

GEORGE C. SCHOOLFIELD

*Rilke's
last year*

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"Freilich ist es seltsam, die Erde nicht mehr zu bewohnen."
(*Duineser Elegien*, I, 11. 69-70)

"... and it seemed strange that this should necessarily be the end of a life, that a life couldn't always end more easily." (Arnold Bennett, *The Journals*, November 20th, 1914.)

RAINER MARIA RILKE died early on the morning of December 29, 1926, in the sanatorium of Val-Mont, at Glion (near Territet) in the Swiss canton of Vaud; he was buried on January 2, 1927, beside Ulrich Ruffinen's late Gothic church at Raron, in Canton Valais. At this distance, it is difficult to gauge the immediate public attention his death aroused. The Austrian novelist, Robert Musil, in a "Rilke-Feier" held at Berlin on January 16, 1927, took the occasion to belabor German readers for their lack of interest in genuinely great literary men—it is not impossible that he was thinking about himself as he spoke. In the German press, Musil said, Rilke received "ein ehrenvolles öffentliches Begräbnis zweiter Klasse . . . Rilkes Tod war kein Anlass. Er bereitete der Nation kein festliches Vergnügen, als er starb."¹ Yet, in France, according to Edmond Jaloux: "La mort de Rainer Maria Rilke a produit . . . une émotion plus grande encore que nous ne pouvions le supposer."² Jaloux, of course, put his words on paper only after those slow workmen, the essayists, poets, and friends, had had the chance to assemble their thoughts; Musil, however, had rushed into voice and print two and four weeks, respectively, after the poet had been laid to rest in his grave, dramatically situated high above the Rhône. Had Musil waited, he would have seen how Rilke, dead, received the laments

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becoming a man who, in Musil's own concluding and symptomatic words, was "nicht nur ein grosser Dichter, sondern auch ein grosser Führer."

The Rilke Collection in the University of Kansas Library, assembled over the years by one of the most devoted and best informed of Rilke-collectors, the late Dr. Henry Sagan, contains many treasures. Among them is a collection of the essays, addresses, and poetry which were written and published in response to Rilke's death. Some material of this sort, by more or less famous hands, has long been familiar to Rilke scholars. There is Adolf von Grolmann's *Gedächtnisrede*, held before the "Argonauten" of Munich on January 22, 1927, a speech ending with a quotation from Theodor Fontane, an author whom Rilke never mentioned and who wrote some of his masterpieces during what Rilke called the "bad 1880's," a period of German literature the poet affected to despise.³ There is Alexander Lernet-Holenia's *Szene zur Totenfeier für Rainer Maria Rilke*, a playlet given at Vienna's Theater in der Josefstadt on January 23, 1927;⁴ in it, Lernet-Holenia, the professional ex-cavalry officer, conjures up Rilke's young cornet and has an off-stage voice sing—Rilke may have turned over in his fresh grave—the German soldier's song: "Kein schöner Tod ist auf der Welt/als wer vorm Feind erschlagen." There is Stefan Zweig's mellifluous *Abschied von Rilke*,⁵ delivered at the Staatstheater in Munich on February 20; and the words of the Swiss novelist and critic, Robert Faesi, given twice, first to the students of the University of Zürich and then in the Landestheater at Stuttgart.⁶ There is the lament of Felix Braun,⁷ who surely owed Rilke something; he had used him as a model for a character in his novel, *Agnes Altkirchner*, which was likewise

published in 1927, the year of mourning; and there is the prose "Requiem" of the very expressionistic poet, Paul Zech: "In dieser neubarbarischen Welt aller äusseren Bewegung, in diesem Zeitkreis rechnerischen Gehirns, in dieser Springflut begehrllicher Hände: da verdichtete sich sein ewiges Kindertum am deutlichsten zur schwimmenden Insel im orphischen Meer."⁸ And there is the noble tribute of Paul Valéry,⁹ which, because it contains personal recollections, is so much more moving than certain of the German threnodies with their splendid abstractions—a charge which surely does not apply, however, to the simple lines which the then unknown (or already forgotten) contemporary of Rilke, Robert Walser, sent to the *Prager Presse*.¹⁰ All these words were a first wave of celebration of the dead poet. Other contributions quickly followed. Lernet-Holenia had a second try at lament with a longish poem, "Auf Rainer Maria Rilkes Tod"; among other things, it contained an allusion to the presumed Carinthian nobility of the Rilkes (a legend, or perhaps a myth, which the deceased himself had liked to foster) and a vision of the poet's entrance into heaven.¹¹ Professor Oskar Walzel spoke about Rilke's death to the students of Amsterdam on March 9, 1928;¹² the somewhat professorial poet, Rudolf Alexander Schröder, performed a similar service (and did it better) in Frankfurt am Main in November of the same year;¹³ Dr. Werner Milch, busy following the career of the Silesian mystic, Daniel von Czepko, with the greatest accuracy, was nonetheless (in his words on Rilke's death written in 1929) unable to keep some simple facts straight: he made the poet die at Muzot rather than Val-Mont—the tower where Rilke finished the *Duino Elegies* and the *Sonnets to Orpheus* was more poetic, we assume, than the hos-

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pital at Glion.¹⁴ Professor Friedrich Gundolf, who had delivered *aperçus* on so many German poets, could not let the opportunity of a Rilke lecture escape him, and on June 3, 1931, he spoke in Essen; his dissenting vote among the eulogies would be more valuable if we did not know how much Gundolf was still the follower of Rilke's great rival, Stefan George, and thus honor-bound to despise Rilke's "Austrian softness."¹⁵ Finally, the Swabian poet Otto Heuschele, using the occasion of Rilke's sixtieth birthday, December 4, 1935, continued to speak as if the poet had just passed away: the refrain of his memorial is "Rilke war ein Edelmann," a Rilke-legend which, like many others, Heuschele swallows hook, line, and sinker; but, at the same time, he tries to defend Rilke both against the followers of George and the enthusiasts of the new Third Reich: "Es sind noch immer manche unter uns, die in diesem Dichter nichts anderes sehen wollen als einen Ästheteten, einen Sonderling oder einen Fremdling gar; andere, die sich bemühen, zu zeigen, dass sein Werk deutschem Wesen fremd sei."¹⁶ Heuschele, of course, finds an inner and very German strength in Rilke's verses.

As these distinguished men said what they had to say of the poet's passing, an obituary literature from less famous hands simultaneously appeared. These mourners of the second line, it is interesting to note, are likewise sensitive about the charge that Rilke was not a genuine German poet—it will be remembered that Rilke had been attacked during his last years for the "un-German deed" of writing in French. Fred Hildenbrandt, in *Der Überblick* (1928), pacified his compatriots by saying that Rilke, after all, was Faustian and so truly German ("Faustisch war sein Leben und sein Schaffen, also wahr-

haft deutsch").¹⁷ A Sudeten German, Hans Funk, writing in the Karlsbad paper, *Der Strom*, for February 1, 1927, was confused as to the cause of Rilke's death (he evidently thought that a poet who dies in Switzerland must die of tuberculosis), but made an honorable defence of his fellow Bohemian against the charge of "betrayal of the fatherland," brought so persistently and hatefully by certain segments of the German-language press in Czechoslovakia.¹⁸ Kurt Busse, in the *Preussische Jahrbücher*, talked about the heroic deed of Rilke's poetry, comparing him to Hölderlin, who—like Rilke—had seemed so "soft" at first.¹⁹ A related patriotic motivation may lie behind the broken-hearted words of Hans Caspar von Zobeltitz, officer and editor, who in his obituary essay for the magazine *Daheim*²⁰ recalled how a reading of *Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke*—here we have Lernet-Holenia's thoughts from the Theater in der Josefstadt expressed more baldly—inspired many a German soldier, "an der Front in Ost und West", to leap out of the trenches, charging the foe like the cornet.

Another trait common to the obituary notices (from, it should be added, prominent and less prominent alike) is a horror of factual information, a phobia, by the way, to be inherited by many of Rilke's later interpreters and biographers. As the Fontane scholar, Conrad Wandrey (who had wanted to know everything he could find out about the life of the realistic novelist) put it: "Von Rilkes äusserem Leben ist wenig bekannt geworden, aber man vermisst die Kunde kaum."²¹ Others are of the same mind. Friedrich Jaksch, another of our German Bohemians, tells us that the world was so astonished at Rilke's demise because, alive, he had seemed utterly removed from earthly life—he had held no public lectures or read-

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ings (something he had in fact done fairly frequently until the financial necessity had been removed by his Swiss benefactors), he had not appeared in literary circles (he had done so off and on throughout his adult life, most recently during his eight Parisian months in 1925.)²² There is talk of his "monkish concentration" (by Rudolf Bach and Heinrich Eduard Jacob),²³ of his hastening through the "Schein- und Trugwelt" of the great European cities—these words are by one Peter Bauer:²⁴ Rilke had made Paris his headquarters for some eight years; he had lived in Munich, with interruptions, throughout the war; in 1925, as we know, he had fled Val-Mont for Paris, hoping to be cured by the city he loved; on his death-bed he planned a winter in Rome. (In *Westermanns Monatshefte*, Friedrich Düsel had excused his last Parisian trip—*de mortuis nihil nisi bonum*—by calling it the aberration of a man mortally ill.)²⁵ At the very opening of his lengthy obituary essay, Carl Albert Lange claims that, in the case of some other great man, one would have felt hurt not to know the circumstances of his death, but at Rilke's passing even the newspapers maintained a pious restraint; "Denn der Welt edelster Teil wusste, dass das Herz dieses Dichters immer schon Rose gewesen war."²⁶ As a matter of fact, Walter Neumann concludes his prose-poem with the opinion that a great silence is the only appropriate reaction to the poet's life and death: "Dem Ereignis Rainer Maria Rilke . . . genügt allein das wahrhaftige Schweigen . . .";²⁷ for, in the words of still another mourner, Ernst Stranik, who did not keep quiet, although he recommended that everyone else do so, Rilke's "Weg zur Stille und Erkenntnis" must be revered as "der einzig wahre Weg des einzig wahren Dichters."²⁸ It was blasphemy to talk about the facts of Rilke's life—Stranik has some

hard words for the physicians who had applied a name, leucemia, to the disease which killed Rilke—even as it was a profanation of the sometime holy presence to talk about Rilke at all. Assuredly, he was a “saint of poetry” (as Max Martin Sternschein²⁹ and how many others said) who, by dying, had become what he had always yearned to be, pure soul, “Seele” (Stranik). And “Geist”—another of German’s words for the spirit—had been, according to Hermann Kasack in *Neue Rundschau*, “das fortzeugende Motif seiner Kunst.”³⁰ In fairness to Kasack, it must be added that he also realized how devoted Rilke was in his poetry to the world which we can behold with our eyes and touch with our hands.

