.e. "where to his flight aspires," or "that which his flight aspires," or "while his flight aspires," or "to be in the place where his flight aspires" etc., creating by this layering a simultaneity of place and action.

9) The rhyme of "flight" with "light" and "slight" is intended

to clarify the unity of the first half of the sonnet or sentence, whose motion is a radiant and weightless ascent. It was felt that this unification was necessary because of the twisted convolutions of syntax, which Rilke also shapes in the original by a rhyme scheme, and which are the result of the need to keep the entire poem within the bounds of one sentence.

Sollen wir unsere uralte Freundschaft, die grossen  
niemals verbenden Goetter, weil sie der harte  
Stahl, den wir streng erzogen, nicht kennt, verstossen  
oder sie ploetzlich suchen auf einer Karte?

Diese gewaltigen Freunde, die uns die Toten  
nehmen, ruehren nirgends an unsere Raeder.

Unsere Gastmaehler haben wir weit -, unsere Baeder,  
fortgerueckt, und ihre uns lang schon zu langsamen Boten

ueberholen wir immer. Einsamer nun aufeinander  
ganz angewiesen, ohne einander zu kennen,  
fuehren wir nicht mehr die Pfade als schoene Maeander,

sondern als Grade. Nur noch in Dampfkesseln brennen  
die einstigen Feuer und heben die Haemmer, die immer  
groessern. Wir aber nehmen an Kraft ab, wie Schwimmer.

## I - 24

Shall we <sup>1.</sup> cast aside our <sup>2.</sup> ancient friendship, the great  
 never <sup>3.</sup> solicitous gods, because they are not known  
 to <sup>4.</sup> the hard drawn steel we harshly raised,  
 or <sup>5.</sup> shall we seek them, suddenly, on a map?

These mighty friends, who <sup>6.</sup> receive the dead  
 from us, nowhere do they <sup>7.</sup> stir at our wheels.  
 Banquet and bath, <sup>8.</sup> fit to receive the stranger, we have  
 moved afar, and their <sup>9.</sup> messengers, long since grown too slow for us,

we outstrip ever. More <sup>10.</sup> alone, now that we are dependent  
<sup>11.</sup> wholly upon <sup>12.</sup> one-another, without knowledge of <sup>13.</sup> each-other,  
<sup>14.</sup> we trace the paths no longer as beautiful meanders,

but as <sup>15.</sup> straightened ranks. Only in boilers  
 do the former fires yet burn and lift the hammers,  
 ever larger. <sup>16.</sup> While we lose strength, like swimmers.

- 1) verstossen -- this is a composite word made up of the verb stossen (to "bump" or "nudge" or "hit"), and the prefix ver, indicating a displacement of or change in the object acted upon. The English phrase which comes closest to the meaning of this word is "to cast aside."
- 2) uralte has here been translated as "ancient" in order to suggest a pre-historic or Ur relation, and to bring this word and its meaning into alignment with Rilke's use of Uralten in sonnet I - 19, where the same area of meaning is suggested.
- 3) The German word used here is werbenden -- "to bid, to advertise, to solicit." It immediately recalls Rilke's earlier use of this word in sonnet I - 3, where "true song" is characterized not by a solicitation of the god or muses, but as a condition of being within the body of the god or "tuning oneself to play the music" (Ein Hauch um nichts. Ein Wehn im Gott. Ein Wind.). With this exact presentation of the god as Spiritus sanctus, we have, at this early stage in the sequence, an image of an aeolian harp -- of "true song" as a participation in a larger order. Here, in sonnet I - 24, the image is seen from the other side. The gods are beings to which we have a friendship -- i.e. they are both separate from us, yet we somehow participate in their activity. They are never solicitous by virtue of the fact that we do participate in their nature simply by being present in the world. We are, however, free to reject this friendship or our participation in their activity and rely totally upon ourselves or the human, but inasmuch as we do so, our strength diminishes.
- 4) der harte / Stahl, den wir streng erzogen: this phrase contains a pun on erzogen which must be reworked in the English translation.