Jaloux has told us, you will remember, something of the extent of the French reaction to Rilke’s death; a few details should be added here about its nature, so different in every way from that expressed in most of the German epicedia. What was true of the remarks by Valéry is also true of remarks by persons lower down on the ladder of fame. The French lament does not try to remove the poet, transfigured, from the eyes of a naughty and undeserving world; it tries rather to make him the more human, and his loss thus the more poignant. Valéry recalled his last meeting with Rilke, “cet ami;” Jaloux, in his little book about the poet written in 1927, does the same thing: the heart of his work is the “Entrevues avec Rainer Maria Rilke,” its conclusion a letter from a woman who had taken a walk through the Jardin de Luxembourg with the poet, some twenty years previously. Monique Saint-Helier wrote a pamphlet, *A Rilke pour Noël*³¹—a Christmas gift for the first yuletide after his death—in which she recalled what he had told her about his childhood (including that remarkable tale of

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his revenge on the fellow cadets who had tormented him) and about his later association with Gide, Giraudoux, Valéry. French men-of-letters who had not known Rilke personally, and so had nothing to recall, used a surrogate: Roger Secrétain and Pierre Humbourg³² remember Malte, the Danish hero of Rilke's novel, as if Malte had been Rilke, and Humbourg tells of reading *Malte* in Brest, "cette étrange ville triste et comme rouillée." It is a place where Malte would have felt at home, which Rilke would have loved. The student who has made his way through the transcendental fogs of Germany's farewells to Rilke will feel relieved at finding the poet and his creation put down in the French seaport, misty itself, to be sure, but with a mist belonging to reality. And it is a relief, too, to learn from the "Souvenirs sur Rilke" (from 1927) of the French-Austrian author, Emil Alphons Rheinhardt (who died later in Dachau) that Rilke, when he spoke, sounded as if he were speaking Danish, that he liked the songs of Mahler and Wolf, that he knew something of such special linguistic areas as the German of the "Volga-Swabians" in Russia and the "Austrian Italian" of the Tyrol and Istria. Mourning Rilke's death, Rheinhardt mourns the living man, with peculiarities and odd stores of knowledge—knowledge useful for a poet.

It is understandable, to be sure, that the laments at Rilke's death, particularly those from Germany, had a peculiarly exalted quality: excessive grief may take excessive forms, and this very outpouring, we are told, purges the mourner and allows him subsequently to establish a more balanced view of the dear departed. However, in Rilke's case, this progression does not seem always to have taken place. That Maurice Betz, Rilke's French transla-

tor, mourned the passing annually with a "rite du souvenir," celebrated privately, seems altogether fitting; and it is significant that we know about the ceremony not from Betz himself, who died in 1946, but from Yanette Delétang-Tardif, who described the event in her *Hommage à Maurice*, a tribute to the Alsatian published in 1949.³⁴ Public expressions of dismay continued for a long time in Germany, as we have seen, in the form of the lecture, the essay, the prose poem; examples in verse appeared later still, and we have a *Requiem* from 1937 by Günther Petry, published by Wolfgang Jess of Dresden, the publishing house which, a few years earlier, had issued a quasi-biography of Rilke by Paul Zech, in which the final chapter was a re-printing of that "Requiem" for Rilke, by Zech, from which we quoted a few stirring lines above.³⁵ The Petry requiem—a long work, consisting of three sonnets as a foreword, about four hundred lines of verse in the main body of the "Feier", and an afterword made up again of three sonnets—is full not only of incomprehensible imitations of Rilke's style in the *Elegies*, but full, as well, of confidence that Rilke will come again to those who have the patience and devotion to hearken to his coming. This thought, that a poet is never altogether dead (Horace said it: "Non omnis moriar"), is scarcely unusual; what may frighten the reader, however, is the suggestion that Petry's subject is not just a poet but a savior:

Der Ursprung quillt, die Gnade ist in Fluss,
 Der mächtig angestrengte Bogen zielt—
 Jetzt gilt es nur den Auftrag zu verstehn,
 Bereit zu sein, gehorchen ohne Ende.
 Dann Rilke kann das Wunder auch geschehn
 Der Auferstehungsnacht um deine Spende.

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The "night of resurrection" in the last line is uncomfortably reminiscent of the frontispiece in Jean Gebser's *Rilke und Spanien* (1940): there, the face of Christ from El Greco's *Espolio* is reproduced, together with a photograph of Rilke from 1905. Yet Petry's *Requiem* surely would not have shocked Elya Maria Nevar, one of Rilke's young lady friends from his last days in Munich (1918-19). Not long after Rilke's death, Miss Nevar had composed a restrained prose-meditation for *Das Goetheanum*, the organ of Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophists;³⁶ The meditation—whose central theme was Rilke's awareness of "die andere Seite der Natur"—appeared side by side with an article of Roman Boos, who hinted that Rilke had become a great poet thanks to an illuminating commentary Steiner had written on his youthful essay, "Der Wert des Monologs."³⁷ (Like Rilke, Steiner was sometimes credited by his followers with semi-miraculous powers.) The impression of reasonableness, at least by contrast, which Miss Nevar created with her essay was dispelled, however, by the "Requiem" she issued later on.^{37a} The language of her poem has a familiar ring to it; have we not sung such words about the missionaries' Jesus who, as the hymn says, "In pity looks on those who stray| Benighted in this land of night"? Like Jesus, Miss Nevar's Rilke cannot be discouraged by our obduracy or our indifference, for he possesses boundless compassion:

wenn immer auf's neu
ein von dir Beschenkter
das Ohr verschloss
und das Herz verriegelt?
Wie wünschtest du flehentlich
alle entsiegelt!

Some watchers at the tomb were less concerned about

resurrection than about the manner—not the physical manner, to be sure, but the spiritual one—in which the master had departed the earth. As everyone knew, he was the poet who had celebrated the dying of “one’s own death.” Now, the more critically minded among the faithful wanted to know, had Rilke managed to have his “own death,” not the “mass death,” the factory-like “hospital death,” for which he had expressed abhorrence in *Malte*? Also, as the readers of Rilke’s most recently published poetry had realized, he had become a poet of praise, “Rühmen, das ist!” Had he been able to praise death, too, as it approached him? Most of the mourners put these questions only rhetorically, in order to be able to answer them in the affirmative. Using what authorities we do not know, Stefan Zweig claimed in his Munich oration that: “auch dies Geheimnis seines Leidens, seines Krankseins, seines Sterbens, auch dies nahm er ganz in sich hinein, um es dichterhaft und schön zu gestalten, um auch dieses letzte und langvorbereitete Werk rein zu vollenden: seinen eigenen Tod.”³⁸ In his Frankfurt address which, in another passage, is valuable because it touches, however lightly, on the causes of the “Hölle” which had beset the dead poet,³⁹ Rudolf Alexander Schröder asserts that Rilke probably wanted to die, or, in the Baroque formula, *cupiebat dissolvi*. A poetess, Charlotte Schiel, proclaimed (in a way not seeming to brook contradiction) that Rilke was well acquainted with death, although in her next lines she may have been assailed by some small doubts about how gladly he accepted it when it came directly to him:

Trugst du nicht lächelnd seinen milden Glanz,
 in deines Lebens wandelbarer Schale
 wie Abendrot?⁴⁰

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The same picture, of a Rilke ready to die, was used much later by a poet of the same rank as Schiel, Heinz Winfred Sabais, in a cycle of three sonnets, "Abschied von Rilke," in which Rilke, growing tired of the earth, prepares himself for transfiguration:

dein bleicher Stern steht tief im Abendrot,
schon überstrahlt von hellerem Gestirne,
das sieghaft in der Kraft der Schöpfung loht.⁴¹

And a certain Heinrich Eduard Jacob, in a prose-poem printed in *Die Weltbühne* (1927), phrased it a shade differently, making the dying man more passive, at the end, than he had been in the lecture of Schroeder and the poems of Schiel and Sabais: "Den Lichtschatz von Formen, der Rilke hiess, hat die Natur zurückgezogen";⁴² while a poet named Laurenz Miedner, in his poem of farewell (the effect of which is spoiled somewhat by its being printed beside a corset-advertisement) claimed that:

In einer Rose lebst du jetzt verborgen,
im Funkeln eines edlen Steins, im Tod,
der liebend naht, im tiefen Blau, im Morgen.⁴³

Dead, Rilke is everywhere, not least in death itself, which he has evidently robbed of its sting—hymnal echoes again. In a remarkable book from 1929, *Die letzte Stunde*, Fritz Gross offered his highly imaginative essays on the deaths of famous men; he included Rilke in his collection.⁴⁴ Like Werner Milch before him, Gross decided that the poet had to die in his tower of Muzot, not in a sanatorium. We behold the dying man, carried out into the cold winter sun before the dark tower; he chats in a friendly fashion with his doctor, with the milkman and the mailman ("Auch mit dem Milchmann und dem Postboten sprach er gerne"). He enjoys "the miracle of a little brimstone

butterfly," a belated guest; he beholds the mountains and the coming evening, and wants to die, for he has seen, and sung of, all the world's beauties. (Gross cannot resist the temptation of making the mortal disease, which Rilke accepts so gladly, both Swiss and poetic: "Er wollte nicht mehr leben mit einer zerfetzten Lunge.") Rilke summons his friends, five of them, and they come; they include a princess (any poet worth his salt, and certainly Rilke, should die with a princess at his chairside) and a monk. (Is it Gross's implication that Rilke died with the consolation of faith, or is the monk simply an echo of *Das Stunden-Buch*?) The sun sinks, the butterfly disappears, and Rilke's last words—a great poet has to have last words—are: "Ich habe einen Schmetterling gesehn." For the pious mind versed in the German classics, the scene composed by Gross even contains reminiscences of the splendid last moments of those un-Rilkean ancients, Goethe's Götze and Schiller's Attinghausen; and its star-actor—that is the main point—accepts death gladly. Just the same, not everyone was quite convinced that Rilke had faced death with such serenity and composure. In a prose "Requiem" published in *Der Schacht* (1927), Dr. Hans Wessling asks, rather ambiguously: "Wie kam der Tod?"⁴⁵ Judging by the quotation from Rilke's own gruesome "Requiem" for Gretel Kottmeyer, a friend of Clara Westhoff, which Wessling appends to his question, he means: "Did death frighten Rilke as it approached?" (Did piety for the poet's memory keep Wessling from formulating his question clearly?) Death probably did *not* frighten Rilke, Wessling finally decides. "Der Tod kann nichts Überraschendes für ihn gehabt haben." Yet on the next page, Wessling comes back to his question again, only to placate himself a second time with a not altogether satisfying answer:

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“Jeder hat seinen eigenen Tod . . . Ob auch der Dichter das in sich spürte, als seine Stunde näherkam? Wir können uns es kaum anders vorstellen nach dem, was wir von ihm wissen.” By 1946, when Ernst Waldinger—an Austrian poet distinctly superior to many of the versifiers mentioned above—published his poem, “Rilke im Sterbejahr,” more *was* known of the circumstances of Rilke’s death; but, on the other hand, there had been plenty of opportunity for the further nurturing and distribution of legends as well. Apparently, Waldinger was not quite as ready as his predecessors had been to stifle the thought that Rilke had met death unwillingly; but even he would not express his doubts straight out:

Fühlst du, wie der Tod dich schon bezwingt?
Und du lächelst fort, als obs dich freue.⁴⁶

How, in fact, did Rilke’s “last year” end? When did it begin? What happened during it? None of these questions are answered easily. We know, of course, *when* it ended; and we have just examined some early reactions to the end. But these reactions were not the earliest, if we are to believe the tales of the *corpus legendarum*. We have been told that his death sent supersensory communications across the boundaries of Europe, long before telephone, telegram, and letter could spread the news. Helene von Nostitz realized, upon hearing of her friend’s death, that he (or his spirit) had made her sit down, a few hours before, to read the lines—for the first time, she says, something very hard to believe in the case of so warm an admirer—which conclude *Das Buch der Bilder*: “Der Tod ist gross. | Wir sind die Seinen | lachenden Munds.” (She misquotes a key phrase, substituting “lächelnden” for Rilke’s “lachenden”—a bad error, since Rilke’s “laugh-

ing" implies criticism of those who, unmindful of death, allow themselves to be caught unaware by it, while Nostitz's "smiling"—which has a favorable connotation, by the way, in Rilke's standard usage, as opposed to the pejorative air with which Rilke surrounds laughter—makes the lines mean that we must accept death gladly, or at least serenely.⁴⁷ Is this her reply, given unconsciously, to the question posed by some of the obituary-literature?) On an estate in distant Bohemia, Magda von Hattingberg, the pianist whom Rilke once thought of marrying, was awakened early on the morning of December 29 by a sudden outcry; she said a prayer and fell asleep again. "In dieser Stunde aber war Rainer Maria Rilke gestorben."⁴⁸ In Denmark (and in considerably more modest circumstances than Frau von Nostitz and Frau von Hattingberg), Inga Junghanns, the Danish translator of Malte, had a strangely similar experience, which she described to the present writer thirty years later.⁴⁹ And in Paris, Lou Albert-Lasard, who had been Rilke's great and good friend during the war-years in Munich, woke up suddenly—like Magda—and began to weep, she knew not why. Unlike Magda, though, Loulou (as Rilke had liked to call her) could not go back to sleep, perhaps because she had not said a prayer.⁵⁰ Later that morning she learned that Rilke was dead. These narrations should be compared with that of another lady, Marie von Thurn und Taxis. She tells us that she had no premonition of Rilke's death at all—she had last seen him at Ragaz the previous summer, and was planning to invite him to visit her in Rome, since she knew that he intended to make a trip southward during the winter of 1926-27. Coming home from a walk on the afternoon of December 30, she found a telegram from a mutual friend, the philosopher Rudolf Kassner, which

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contained a report of the death.⁵¹ The accounts of Rilke's less ecstatic friends are those best used by anyone interested in finding out what happened during his last year; it will be understood, however, that legends attached themselves with special speed to the final phase of his life, wrapping the facts in an encrustation still thicker than is the case for the rest of his existence.

Certainly, Rilke himself encouraged legend-making with his "last will and testament," which he sent to the closest and best friend of his Swiss years, Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, on October 27, 1925. The date may be used as an appropriate opening of the "last year," on the assumption—let us make it for a moment, at any rate—that, foreseeing his death as early as fourteen months before it took place, Rilke decided to put his house in order. The document is a strange one, beginning with the oddly clumsy and quasi-legal jargon of the title: "Einige persönliche Bestimmungen für den Fall einer mich mir mehr oder weniger enteignenden Krankheit," i.e.,⁵² "Some personal requests in the event of an illness which puts me more or less out of control of myself," or literally, ". . . which more or less dispossess me of myself." The contents are concerned with the following points: that "priestly assistance" should be kept away "if I should have a serious illness effecting my mind" (doctors are bad enough, he goes on to say); where in Switzerland he would like *not* to be buried (Sierre and Miège) and where he *would* like to be buried (Raron); what sort of tombstone he wanted (an "authentic one in Empire style," since he "detests the geometric arts of modern stonemasons"), to be ornamented with the family scutcheon, of which he was so proud, and an inscription, of which he provided the text (it was, of course,

the three-line poem, beginning "Rose, reiner Widerspruch," later to be interpreted in so many ways). The earlier inscription on the antique stone, was, naturally, to be removed beforehand.⁵⁸ These details out of the way, Rilke went on to his effects and chattels. The "furniture and objects" at Muzot—save family pictures, which shall go to his daughter—are to be disposed of by Nanny Wunderly-Volkart and her cousin, Werner Reinhart, the owner of the chateau. The publication of his letters should be allowed, in the event the Insel-Verlag proposes it. And he considers, finally, none of the pictures of him as valid, save those in the thoughts and feelings of particular friends.

The tone of the will ranges from the nastily and brilliantly satirical (Rilke could have made his stipulation about pastoral aid without using the phrase "spiritual middlemen," "geistliche Zwischenhändler") past the expectedly solemn to the coy—which we find in the statement that he does not wish to be buried at Miège, lest the spirit of Isabel de Chevron, Muzot's ghost, begin to walk again. There is—if we remember how sensitive to the rights and privileges of the dead Rilke had often shown himself to be in his poems—a measure of selfishness in the stipulation that the earlier inscription be removed from the tombstone chosen for his grave; he also turns out to be inconsiderate of the rights of the correspondents whose letters *to him* he had so carefully preserved: what is to become of these documents, we wonder, and whatever confessions they may contain? Why no statement that they are to be returned to their authors? We cannot keep ourselves from thinking that Rilke has worried very little about others in his will (although a will is supposed, in the last analysis, to provide for those who are left be-

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hind); nor can we help thinking that the testator dwells overmuch on certain details which contribute to the dramatic effect his grave will make: the special location, at some distance from Muzot, the special tombstone, which will obliterate someone else's memory forever. One of Rilke's biographers says that "the whole testament is a worthy mirror of [his] personality. . .utterly unmaterialistic."⁵⁴ The rejoinder could be made that it might seem to some readers to be very materialistic indeed, or at least the work of an unusually self-centered man.

Perhaps, though, such sharp rejoinders are too hard on Rilke. It may be that he had not thought too carefully about some practical aspects of his departure from earth, and that he was in a hurry to get the unpleasant job of writing the will over; in this case, the document could be called an improvisation, which would account for the apparent callousness of portions of it. The fact that he, the poet, does not mention the disposal of his manuscripts at all would argue for the theory of hasty composition. No one likes to compose a will, no one likes to think of his death as immediate. Or, possibly, he could not quite bring himself to believe that he would die: it *is* a bitter pill to swallow, and while we may enjoy our phantasies about the splendid situation of our grave, we still cannot wholly accept the fact that we shall have ceased to exist. However concerned Rilke may have been about his tombstone, his failure to provide for his manuscripts, the monument outlasting bronze, would indicate his inability to take the final step—to comprehend that there would be a world without himself in it. The jocularities of portions of the document, particularly the passage about the ghost of Isabel, has, surely, a sound of whistling in the graveyard, of wanting to disguise the worst.