The root of the word erzogen is ziehen, "to draw (out)," and as such it creates a pun on the process of working steel billets into objects and tools ("to draw steel"). Literally, erzogen means "to raise, to teach, to instruct." Also, "steel" is here seen as that which severs our friendship with the gods, thus there is a suggestion of a sword. In order to maintain these levels of meaning the phrase has been translated as "the hard drawn steel we harshly raised."

5) German syntax allows Rilke to place the verb verstossen at the end of line 3, in close proximity to the second verb of the compound sentence making up stanza 1, suchen. Since English syntax demands that a verb follow the phrase "shall we" immediately in line 1, it is necessary to repeat that phrase in line 4 immediately preceding the verb "to seek."

6) The German phrase die uns die Toten / nehmen is ambivalent. While a first reading of the line produces a meaning of "that take the dead from us," the phrase may also be read to mean "that the dead take from us." English syntax does not allow the creation of this ambivalence here without producing a very awkward construction. For this reason, the word "receive" has been substituted for "take," and the entire issue has been moved two lines farther on into a phrase which has been added to the translation, and in which the word "receive" appears again. (See note 8 below.)

7) an rühren has come to mean "to touch lightly" in common usage, but originally it meant "to set into circular motion, to stir." The English word "to stir" has undergone a similar broadening of its meaning, and has been used here for this reason. The ambivalence of the German word (which, as it is used here denotes proximity to a far



greater extent than activity) has been duplicated by the rather unusual English phrase "to stir at," which suggests not only that the gods do not touch our wheels, but also that they do not "stir at the bidding of our wheels."

8) The word Gast, which disappears in the translation of Gastmaehler as Banquets, has been introduced in its etymological sense by the addition of the phrase "fit to receive the stranger." Gast belongs to a group of words originally meaning not only "stranger" but also "enemy" or "enemy warrior" (ghosti-s, lat. hostis). Not until the late middle ages does the word begin to acquire (in certain circumstances) its present sense. Thus, Rilke's use of the word Gastmaehler indicates a "banquet or feast for a stranger." In Homer, a stranger to the court is always offered sustenance, partakes in an offering to the gods, and receives a bath which is both a personal and a ritual cleansing of pollution before the nature of his business is entered into. The rationalization for the necessity of this ritual of hospitality, as given by the Homeric text, is that the stranger may be a god. Jane Harrison distinguishes between two types of offerings in the Greek world -- one to appease the dead, the other to appease the gods. Thus while the explicit referent for "stranger" in this line is "the god(s)", the reappearance of the word "receive" in this phrase is intended to draw in "the dead" of line 5 as a possible referent, thus recreating the ambivalence between "the dead" and "the gods" created in the original German in line 5. (See also note 6 above.)

9) Boten may here be translated as either "heralds" or "messengers." Since "heralds" has been used in a pejorative context in sonnet I - 18, and "messenger" has been used in connection with Orpheus in sonnet

I - 7 (where Rilke also uses the word Boten), "messengers" has been chosen here to announce the presence of "the dead" and / or "the gods."

10) Einsamer -- this word is usually translated as "more lonely," but since it begins a whole series of words built around "one," (ein -- Einsamer, aufeinander, einander), it has been translated as "more alone" to emphasize the condition or number, rather than the feeling or emotion. At this point in the sequence, a curious reversal is beginning to take place. While in sonnet I - 16 Esau is "set apart" by the community, here, in sonnet I - 24, that community itself made up of a group of disconnected units, is set apart from or cut off from the world -- ("wholly dependent on each-other").

11) ganz has been translated as "wholly" (rather than "completely") because Rilke is creating an image of a human community which is attempting to overlay the multiplicity of the world with a single multiplication of itself and its extensions. Das Ganze ... is a common German phrase meaning "the whole ... ."

12) "one-another" has been hyphenated to emphasize the disjointed nature of the anthropomorphic trap Rilke presents here. The separation of the word is intended to create a play of meaning wherein the reader sees "a one," and "another-one," all of which remain separate and static, since there is no opposition to create movement. (See also note 13 below.)