Yet what is oddest in the will is the element we sense in the title and the first paragraph: that Rilke was afraid of losing his mind. It is almost as if he began by arguing one line (what would become of him if he were still alive but no longer in control of himself), then changed to another—what should happen in the event of his death. The transition lies in the implication that he will be irrational in the last stages of an illness which then will kill him. Four days after putting his will on paper, he wrote a letter to that person on earth who probably knew his secrets best of all, Lou Andreas-Salomé. It was the first time he had written to her in almost a year—they had agreed, more than two decades before, that they would communicate with one another only in times of greatest need, a clause of which Rilke, at one time and another, made the most liberal interpretation. The letter of October 31, 1925, has been printed in Ernst Pfeiffer's edition with a number of omissions,⁵⁵ holes to be filled in, partly, by a careful reading of what Lou Andreas-Salomé has to say about Rilke in the journal of her training with Freud.⁵⁶ The letter does not mention the possibility of Rilke's death. Instead, it tells how its author has lived, for the past two years, "mehr und mehr in der Mitte eines Schreckens. Es ist ein entsetzlicher Cirkel, ein Kreis böser Magie, der mich einschliesst wie in ein Breughel'sches Höllenbild." And: "Untergraben wie meine treue Natur jetzt ist, durch die Dauer und den Wahnsinn der Heimsuchung, genügt diese alles überwiegende Angst, um mich mir nun ständig zu enteignen." We have seen the final phrase before; it appeared on the envelope which contained his will: "Einige persönliche Bestimmungen für den Fall *einer mich mir mehr oder weniger enteignenden Krankheit*" [*italics added*]. He had hoped that his sudden trip

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to Paris, by the very change of scene, "would tear him away from the rhythm of the crazy temptation" ("dem Rhythmus der unsinnigen Versuchung entreissen"). But, alas, victory did not come nor even relief. "Stell Dir vor, dass die Besessenheit [. . . .] stärker war, mächtiger, als Paris;"⁸⁷ if he had remained in Paris longer than he at first had planned, then it was "out of shame at returning to [his] tower as the same ensnared person" he had been when he left it—returning to the tower, "in dessen völliger Abgeschiedenheit, wie ich befürchtete, diese mesquinen Teufel erst recht ihr Spiel mit mir übertreiben würden." After this confession, Rilke went on to tell his correspondent about certain symptoms of physical illness, nodules on the inside of his lips, which had appeared during the month of September just past.

The ugly situation was this: over the past two years, Rilke had suffered from two sets of afflictions, of which only the medical expert may say whether they are connected or not: the symptoms of the myeloid leucemia which killed him (exhaustion, the appearance of blisters in the various mucous membranes) and the indulgence in a personal and individual vice which, to judge by both what Lou Andreas-Salomé and certain of the works (particularly *Malte*) tell us, had been his occasional torment since childhood. He connected the habit with his physical illness, perhaps regarding the latter as a punishment for the former—an attitude, then, which may be a residue of the threats of punishment he had heard, once upon a time, from his parents, threats written about circumspectly in *Malte* and described (according to the report in Lou Andreas-Salomé's *In der Schule bei Freud*) in considerable detail to his sometime mistress and mother-confessor. In this "circle of evil magic," he thought—and

who can blame him—that he was losing his mind, a fear he had entertained at different times during his life, after the second Russian trip with Lou, for example, and during his “Wendung” crisis of 1912. Haemmerli, his physician at Val-Mont, appears to have tried to talk him out of these notions of crime and punishment, according to what Rilke tells Lou in this letter of Halloween Eve, 1925; and Lou herself, in her reply, follows Haemmerli’s course, poking gentle and helpfully meant fun at the notion that “es sei doch alles irgendwie selbstverschuldet und hinge mit der ‘teuflischen Besessenheit’ zusammen” (p. 502: December 12, 1925).

Whether Lou succeeded in soothing Rilke, we do not know; they did not correspond again until he wrote to her from his deathbed, and the subject was one he discussed with no one save her, Dr. Haemmerli, and, perhaps (there is no available epistolary evidence) Frau Wunderly-Volkart. Lou’s last words in her reply to the confession were: “Nichts ist da Schuld; das *íslomáj*⁵⁸ wird nachlassen, wenn Du es ganz tief weisst: Dir vertrauend, Lieber, Lieber!” Her answer was written on December 12, 1925; Rilke had hesitated for a month-and-a-half before mailing his confession to her, so shocking were its contents. What must be remembered, in our present argument of the confession-episode is this: that Rilke was more immediately afraid, at the time of writing his will, of madness than of death. Or, let us say, madness was something which he could imagine, and which he could discuss, at least with his closest confidante, while death was something almost too bad to be contemplated at all. Yet it still lurks in the background, connected with the fear of a disgraceful, an humiliating insanity: mad or dead, one would not be in control of one’s self.

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The reader of *Malte* will recall how the sexual anxieties which beset the lonely Dane in Paris are transformed, so often, into fear of death, or, more precisely, they may be reduced to it.

The Rilke who had addressed his will to a trusted friend, Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, and who had confessed his fears to a still more trusted one, Lou Andreas-Salomé, spent the remainder of the autumn of 1925 battering the hatches against a bad time: his fiftieth birthday, about which he had been talking and worrying for some years past, was upon him. The thought of growing old had long terrified Rilke, who had such great admiration for and understanding of the young, of children, girls, and youths; turning 25, he had written:

Dies schien mir lang wie eine Art von Tod:
das Nicht-mehr-Jüngling-Sein von Angesicht;
auf sanfte schmale Wangen presst sich dicht
die Männermaske, bartig, hart und rot.⁵⁹

Now, almost fifty, he took refuge in forced joking of the variety to be found in the Isabel-passage of his will: "Wie gern wär ich unter diesem Geburtstag unbemerkt durchgekrochen";⁶⁰ and the smiling mask is dropped when, in the same letter, he speaks of "dieser für mich bangen Zeit." He did not enjoy, to be sure, all the congratulatory fuss, modest as he was in such matters; but in his words there also lies his utter dismay at the celebration of a—for him—genuinely terrible event. Can it be a coincidence that he had made a practice of entering Val-Mont just before or immediately after his birthday, December 4? In 1923, he had made his first acquaintance with the hospital on December 29, staying there until January 20, 1924. He had appeared at Val-Mont's gates

a second time on November 24, 1924, and celebrated his forty-ninth birthday there, not emerging until January 8, 1925, when he made his break for Paris. And, in late 1925, he went into the hospital on December 21, staying until the end of May. His last stay in the hospital began on November 30, 1926.

The longest of his stays in the sanatorium, from December, 1925, through May, 1926, was interrupted by little trips here and there: in April he paid a brief visit to Muzot, to see after the repair of a dangerous flaw in the fireplace, and in May he was in Lausanne, visiting with the French man-of-letters, Edmond Jaloux. During these Val-Mont months, he also had a good many trips in the planning stage: on January 11, he told Marie von Thurn und Taxis that he had been considering a flight to Rome, like the escape to Paris he had undertaken the previous year; in May he told Kippenberg, his publisher, that he was looking forward to a trip to Milan and Venice. Neither of these trips was carried out, because of the precarious state of Rilke's health, just as it was his health which kept him from moving directly into Muzot again in June—he preferred to stay in the comfort of the Hotel Bellevue at Sierre. Nonetheless, his health was not bad enough to keep him from receiving visitors or writing poetry; in this month he composed the great fragment of elegy for the Russian poetess, Marina Zwetajewa-Efron. In July, Rilke traveled to Zürich, and from there, in the company of Frau Wunderly-Volkart, went on to the spa of Ragaz, in the Grisons, where Marie von Thurn und Taxis was waiting for him. This was Rilke's third visit to what he liked to call the Biedermeier watering-place; he had been there in the summer of 1924, when he wrote his poem-cycle "Im Kirchhof zu Ragaz Niedergeschrie-

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benes," and again, briefly, in the late summer and early fall of 1925, when his belated arrival gave him the occasion for one of those typical Rilkean descriptions, compounded of pleasure, malaise, and maliciousness: he found "*hélas*, einen vorherbstlichen Ort, dem bei noch voll belaubten Bäumen die Augen zufallen."⁶¹ Since, this time in 1926, Princess Marie had been advised to look for a "Kurort" with a higher altitude, she left Ragaz and Rilke shortly, to go on to Vienna and then to the Semmering. It had been their last meeting. Rilke had seemed to her to be in a by no means bad condition. Although he often spoke to her "with deep discouragement" about the state of his health, his appearance gave her every hope for his complete recovery. She had been his friend long enough to take his complaints with a grain of salt: besides, he was full of energy, reading aloud to her, recalling the old days in Duino, and even, one moonlit night, reciting one of his great set-pieces about himself—the tale of how he wrote the *Cornet*. She must have heard it before.

Throughout August, Rilke stayed on at Ragaz. He enjoyed himself, having inherited some of the Princess's elegant acquaintances, including the caricature of an Austrian nobleman, Graf Karl Lanckoroński, the mark for some pointed remarks in Rilke's letters but also the recipient of one of the last of his German-language poems, the one opening "'Nicht Geist, nicht Inbrunst wollen wir entbehren.'" (The most unforgettable part of the poem belongs, unhappily, not to Rilke but to the count, who, a dabbler in verse, made himself immortal with the seven words which Rilke quotes in his first line.) Rilke also had friends nearby, at Castle Salenegg near Maienfeld, and for them he wrote another set of dedica-

tory verses, "Die Weide von Salenegg," in which he described the renewal of the castle's ancient willow: a root, sprung from the crown of the old tree, had grown downward through the rotten trunk and given it new life. Both poems are, in a word, affirmative; the Lanckoroński poem says yes to both life and death, the poem to the family Gugelberg von Moos, which owned Salenegg, tells of how "wonderful things breathed in the poverty of decay":

Dies vollzog sich dennoch. Wunderbares
atmete im Armsein des Verfalls;
heimlich stieg die Stimme jedes Jahres
innen auf und stärkte diesen Hals.

(*SW*, II, 276)

And Rilke himself felt strengthened at Ragaz, whose very waters he celebrated in an octave of hexameters: the waters are but an expression of abundant nature herself:

doch wie ergänzt sie uns schön, wenn sie uns einmal bekräftigt:
rein, aus der Tiefe hervor, stimmt sie uns Zögernden zu.

(*SW*, II, 274)

The German poet of late Humanism, Paulus Melissus Schede, has an ode celebrating the garden-spring of none other than Good Queen Bess; in it he likewise sings abundantly of abundance:

O argenteolis lucide rivulis
Fons et frigidulis limpide glareis
Ecquae Nympha loci te gelido cavae
Rupis ab antro
Limphis tam riguis elicit uberem?

What Melissus Schede wants from the overflowing spring is, in fact, money; Queen Elizabeth will surely reward

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him for his celebration of her nymph-like qualities, Rilke, on the other hand, wants a reward much harder to come by—a little more of the vital strength of life—and he seems to have got it.

A book could be written, were the sources open, on the amours of Rilke's last years; the whole tale can scarcely be pieced together from the blissfully ignorant or carefully restrained pages of the biographies thus far available. The "Ode an Bellman" and the seven phallic hymns⁶² may well mark the turning point in Rilke's life; from 1915 on, he appears to have lived up to, or to have tried to live up to, what Princess Marie once said: that Don Juan was an orphan boy in comparison with him. There exists the very good possibility, to be sure, that Rilke had talked a monkish game and played an altogether different one long before he announced his sexual program, encouraged, among other things, by such disparate stimuli as Lou Albert-Lasard and the songs of the great Swedish anacreontic poet, sung by a Danish lady, Inga Junghanns. How much of the gallant chronicle has to do with actual encounters, and how much is erethism on paper (such was surely the case with Erika Mitterer, the partner in an exchange of *heroides*)—this can probably never be determined; we certainly do not have the time to determine it here. What we must remember is that Rilke—not the ascetic, not the monk of his obituaries at all—liked to surround himself with young girls; he wrote to them, they visited him, he engaged them as secretaries (Marga Wertheimer of 1924 and Génia Tschernosvitow of 1926 are cases in point) and as housekeepers—Frieda Baumgartner, whose departure from Muzot in October, 1925, contributed to Rilke's practical miseries during that month, was in her twenties.

These interests did not subside during Rilke's last summer; as Eudo C. Mason, one of the most knowledgeable of our Rilke scholars, has put it: "Above all, however, he sought distraction from his anxieties and restoration of his zest for life in the company of young girls."⁶³ A look at the poems written in Ragaz will tell something about his activities on this front. Beppy Veder, a Dutch art student, received a letter talking about "our hour alone"; Rilke probably also intended the following lines of verse for her, since they resemble a passage in the letter:

Da mit dem ersten Händereichen schon
 hast du dich rein mir in die Hand gegeben:
 so hört man in dem ersten Orgelton
 das ganze Lied sich unaufhaltsam heben.
 (SW, II, 509-510)

And there is no doubt that Alice Bürer did get a poem which has a sound of Opitz's "Komm, Liebste, lass uns eilen," or Carew's "Then (Celia) let us reap our joys|Ere time such goodly fruit destroys." Or, let us say, it sounds as if the impatient lover's prayer had already been heard, save for the formal mode of address:

Wie waren Sie im Recht, dem Wunsche nachzugeben,
 von meiner eignen Hand beschenkt zu sein!
 Vielzuviel Zögern unterbricht das Leben:
 singt einer auf, so stimmt der Andre ein.
 (SW, II, 278)

And, in French, Isabel Trümpy received lines dedicated:

À ces moments si beaux
 avant les paroles et entre . . .
 (chacun si près de ce centre
 où il faut à peine des mots).
 (SW, II, 683)

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Rilke's biographers have been hesitant about discussing these young ladies, so tangible on the one hand, yet so difficult to identify (beyond their names) on the other. They have preferred to concentrate their attention upon a single figure, an exotic Egyptian to be mentioned below. Either they race past them without stopping, eager to maintain the picture of a moribund Rilke, or else they transform them into something a good deal nobler (in the biographer's opinion) than the pretty and, we hope, entertaining girls they were; Mason, discreet and brief though his is, has come closest to the truth about Rilke's amusements. Transformation is the technique followed by Nora Wydenbruck in her popular biography, *Rilke: Man and Poet* (1949). At first glance, Wydenbruck seems a happy foreshadowing of Mason; for she has the nerve to mention Beppy Veder (without, however, trying to find out who she was), and utters the suspicion that (as she says): "the world of the living was beckoning to [Rilke] and displaying its evanescent charm."⁶⁴ But then she goes on to provide a classic example of how wishful thinking has served to de-humanize the poet. Having voiced her shocking suspicion, she proceeds to ennoble it. "He was immensely impressed by a child he met at that time—the thirteen-year-old son of a Belgian family. Edmond Jaloux, to whom he spoke about it when he met him later in Lausanne, stated that Rilke had praised this child as one of the most perfect creatures he had ever seen, beautiful, wise, mature, a born poet. . . . He said that he trembled to think of the boy's future, for what would the cruelty of everyday life make of this pure being? This episode seems somehow fraught with a symbolical, mystical meaning. . ."⁶⁵ It all sounds splendid, and summons up images of Rilke's

own unhappy boyhood, of Vergil's savior child, of the establishment of a dynasty of poet-princes, even of Thomas Mann's little Nepomuk Scheidewein—*Doktor Faustus* had appeared two years before the publication of Wydenbruck's book. Nevertheless, the investigator who noses through the unprinted correspondence from the last Ragaz summer may begin to think that the place was overrun with Belgians, since, in a letter to Nanny Wunderly-Volkart from July 31, 1926, Rilke mentions, with obvious (although perhaps not particularly noble) enthusiasm: "la petite Belge (ravissante)!"⁶⁶ Made curious, the investigator will look up what apparently (from a reference made later on in her paragraph) was Wydenbruck's source, the opening of a chapter called "Le dernier été" in the well-known book by Rilke's French translator, Maurice Betz, *Rilke vivant* (1937), of which a German translation, *Rilke in Frankreich*, appeared the next year. There, in the French original, Betz tells the story of a marvelous girl-child whom Rilke had described to Jaloux in more or less the terms Wydenbruck had paraphrased.⁶⁷ The next step is to find out where Jaloux told the story: he told it in a dialogue with Jean Cassou, printed in the *Bibliothèque universelle et Revue de Genève* for 1930.⁶⁸ There the little being steps forth in more detail; it had won Rilke's heart by saying to him: "Vous avez l'air d'une licorne." And it was an adolescent girl—Rilke had become acquainted with a family composed of three Belgian women, from three generations: the youngest was thirteen and doubtless "la petite Belge (ravissante)" mentioned in the letter to Nanny. Betz, somewhat pious toward Rilke, had subdued the possible erotic note in Jaloux's account by speaking only of "une enfant"; the feminine "enfant" became the neuter "das

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Kind" of the German translation. We may assume that Wydenbruck had the German translation before her, and wishful thinking made her turn the "child" into a boy—a spiritual successor to the dying poet, in an episode "fraught with a symbolical, mystical meaning." The episode does have a meaning, of course; as he had sought solace and stimulus from adult young women, so, in this case, he thought the same things—here no doubt quite platonically, and filled with the admiration he catalogued for Jaloux—from a girl on the brink of growing up. And the mode of its telling by Betz and then by Wydenbruck proves once again how ready workers in the Rilkean vineyard have been, quite without being aware of it, to clip away his humanity.

There was, by the way, a genuine boy to be found in the last days of Rilke, Henri Gaspard, a poor youth from the neighborhood of Muzot. Rilke liked him, because of his pleasant intelligence, and felt sorry for him, because he had to work when he should have been in school; the poet persuaded his patron, Werner Reinhart, to pay for Henri's education. In his last letter to Reinhart, from November 11, 1926, he writes: "Ich freue mich für Henri."⁶⁹ It was not the only case of this sort in Rilke's life. But poor Henri (like others before him) was unfortunate in having no "poetic" qualities about him; simply a nice, deserving little fellow, he has fallen into limbo, to be replaced by a Belgian boy who never was.

After Ragaz, Rilke went on to Lausanne-Ouchy, where he visited a Viennese family named Weininger; he saw Jaloux again, crossed the lake to the French side, there to chat with Valéry, who was staying at Anthy, and wrote almost the last of his poetry. Jaloux tells us that he had not the slightest premonition that anything

was amiss with Rilke;⁷⁰ the latter talked of spending the coming winter at Toulon, near the sea, making Jaloux suspect that he was ready to bid farewell once and for all to the loneliness of Muzot. Valéry got the same impressions, both about Rilke's intentions and the state of his health: "Je ne l'avais jamais trouvé si bien portant."⁷¹ But Frau Wunderly-Volkart, in her letter to still another friend of Rilke, Gudi Nölke, about the poet's death, reported that he had been struck by a nameless fear during these happy Lausanne days: "... 'Dieses Jahr endet schlecht für mich'. . . .'"⁷² We do not know her source for this observation; she herself was not present. She came to Sierre on September 23, and found the poet in the dining room of the Hotel Bellevue: "so elend, so ängstlich, bleich und wie nach einer schweren Krankheit sah er aus." During the first weeks of October, Rilke evidently lived at Muzot, making frequent trips to Sierre in the company of his new secretary, Génia Tschernosvitow, who was taking down his translations of Valéry's *Eupalinos*, *L'Ame et la danse*, the three *Narcisse* fragments, and *Tante Berthe*. Muzot was the scene, at any rate, of the accident which is traditionally used by his biographers to mark the beginning of the end: the injury to his fingers while plucking roses in Muzot's garden.