13) "each - other" is hyphenated basically for the same reason as "one-another" earlier. However, in this second instance a doubling of the original meaning is intended, wherein the reader sees that each "other" is in fact the "same" -- "one-another." These two hyphenated words bracket the word "knowledge," which is stopped by the constant

repetition of "sameness." "Knowledge," for Rilke in the Sonnets to Orpheus always implies the existence of an "other" world or thing which one enters -- ("step from time to time / into that breath which does not mean you" -- sonnet I - 4).

14) "trace" has here been used to translate the word fuehren for several reasons: although fuehren is now commonly translated as "to lead," it originally meant "to bring into motion." This image of motion is an inseparable part of English expressions like "the comet traces a path in the sky." Furthermore, since Rilke is opposing two kinds of "paths" or "ways," the first of which ("meanders") is congruent to the structure of the world as it is revealed in the sonnet sequence, while the second one is not ("straightened ranks"), the duplicating aspect of the word "trace" is quite appropriate here. Finally, special uses of the root fuehren like vorfuehren or auffuehren denote not a "leadership" so much as a "participation" or "presentation."

15) Grade -- Rilke uses this word as a noun here. It is a plural form of Grad and means "degrees, units" or "ranks." However, he is also creating a pun on Gerade ("straight") which is pronounced with a silent "e" after the "G" in most modern instances of usage. The word has been translated as "straightened ranks" in order to recreate the meaning of the pun.

16) As in sonnet I - 18, Rilke emphasizes here that the degree to which we overextend ourselves or the human by increasing the power of our material creations (machines) is the degree to which we lose strength as participants in a world which remains larger than the human. In order to retain this condition of simultaneity, the sonnet ends with an incomplete sentence beginning with the word "While."

Dich aber will ich nun, dich, die ich kannte  
wie eine Blume, von der ich den Namen nicht weiss,  
noch ein Mal erinnern und ihnen zeigen, Entwandte,  
schoene Gespielin des unueberwindlichen Schreis.

Taenzerin erst, die ploetzlich, den Koerper voll Zoegern,  
anhielt, als goess man ihr Jungsein in Erz;  
trauernd und lauschend -. Da, von den hohen Vermoegern  
fiel ihr Musik in das veraenderte Herz.

Nah war die Krankheit. Schon von den Schatten bemaechtigt,  
draengte verdunkelt das Blut, doch, wie fluechtig verdaechtigt,  
trieb es in seinen natuerlichen Fruehling hervor.

Wieder und wieder, von Dunkel und Sturz unterbrochen,  
glaenzte es irdisch. Bis es nach schrecklichem Pochen  
trat in das trostlos offene Tor.

I - 25

But you now, whom I have known like a flower  
of which I know not the name, I <sup>1.</sup> will remind once more,  
and <sup>2.</sup> show them, <sup>3.</sup> you whom the winds have unravelled,  
beautiful playmate of the <sup>4.</sup> untrammelled cry.

A dancer first, who, the body full of lingering, suddenly  
stilled, as if one cast her <sup>5.</sup> youthfulness in <sup>6.</sup> bronze,  
grieved and hearkened -. There, from the <sup>7.</sup> numinous height  
music fell into the transformed heart.

The illness drew close. Already <sup>8.</sup> wrapped in shadows  
welled the darkened blood, yet, as if only fleetingly <sup>9.</sup> clothed  
in suspicion,  
<sup>10.</sup> it shot forth in its natural springtime.

Again and again - <sup>11.</sup> broken by darkness and fall -  
it shone forth, earthly. Until, after terrible <sup>12.</sup> beating,  
it stepped into the <sup>13.</sup> pitiless open gate.