The temptation to connect his death with the flower he loved most is difficult to resist, and few have tried to resist it. Katharina Kippenberg speaks of "eine Verletzung vom Dorn einer Rose, die ihrem Sänger und Freunde besser hätte vergelten sollen,"⁷³ while Christiane Osann puts the burden on a lizard (presumably her invention) which, searching for "die letzten wärmenden Strahlen der Herbstsonne,"⁷⁴ distracted him as he snipped

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away at the (now exculpated) roses. Even the hard-hearted E. M. Butler terms the event that "strange and fatal accident which precipitated his death."⁷⁵ Rilke himself, however, did not attach nearly as much importance to the accident as have his biographers, and the careful Dr. Haemmerli does not mention it in his report.⁷⁶ Instead of stylizing the details of the accident, and telling of the misadventure again and again, Rilke mentions it in only one available letter, to his publisher Kippenberg, from October 27,⁷⁷ where he tells of its having befallen him some time ago (Génia Tschernovitsow says it happened at the end of September);⁷⁸ he also says that the wound was only to his left hand, the right hand was put out of commission by an infection of the fingernail. This in itself may be the reason for his failure to write about the accident; he was, quite simply, unable to maintain his usual epistolary productivity while his hands were bandaged. Yet, if he had deemed the accident important enough, he could have dictated letters to his waiting secretary. Just the same, the story was quickly spread among his friends; by October 27, Baladine Klossowska had heard the news from Rudolf Kassner, although with the accents rearranged. Rilke had planned to come to Paris, but (she reports to Rilke): "[Kassner] m'a raconté ce que vous arrive, que vous deviez être ici Samedi et qu'une névrite vous empêche, que vos pauvres mains sont bandées."⁷⁹ He had, in fact, been well enough for an overnight trip to Lausanne with Génia on October 12 and 13, to see Jacques Copeau in *L'Illusion*, and, again, he went down to Sion on the 15th. By the time Rilke got around to writing letters once more, at the end of October, the rose story was not important to him at all; what concerned

him was a proposed trip to Toulon and the "intestinal flu" which had kept him in bed at the Bellevue, whither he had moved after his accident. Writing to Maurice Betz on October 29, he tells about the "flu" but does not mention the roses at all; he devotes the body of his letter to Betz's new novel, *Le démon impur*, and to the issue of *Les cahiers du mois*, "Reconnaissance à Rilke," assembled by Betz and his friends.⁸⁰ In other words: what became another episode "fraught with symbolical, mystical meaning" for his biographers, had been, for Rilke, a painful and discommodious event, an inconvenience.

However, the plucking of the roses and its unfortunate aftermath were not enough in themselves. An ancillary episode was added to the story: the lovely Egyptian for whom Rilke picked the flower. As H. F. Peters puts it, with simple eloquence: "A year after he had written his testament, the exotic Egyptian beauty, Madame Eloui Bey, came to Muzot to pay her respects to the poet she loved. In accordance with his chivalrous nature, Rilke wanted to present her with a bouquet of roses. As he went into his garden to cut them he hurt his hand on a thorn."⁸¹ When did Madame Nimet Eloui Bey enter the story? Maurice Betz, writing in 1937, tells about a remarkable Oriental beauty who attracted Rilke during the last days of the last summer; he gives as his source the unpublished reminiscences of another of Rilke's French friends, André Germain.⁸² In fact, Germain published his memories of Rilke the same year, in an article in the *Revue française de Prague*, where he told about Eloui Bey without naming her, and the "fatal picking" of the roses. In 1941, both Butler in her biography and Maurice Zermatten in *Les années valaisannes de Rilke*, repeated the tale;⁸³ in 1942, Edmond

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Jaloux, in *Rilke et la France*, a collection of essays and tributes by various hands, told it once again, in connection with his printing of a late, late letter by Rilke to Eloui Bey (who is not named, however), postmarked December 22, 1926. The letter does not mention the rose-episode, but Jaloux does, calling it a "légende. . . mais legende en quelque sorte nécessaire."⁸⁴ Then, in 1949, Jaloux published a little book about "the last friendship" of Rainer Maria Rilke,⁸⁵ widely disseminated both in its French original and its English translation, in which he told the whole story over again, revealing Madame Eloui Bey's name at last, and adding the interesting detail that Rilke liked to ride in the Egyptian's car but got frightened at her reckless driving. Since then, the tale has been unshakeably established as a part of the *corpus legendarum*, and such a sober and excellent workman as J. F. Angelloz retells it as if it had happened, beyond question.⁸⁶ As a matter of fact, it has become so popular that Barnaby Conrad includes it, not quite appropriately, under the Rilke-entry in his compendium, *Famous Last Words*.⁸⁷ But the question remains: is it really true, or simply another attempt at transfiguration? And why has so much attention been paid to it, and so little to the fact that Rilke had a devoted (but, save that she was Russian, not especially exotic) secretary at his side during the last months, for whom he also plucked roses—and who found him pacing the floor of his hotel room at Sierre one evening; he greeted her with the words: " 'Je n'en peux plus, je n'en peux plus. . . et aucun médecin du monde ne pourra me soulager'."⁸⁸

On November 30, Génia accompanied Rilke to Val-Mont; it was a repetition of those birthday flights of the three previous years, but this time Rilke was

suffering severe pain, and would not return to Muzot. The external events of the last weeks of Rilke's life are fairly well documented; what remains mysterious is the poet's own attitude toward what was taking place. During the first week, until December 9, Rilke was under the care of a new physician, a Dr. von Schultheiss; his regular physician, Dr. Haemmerli, was in Berlin at a medical congress. Upon his return, Haemmerli diagnosed Rilke's disease as acute leucemia. Frau Wunderly-Volkart, who had received both a partially despairing letter (written on December 8) from Rilke and a telephone call from Dr. Haemmerli, hastened to Val-Mont, where she remained until Rilke's death, save for a quick trip home to Meilen over Christmas Day. His other attendants were a nurse, "eine reizende Krankenschwester" according to Frau Wunderly, or "une simple infirmière de Lausanne" in the somewhat more condescending description of the attending physician; and Génia, who paid Rilke two visits from Lausanne. Although no one else mentions her, Rudolf Kassner reports that Clara Rilke appeared in Sierre, "doch er wollte sie, Aufregung fürchtend, nicht sehen."⁸⁹ (In a letter from sometime in November, not dated but written from Sierre, Rilke said to Frau Wunderly-Volkart that, if Clara did appear, he would immediately flee over the nearest frontier.) Dr. Haemmerli tells us that his patient spent the last week of his life lying with eyes closed, but conscious, his mind clear, despite a constant fever of 40 degrees (about 104 degrees Fahrenheit). He fell into a deep sleep at 3:00 on the afternoon of December 28, and slept until midnight; then he entered a comatose state. At 3:30 in the morning he lifted his head slightly, his eyes open, and fell back dead into Dr. Haemmerli's arms.

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A simply and moving story, then—but not quite as simple as it seems. It contains a number of contradictions, as J. R. von Salis has remarked near the end of his book on Rilke's Swiss years,⁹⁰ contradictions which Salis does not resolve in an altogether satisfying manner. A first question arises concerning the use of drugs during Rilke's last illness. In his book of 1927, Jaloux states categorically that Rilke refused to allow his physician to give him injections, "piqûres," saying: "Non, laissez-moi mourir de ma mort, à moi. Je ne veux pas de la mort des médecins'."⁹¹ This statement has been accepted by most biographers, with their urge to deification. Heerikhuizen says. "Although he suffered great pain, he utterly refused drugs;"⁹² and Osann: "Aber trotz seiner entsetzlichen Schmerzen. . .lehnte er schmerzstillende Mittel oder gar Narkotika ab. Bewusst wollte er sein schweres Leiden haben!"⁹³ A contradiction to this image of an unbelievably heroic Rilke has been provided both by the doctor and Frau Wunderly-Volkart (in her report to Gudi Nölke):⁹⁴ in accordance with his request, he was given sufficient sedatives ("calmants") to assuage his pains without making him lose consciousness—a request, it would seem quite in keeping with the human Rilke whose presence we suspect behind the mask his celebrants have constructed. He did not trust doctors (Dr. Haemmerli tells how he had to hear a recital of Rilke's unflattering old theories about physicians and medicine from the poet as he lay on his deathbed), and wanted to know what they were doing to him; also—and here we approach a second and major contradiction of the last days—sleep induced by narcotics was very close to death, a little death indeed, and death was something Rilke did not want to be reminded of as he lay dying. Dr.