1) "Dich ... will ich ... erinnern" clearly means "I will remind you," not, as all previous translators have rendered it, "I will remember (recall) you." Were the latter the case, the construction in German would be reflexive -- i.e. An dich will ich mich erinnern. This is anything but a sentimental poem, where the persona is "recalled" to the poet's memory after the fact. Quite on the contrary, the first stanza asserts unequivocally that the dead may be reminded of the events of their own death, and thus implies a belief in the persona's presence in a world after her death. The beauty of this passage is that nowhere does Rilke make a personal statement as to his belief in a realm of the dead which is accessible and present -- the language itself, through its own possibility of syntax (life) makes the statement for him. This moves the issue into a realm of fact which is outside of and larger than the poet's own personal concern in the matter. It is of these facts of the language (or dance) and their statements about the nature and structure of the world (cosmology), in which both Rilke as a poet, and Vera as a dancer (and persona of the poem) participate, that Rilke wishes to remind the persona, and show forth to the world (ihnen). Thus this sonnet constitutes, within the context of the sonnet sequence, a formal proof of the poet's assertion that Orphic song gives access to a realm of the dead and hence to immortality. This immortality, however, always remains in or through image. (See also note 6 below.)

2) As mentioned above, Rilke is not showing his memory of the person Vera to the people or readership (ihnen), but is reminding the persona Vera of the events or process of her own death, within which are to be found not only the elements of her own immortality, but also

a Motif for the immortality of man and the world. We are reminded of sonnet I - 2: "will you yet invent its motif before your song is lost." Here we are presented with its motif or image. Just as the attendant persons (the readership) are seen as participating in the dancer's dance of life in sonnet I - 15, so here they are invited to participate in her dance of death. Rilke is again involved, in this sonnet, with the Orphic process of Deuten or Deutlich machen -- "to show forth to the assembled people."

3) That Rilke is not speaking of the person Vera, but of Vera as a persona or image becomes clear in this phrase. The poet does not name her, but refers to her as Entwandte; literally "one who has turned away" (Wenden), which is based etymologically on the root winden, hence "unwound one." Again we recall sonnet I - 15: "in her exquisite windings turns your proselyte." In order to maintain this recurring image of "winding," now presenting its opposite face, the word "unravelling" has been used. For an explanation as to why the phrase "whom the winds have" has been used, see note 4 below.

4) Unueberwindlichen is usually translated as "unconquerable," but that misses the imagistic nature of the German word which literally means: "something which cannot be wound over (with rope etc.), cannot be tied or tamed." In any case, the precise German word for "unconquerable" is unbesiegbar. In order to retain that visual aspect of winden contained in the original, in conjunction with the implication of "unbound" and "unfettered," the word "untrammelled" has been used as a translation. Also, both in Rilke's use of unueberwindlichen and his use of Entwandte, we must deal with a pun on Wind ("wind") which is substantiated by his phrase schoene Gespielin, recalling the phrase

"beloved instrument of the play of winds" in sonnet I - 23, and the phrase "step from time into the breath which does not mean you" of sonnet I - 4. Since the movement of the poem shows forth the transformation of the dancer from life to an image of life as the persona passes through the gate of death (the "lyre's gate" or "gate of horn," the gate of death and vision or sleep and dream), it is essential that those earlier poems (and their statements about the nature of the way of the imagination) be recalled at this point.

5) Rilke's word is Jungsein, literally: "being young." Thus it is not her "youth" which is cast in bronze, but the form of her body as it shows forth a certain kind of action. For this reason, "youthfulness" has been chosen as a translation.

6) The etymology of the word Erz reveals that it is of indeterminate origin, but probably from Asia Minor, and meant originally "copper," then "bronze," and finally "ore." "Bronze" has been used in the translation to recall the cire-perdue method of bronze casting discussed in relation to Icarus in the notes to sonnet I - 23. What we are presented with is an image of how the dancer is filled with Orphic song which informs the figures of her dance. Like Orpheus, whose music remains immortal, not his body, what is immortalized here is not the body but the body as medium for image, or the figure of the dance. This is what Rilke seeks to remind the persona of, and show forth to the world -- not that man is immortal, but the exact extent and form to which he participates in the immortal. This does not contradict the notion that the dead may be addressed by the living -- but only in a different form since they now inhabit a different realm. Nowhere is this more clearly depicted than in the underworld episode of the Odyssey, where



Odysseus speaks with the "shades." So here, the persona's blood, close to death, is already "wrapped in shadows" and "darkened." What remains, shining, is an image of their deeds. We remember that what lends a man or woman heroic stature are their deeds which are, like Achilles or Icarus or Vera, "cast in bronze."