Haemmerli, who had no reason to make up tales, wrote to Marie von Thurn und Taxis that: "La pensée de mourir lui était tellement terrible qu'il l'écartait au point de ne jamais même demander de quelle maladie il souffrait et pas une seule fois il n'a parlé de la possibilité de sa mort, bien que, chaque jour, quand j'étais tout seul avec lui—ce qu'il demandait—nous parlions très intimement de son état et de ses amis."⁹⁵ And, near the beginning of the same report: "La mort était parmi les problèmes de son oeuvre et pourtant l'idée de devoir s'en aller si jeune lui était inacceptable et il ne le croyait pas possible peut-être même jusqu'au dernier jour de sa maladie." At Rilke's request, Haemmerli had written to Lou Andreas-Salomé about her friend's illness; there, Haemmerli had spoken of "eine ernste Gefahr, deren Wissen er nicht erträgt."⁹⁶ The physician begged Lou to help him keep up the patient's spirits—at this time, Haemmerli still thought that he might save him: "dass Sie als wahre Freundin vermögen, trotz allem in unserm armen Kranken den Lebenswillen und die Hoffnung zu erhalten, die für jetzt nicht erschüttert sind,—dem Kranken die Diagnose zu sagen, scheint mir in diesem Moment gefährlich."

Haemmerli's words have upset a good many authors of books on Rilke; Lou Andreas-Salomé, who knew the patient very well, does not appear to have been shocked by them at all: "Täglich trug ich mich mit dem Gedanken, ob er um sein Sterben wisse," she wrote to Nanny Wunderly-Volkart.⁹⁷ As a matter of fact, Haemmerli has been given as hard a time by the dead Rilke's admirers as he was by the living poet. Christiane Osann attacks the physician, mocking his astonishment at Rilke's unwillingness to mention his death—according to her, Rilke

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simply did not want to profane "die grossen Geheimnisse" by discussing them with a mere doctor.⁹⁸ In his little biography, Werner Kohlschmidt, after repeating the story of Rilke's refusal to take "betäubende Mittel," declares that Rilke did not want to be deprived of his "eigenen Tod"—the notion is based, of course, upon Jaloux's "quotation" of Rilke's words about not wishing to die the death of doctors.⁹⁹ And Hans Egon Holthusen interprets Rilke's refusal to talk about death from the other side: the death he *was* dying was *not* his "own death," and that is why he did not wish to discuss it with poor Haemmerli.¹⁰⁰ There is, to be sure, one important bit of evidence in support of these accusatory explanations of Rilke's failure to face up to the possibility of his death. J. R. von Salis reproduced it in part; the publication of Rilke's correspondence with Gudi Nölke at last provided a whole text.¹⁰¹ In the account of Rilke's death which Frau Wunderly-Volkart sent to Frau Nölke, and which is appended to the correspondence, the former says that Rilke cried out to her: "'Liebe, helfen Sie mir zu meinem Tod, ich will nicht den Tod der Ärzte—ich will meine Freiheit haben,'" and "'ich kenne [den Tod] ja so gut'" and "'das Leben kann mir nichts mehr geben—ich war auf allen Höhen.'" This last outcry, quoted by Salis in the first edition of his book on Rilke's Swiss years (from 1936: p. 200), has become a special favorite: Katharina Kippenberg uses it, as does Osann.¹⁰² Salis remarks that there is no reason to doubt what Frau Wunderly-Volkart says.¹⁰³ Still, it must not be forgotten that, a week before writing to Frau Nölke, the devoted friend had sent a report on the death scene to Marie von Thurn und Taxis (February 9, 1927). In it, she quotes none of the dying Rilke's statements about life and death; instead, she says:

“aber da alles in seinem Leben Sinn hatte, wird auch sein Sterben richtig sein für ihn.”¹⁰⁴ In her admirable and inculpable love for the departed, did she give—doubtless without being aware of it—the report to Gudi Nölke a justificatory cast?

Rilke's own letters from the last weeks of his life indicate, to put it bluntly, that his mind had not opened its doors to the possibility of extinction. In his last letter to Regina Ullmann, written on November 25, when he was already very ill, he tells her that he will do something more to help her—she had just received a small stipend from Georg Reinhart, the brother of Rilke's Maecenas—as soon as he feels better.¹⁰⁵ On December 3, he wrote another letter to Princess Marie Gagarine, a Ragaz friend, and did naught save commiserate with her for her having had the bad fortune to go to America—she was visiting on Beacon Street in Boston. The next day, he began a series of letters in which he described his *suffering* (but did not mention the possibility of death with a single word). To Génia Tschernosvitow he wrote: “Je suis livré jour et nuit à d'indicibles tortures”;¹⁰⁶ to Lalli Horstmann, a former fellow patient at Val-Mont, he sent a slip of paper with the sentence: “Je souffre plus que des mots peuvent le dire.” On December 8, he sent Nanny Wunderly-Volkart the letter which brought her to Val-Mont: “jour et nuit, jour et nuit. . .l'Enfer! on l'aura connu!”, and ‘Le plus grave, le plus long: c'est abdiquer: devenir ‘le malade’ ”; near the letter's end, he repeats the word, “l'Enfer.”¹⁰⁷ On December 13, in German, he wrote to Lou Andreas-Salomé about the pain: “Er deckt mich zu. Er löst mich ab. Tag und Nacht!”¹⁰⁸ The “Enfer” of the French letters is present: “ich weiss nicht wie viel Höllen,” and, again near the end, “Aber. Die Höllen.”

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Two days later, he described his pain to Kassner: "Und ich, der ich ihm nie recht ins Gesicht sehen mochte, lerne, mich mit dem inkommensurablen anonymen Schmerz einrichten."¹⁰⁹ On December 21, he wrote to the French poet Supervielle that he was seriously ill: "gravement malade, douloureusement malade, misérablement, humblement malade;"¹¹⁰ on December 23, to Baladine Klossowska, that he was "enfermé cette fois pour longtemps avec des douleurs inhumaines. . . donc humblement, misérablement malade;"¹¹¹ to Nimet Eloui Bey, in a note which Jaloux says was written on the eve of his death, but which in fact dates from December 22, a week before: "oui, misérablement, horriblement malade, et douloureusement jusqu'à un point que je n'ai jamais osé imaginer. C'est cette souffrance déjà anonyme, que les médecins baptisent, mais qui, elle, se contente à nous apprendre trois ou quatre cris où notre voix ne se reconnaît point. Elle qui avait l'éducation des nuances!"¹¹² These letters, it will be seen, have certain features in common. Rilke, that prodigious letter-writer, had long had the practice of using the same turns of phrase (and the same material) for a number of letters composed at more or less the same time; this skill or habit—closely related to his telling of the same anecdotes, stylized set-pieces, again and again, a trait which the Swiss critic Robert Faesi noticed¹¹³—did not desert him on his deathbed: "l'Enfer," "die Höllen," "jour et nuit," "anonymous pain," "humbly, miserably ill"—Rilke stylizes his sickness not a little. What is more important than this stylization, though—a stylization we might well attribute to the awful fatigue of the dying man, if we did not know his practice from the past so well—is the failure of the letters to say goodbye. Pain is described, in terrifying terms, but death is absent. The

letter which is evidently the last one from his pen, to Baladine Klossowska, ends not with goodbye, but with an expression of embarrassed chagrin that the manuscript of his book of French poems, *Les Fenêtres*, had been sent to Valéry, in order to win his help in finding a publisher.

Indeed, the letters, if read in their entirety, sound as if Rilke were preparing himself for a long training, a long course in illness and pain, rather than a departure from the world. The letter to Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, for all its infernos, gets a less tragic air if we examine its German-language portions, which have never been printed. It contains detailed instructions about the apparel Rilke wants for his hospital stay. In the catalogue of the *Haus zur Meise* he has seen listings of genuine soft nightshirts made according to "Dr. Lahmann's system"—long ago, in 1905, Rilke had been a patient at Lahmann's famous sanatorium, "Weisser Hirsch," near Dresden. They can be had in white or beige, he writes; he does not care which color he receives, but the beige ones, after all, are even softer and silkier. And beyond the nightshirts, not mentioned by von Salis in his book, there is the tone of Rilke's remarks on pain. Nanny herself wrote to Lou: "Er denkt an eine lange, lange Leidenszeit," and he wrote to Kassner: "[meine Lage wird] nicht die vorübergehendste sein." Likewise, reading the last letters to Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, Kassner, and Eloui Bey, we detect an almost macabre (and almost heroic) concept of pain as a pedagogical institute. Amidst the countless sillinesses of her depiction of Rilke's death, based upon her imagination and little else, Elisabeth Schmidt-Pauli, another of Rilke's many lady-friends, makes an observation that is strikingly right: "Er lernte—also lernte er noch immer."¹¹⁴ A strain that remains con-

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stant in Rilke throughout his life is a pronouncedly economic treatment of his time and gifts; the motto, "Never a day without its line," could be transposed in his case into: "Never an hour without its profit to the poet." This hoarding and nurturing of himself had, we suspect, some unfortunate results, since, carried too far, it made Rilke live too carefully and in too great isolation; but, on the other hand, it kept him from falling into the wastefulness of self which marked his contemporary Gerhart Hauptmann—whom he called, with contempt, "dieser nun bald zwanzig Jahre dauernde Untergang, verbrämt mit Geburtstagen und Ehrendoktoraten."¹¹⁵ Now, at the last, he tried to turn his inferno, pain, into a school, a school he had tried to keep from visiting before. To Kassner, he wrote: "ich. . . lerne, mich mit dem. . . Schmerz einrichten!" to Eloui Bey of "l'éducation des nuances;" and he closed the French portion of his letter to Nanny as follows: "Il faut devenir le malade, apprendre ce métier absurde sous l'oeil des médecins. C'est long! Et je ne serais assez rusé pour en tirer profit. [*italics added*]. Dans cette affaire je perds." At first reading, the words sound still more desperate than they are, albeit they are desperate enough; they mean: "And I would never be wily enough to get profit from it [the schooling]. In this piece of business, I'll lose." The training will be without profit for him, a waste of time. The last poem he ever wrote was an entry in his pocket notebook, made in the hospital. It begins:

Komm du, du letzter, den ich anerkenne,
heilloser Schmerz im leiblichen Geweb:
wie ich im Geiste brannte, sieh, ich brenne
in dir . . .