7) The word Vermoegern (noun) is built on the root Vermoegen meaning "ability, power, capacity, property, fortune, means, capital, assets." A Vermoeger is thus "one who grants ability, power, capacity" etc. Undoubtedly Rilke is here referring to the gods, and more specifically the Muses. The word used in the translation is "numinous," which Websters 2nd International defines as "pertaining to or characteristic of a numen," which in turn is defined as a) "The divine force or potency ascribed to objects or beings regarded with awe."; b) "A god conceived as a person."; c) "A divine or presiding spirit; a local or tutelary deity." It is they that make it possible or grant that the dancer may be filled with Orphic song and thus participate in the immortal. At this point the reader is also made to realize that the abandonment of the "great, never solicitous (but numinous) gods" entails simultaneously an abandonment of one's participation in the immortal. The merely human realm is defined by its mortality.

8) Bemaechtigt, which is usually translated as "overpowered," has been translated as "wrapped in" for two reasons: a) "overpowered" carries a connotation of destruction which bemaechtigt does not -- bemaechtigt always implies a bringing of something under ones power so that one may make use of it, which one cannot do, of course, if one has destroyed that thing; and b) Rilke's rhyme of bemaechtigt with verdaechtigt is intended to make thought and action simultaneous.

(See also note 9 below.)

9) The word "clothed" has been added to this phrase in order to bring the "suspicion" in this line into congruence with the "shadows" of the previous line. Verdacht, with its root in Denken, suggests "darkened thought." Thus both the body and the spirit of the dancer stand under the shadow of death.

10) One of the meanings of trieb (usually past tense of treiben, "to drive") is "sprout" or "young shoot." The image which immediately suggests itself here is of a felled tree which, with the coming of spring, puts forth shoots of new "growth." In order to hold the acuteness of this association, the word has been translated as "shot forth." The reference across the sonnet sequence is of course to the phrase "felled by victory" in sonnet I - 23.

11) The usual translation of unterbrochen is "interrupted." However, the German word is based on the root brechen which means literally "to break." In order to retain the original image and its recurrent appearance, the phrase "broken by darkness and fall" has been placed between dashes in the centre of the sentence "Again and again ... it shone forth earthly."

12) Pochen has been translated as "beating" for a variety of reasons. Primarily, since we are dealing with an image of blood, it immediately suggests a heartbeat. What is interesting, however, is that Pocherz is "ore as mined," Pochgestein is "stamp rock," Pochhammer is an "ore hammer," and Pochmuehle is a "stamp mill." In the notes to sonnet I - 23 the relation of blood to molten bronze has been discussed at length with references to such bronze heroes as Achilles and Icarus. The term "beaten metal" (as in "beaten gold") is a common

enough metallurgical term to include a notion of metalworking within the image of blood in stanza four. Finally, the word "beating" calls to mind the manner of Orpheus' death at the hands of the maenads. All of these elements move together in the poem to inform the image of the dancer, Vera.

13) My translation of trostlos as "pitiless" cannot be substantiated with either lexicographical, etymological or contextual evidence, but must rely purely on critical opinion which the reader is completely free to agree or disagree with. The problem is complicated by the fact that, to my knowledge, there is no German word for "pity" -- the closest one comes to it is Mitleid, but that means "sympathetic grief (or suffering)." Trost means literally "consolation." Now although my reading of this poem is far more harsh than most translators and critics seem to allow, in that I indicate that Rilke wishes to cut away completely all "sentiment" and "personality" from the image, leaving only its hard core or "what remains," I do not feel that the "open gate" in the final line can be in any way "disconsolate," "hopeless" or "desolate." The mere fact of its openness seems to suggest not a finality, but an entrance to another realm. In that Rilke, throughout the sonnet sequence, defines life in and by the tragic mode, and in that the purpose of tragedy according to Aristotle, is to achieve a catharsis of pity and fear, and finally, because the image of the dancer Vera in this sonnet is ruthlessly stripped of precisely those elements of pity and fear, I have chosen to translate the word trostlos, which characterizes the gate through which the persona steps from life into an image of life (the lyre, or the sonnet itself), as "pitiless."

Du aber, Goettlicher, du, bis zuletzt noch Ertoener,  
da ihn der Schwarm der verschmaechten Maenaden befiel,  
hast ihr Geschrei uebertoent mit Ordnung, du Schoener,  
aus den Zerstoerenden stieg dein erbauendes Spiel.

Keine war da, dass sie Haupt dir und Leier zerstoer',  
wie sie auch rangen und ra'sten; und alle die scharfen  
Steine, die sie nach deinem Herzen warfen,  
wurden zu Sanftem an dir und begabt mit Gehoer.

Schliesslich zerschlugen sie dich, von der Rache gehetzt,  
waehrend dein Klang noch in Loewen und Felsen verweilte  
und in den Baeumen und Voegeln. Dort singst du noch jetzt.

O du verlorener Gott! Du unendliche Spur!  
Nur weil dich reissend zuletzt die Feindschaft verteilte,  
sind wir die Hoerenden jetzt und ein Mund der Natur.

## I - 26

But you, <sup>1.</sup> beautiful and godly, <sup>2.</sup> sounding your notes to the last,  
 there where he fell in the swarm of the <sup>3.</sup> disdained maenads' charge;  
 above their cries <sup>4.</sup> your play resounded with order,  
 from the destroyers arose your <sup>5.</sup> constructs of song.

Not one was there, <sup>6.</sup> could destroy what was yours  
 though they wrestled and raged with <sup>7.</sup> the head and the lyre, and all  
 the sharp  
 stones, which they cast at your heart,  
 became gentle upon you, and gifted with hearing. <sup>8.</sup>

Finally they shattered you, spurred by vengeance,  
 while your sound still <sup>9.</sup> lingered in lions and cliffs  
 and in trees and birds. It is there that you still sing now.

<sup>10.</sup>  
Oh you lost god! You track without end!  
 Only because you were torn by enmity and scattered at last,  
 are we now the hearing, and a mouth of nature.

1) This poem can only be understood if one realizes that it is addressed to both of Orpheus' nature or realms. Only in this light can the curious doubling of pronouns in the octave, and the metamorphosis of the "he" to the "you" in lines 7 and 8 be explicated. These two natures are of course the divine and the mortal, and their duality is begun by the word Goettlicher, which may mean "one who is a divinity" or "one who is god-like." Now as an adjectival pronoun, Goettlicher usually means "god-like," when followed by an antecedent (eg. goettlicher Mann). When the word is capitalized, the antecedent is always implied in the ending er. Thus one begins to read sonnet I - 26 as if the first line referred to Orpheus. However, once one realizes that the "he" in line 2 is the pronoun which refers to Orpheus, one must return to the word Goettlicher and determine that it must mean "divine one" rather than "one who is god-like," and that the divinity addressed is Apollo, the god of the lyre. It is valid at this point to ask, "if Rilke is in fact addressing the god, then why does he allow this ambiguity to arise?" It is this question that the poem answers. ("Beautiful" has been moved from the end of line 3 to a position adjacent to "godly" to provide a continuity of syntax not otherwise possible in English.)

2) Ertoener, like Goettlicher and Schoener, is another of those adjectival pronouns not possible in English, complicating the syntactical problem in the translation. Basically, what a word like this does is to make the persona doing the action into the action itself: i.e. it defines the persona by its activity, not by its species -- the nature of a thing is characterized by an image of its action -- the persona both makes and is whatever it is doing. Thus, Ertoener is

translated with the phrase "sounding your notes" so that the reader sees in the image both "the god playing his lyre" and the "god as the lyre" from whose vibrant body sound the notes of his music. What this accomplishes is a vision of divinity which is never transcendental, but always and only apparent within a certain kind of activity which carries its "secret name."

3) The word befiel ("to fall upon") creates an auditory pun here on befehlen ("to command"), informed by Orphic legend. The story goes that Orpheus was charged (accused) by the maenads of rejecting their rites, and ultimately destroyed on the grounds of this charge. It must be made clear that their action hinges on the divine imperative of Dionysos. In the execution of Orpheus we witness a tragic event. His life and death are an image of the power of Apollo and the power of Dionysos meeting within the persona of a man. His limbs are buried in the ground, his head is placed in a cave (between the upper and the lower world), and his lyre is placed in the heavens. The phrase "fell in the swarm of the disdained maenads' charge" is intended to retain this sense of "accusation" and "command" via the pun on "charge."

4) uebertönt -- this word has no literal English equivalent. It means "toned over" or "over-toned" (sic), in the sense that "one sound among many may stand forth as dominant." It has been translated as "your play resounded" to capture both the loudness of the original, and that sense of "one prominent among many" via the pun of the literal "sounded again." The word "play" has been added to include Rilke's sense of a "play" between the destruction of the maenads and the song or story created by that destruction which appears in his use

of Spiel in line 4. (See also note 5 below.)

5) erbauendes Spiel -- literally "building up or constructing up play." These constructions are much too awkward in English. "Constructive" comes closest in meaning, but this word carries an abstract moral connotation not present in the German. Furthermore, it does not hold the notion that the "play" both "constructs" and is "that which is constructed." Also, Spiel as it is used here carries a meaning of "musical play" or "song." Since it is imperative that the "play" be seen here as both subject and object of the action, and since the notion of "play" has already been introduced in the English translation in line 3, the phrase has been translated as "constructs of song."

6) dass sie ... dir continues the relation of "nature" and "action" outlined in notes 1 to 5 above. This possessive construction identifies the "thing possessed" as "yours" because it "partakes of your nature:" i.e. it may be yours because it is "part of you," or because "you are recognized in it as its originator." In stanza 1 above, we have seen that the god is the song and the lyre -- so too here Orpheus' head and lyre are "the god's" because the divinity is manifest in them or revealed through them. In order to retain this binary aspect of "possession," the phrase dass sie ... dir has been translated as "could destroy what was yours."

7) "the head and the lyre" is intentionally ambiguous -- it may refer either to the god's head and lyre, or Orpheus' head and lyre, or the head and the lyre as possessions or attributes of the god.

8) It is in these two lines that the metamorphosis takes place. Up to this point (line 7) Orpheus and the divine music which issues



through him have been divided. It is the divine command of Dionysos as shown forth in the dismembering action of the maenads which unites the image of Orpheus with the form of his song. No longer is there a division between the "you" (god) and the "he" (Orpheus) -- the "he" has become "you" at the moment of Orpheus' death. The key word, here in the centre of the poem (the first word of line 8), is wurden, "became." The reason the transformation from the mortal to the immortal can take place here, at the moment of Orpheus' death, is that what remains at this point is not the man, Orpheus, but the image of his action -- song. At the moment of Orpheus' death, the world (stones) hear his "true song" for the first time -- become "gifted with hearing." His death is the measure of what it is about him that is immortal. We remember that Orpheus has been imagined in sonnet I - 7 as the "ore" that is smelted from the "stones' silence." The inclusion of the word "cast" in line 7 is intended to recall the bronze casting image of sonnet I - 25, where the image of the dancer is shown both to herself and to the world of which she is and remains a part.

9) Although verweilen means "to remain," it carries a connotation of "remaining for a while only" or "for an indeterminate length of time," somewhat similar to the English notion of "spending time (at)" in the sense of a "visit," etc. When used in its past tense, as Rilke does here, it means "to linger," and not "to remain." The word is intended to recall the body of the dancer ("full of lingering") in the previous sonnet I - 25.

10) It is not until this line that Rilke clearly addresses a god. Thus, the god is only recognized after he is lost -- lost because he

is nameless, scattered, not because he has removed himself to a  
transcendental remoteness. His divinity is defined both by his absence  
as an entity or identity, and by his presence as a "track without end"  
-- as dismembered fragments endlessly appearing in the world.

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