(*SW*, II, 511)

Its concluding section becomes scribbled semi-prose:

Verzicht. Das ist nicht so wie Krankheit war
einst in der Kindheit. Aufschub. Vorwand um
grösser zu werden. Alles rief und raunte.
Misch nicht in dieses was dich früh erstaunte.

The illnesses of childhood had been a training ground, and one learned from them; *this* illness cannot be thought the same, however hard one wishes or tries. The memory of illnesses past should not be mixed into the present condition, from which the poet is not "assez rusé pour en tirer profit."

At Val-Mont the previous spring, Rilke had received a visit from the Swedish psychiatrist and author, Dr. Poul Bjerre, who gave him the details of the death of his onetime friend and benefactress, Ellen Key. She had died in April, 1926, at Strand, her home on Lake Vättern, under circumstances which were (Rilke reported to Frau Wunderly-Volkart) fully as horrible as those surrounding the death of Rodin. But, Rilke continued, he could not bring himself to write any more about it, he would tell her the story when he saw her next. The deaths of Rodin and Ellen Key must have gnawed at Rilke's mind during his last summer; a principal theme of his final French poetry (which, much more than his German pieces, save the last, has the air of the diary-entry) is whistling in the graveyard again, attempting to tell himself, with ever smaller success, that death is not so dreadful after all. In the German-language cycle about the churchyard at Ragaz, written two summers before, he had managed to muster an air of having made peace with death; in August, 1926, in a little poem called "Cimetière à Ragaz," words of ignorance predominate:

C'est de ton repos *inconnu*
que cette douceur se dégage,

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de ta jeunesse sans âge
de ton beau ciel *non-su.*
(*SW*, II, 740, italics added)

And, in a two-line fragment from the same frightening place, he stops flattery and tries a dash of hopeless hope:

Vous, vous toutes qui savent bénir
peut-être malgré vous . . .
(*SW*, II, 742)

The pronoun no doubt refers to the crosses of the preceding poem—crosses called elsewhere by Rilke, in the poem “Cimetière à Flaach” from 1921, “horribles stèles” (*SW*, II, 638). Something had to be done about the death which had taken Ellen Key away so horribly: in Val-Mont, at long last face to face with death, Rilke pretended as long as he could that it was not there.

The succession of inner events at Val-Mont must have gone something like this: first, there was Rilke's determination to regard his *pain* as a schooling, and, at the same time, to exclude death carefully from correspondence and conversation. Then, the realization, as the pain grew worse, that it was indeed “du letzter” and “heillos”; still, however, the backdoor is left open: Rilke, to the end a master of the play on words and the ambiguity, could have meant “last” not as “final” but as “last in a series of phenomena experienced,” the schooling long avoided of which he speaks to Kassner; and “heillos,” although J. B. Leishman translates it as “beyond all cure,”¹¹⁶ may mean “disastrous, dreadful,” not “incurable” (“unheilbar”). Finally, sometime during the last week from the 23rd until the 29th, when our only communication with the dying man is through Nanny Wunderly-Volkart and Haemmerli, the acceptance of

death perhaps occurred—but now it was much too late for goodbyes to anyone save Nanny, who reports having heard the remarks in which he seems to indicate that he knows he will die, and accepts the end.

A battle was waged after Rilke's death over his "last words." In her book on Rilke from 1929, Lou Andreas-Salomé made it appear that the poet's last (epistolary) words to her had been "Aber die Höllen."¹¹⁷ Indeed, they had been, save for a period after the conjunction, and a concluding sentence, in that letter of December 13, which again indicates that Rilke was badly frightened but by no means resigned as he wrote: "Seid ihr beide gesund, es weht etwas Ungutes in diesem Jahreschluss, Bedrohliches." Rilke's daughter and her husband, Dr. Sieber, took umbrage at the proposal that "der Dichter des Todes" could have made so despairing a remark upon his deathbed, and, in a newspaper article (*Deutsche Zukunft*, March 9, 1936), claimed that Lou Andreas-Salomé had recanted. This recantation was then greeted by great joy (and gratuitous insults hurled at the "forger") by Dieter Bassermann in his *Der späte Rilke*; he claims, among other things, that there is no such phrase in Rilke's letters as "Aber die Höllen." He was utterly wrong, of course, as Ernst Pfeiffer's subsequent publication of the full text of the last letter to Frau Andreas-Salomé proved. Heerikhuizen, in his Rilke biography, was equally insulting; he speaks of the "lady's lively phantasy."¹¹⁹ J. R. von Salis reported, in part, on the little war in the revised edition of *Rilkes Schweizer Jahre*, putting Bassermann, at any rate, in his place; Salis said at the opening of his corrective note that it had been "eine gegenstandslose Kontroverse."¹²⁰ But had there not been something important at stake after all? In

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its report of Lou's recantation, the family had said that she had made it seem as though Rilke had uttered a "Widerruf seiner letzten Erkenntnisse." Lou, however, regarded Rilke as a human being full of contradictions, and not the doctrinaire founder (or revealer) of a faith. Her repetition of his "Aber die Höllen"—which he did say—shows how little willing she was to put him into a system, to stylize the stylizer. He was a man in great pain and terribly frightened; he said and did not say a great many things on his deathbed. And it is entirely possible (remember her question to the physician about Rilke's *knowing* of his death) that Lou was aware of his failure in his works, despite the many, many, remarks on death to be found therein, to look the inevitability of his own extinction directly in the face, as Erinna does in Mörike's great poem. He had never been able to stare, without protective glasses, into "die schaurige Kluft, schwindelnd," pondering "das eigene Todesgeschick." The fact that he could not do so, that he found so many circumlocutions—the theory of one's own death, the admiration of the early dead, the requiems for Paula and Kalkreuth which talk of wasted life, not death—does not make him into a coward or hypocrite, or reduce the value of his work. It simply proves, again, that he was a human being, a human being fascinated by the theme on which he *could not* come to the point. He is, of course, to blame in part for the de-humanization to which he has been subjected; he stylized himself, and was prone to announce "programs" for his current views on life—despite his Austrian birth, he was very German in this respect. He is at his very greatest when he escapes his stylizations and programs, when he speaks as a man who can be a spokesman for us, not—to return to Musil's words—as our leader.

He is the poet who wrote, in 1915, of death in the kitchen dregs:

Da steht der Tod, ein bläulicher Absud
in einer Tasse ohne Untersatz. . . .
(*SW*, II, 103)

and tried, scared though he was, to pull himself together with an ideal imperative at the poem's end.

In writing about Rilke, it is good to remember what he said in a French poem he wrote during his last stay at Lausanne. It is about the clarity of autumn air, which trembles none the less in the fire's heat:

Clarté qui tremble de ce feu d'automne
pour être *humainement*
plus près de nous, plus émue et plus bonne
en ressemblant au temps.
(*SW*, II, 744)

Future biographers of Rilke, will, we hope, try harder than their predecessors to discover, and to value, the human Rilke. And they can have no better tool than an archive such as that which has been established in the University of Kansas Libraries.

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34. Yvonne Délétang-Tardif, "Maurice Betz et Rilke," in *Hommage à Maurice* (Paris, 1949), pp. 38-51.
35. Günther Petry, *Requiem für Rainer Maria Rilke* (Dresden, 1937).
36. Elya Maria Nevar, "Von Rainer Maria Rilke," *Das Goetheanum*, VI (1927), pp. 416-417.
37. Roman Boos, "Um die Fülle des Wortes: Eine Begegnung Rainer Maria Rilkes mit Rudolf Steiner," *Das Goetheanum*, VI (1927), p. 418.
- 37a. Elya Maria Nevar, "Requiem," in *Freundschaft mit Rainer Maria Rilke: Begegnungen, Gespräche, Briefe und Aufzeichnungen* (Bern-Bümpliz, 1946), pp. 202-205.
38. Stefan Zweig, *Abschied von Rilke: Eine Rede*, p. 36.
39. Rudolf Alexander Schröder, *Rainer Maria Rilke*, pp. 44-45.
40. Charlotte Schiel, "Auf Rilkes Tod," *Die Horen*, III (1926, appeared 1927), p. 258.
41. Heinz Winfried Sabais, "Abschied von Rilke," in Karl Dietz, *Der rote Greif: Eine Schau unseres Wirkens und Planes* (Rudolstadt, 1946), pp. 46-47.
42. See note 23 above.
43. Laurenz Wiedner, "Rainer Maria Rilke: Zum fünften Todestage," *Die Bühne: Zeitschrift für Theater und Gesellschaft*, No. 319 (1932), p. 38.
44. Fritz Gross, *Die letzte Stunde: Legenden vom Tode* (Berlin, 1929), pp. 243-244.
45. Hans Wessling, "Requiem," *Der Schacht: Unpolitische Wochenschrift für bewusste Kulturarbeit im Westfälischen Industriegebiet*, III (1927), pp. 454-455.
46. Ernst Waldinger, "Rilke im Sterbejahr," *Das Silberboot: Zeitschrift für Literatur*, II (1946), p. 170.
47. Helene von Nostitz, *Aus dem alten Europa: Menschen und Städte* (Wiesbaden, 1950), pp. 140-141.
48. [Magda von Hattingberg], *Rilke und Benvenuta: Ein Buch des Dankes* (Vienna, 1943), pp. 299-300.
49. In April, 1956. Another experience of the same variety was had by Elya Maria Nevar; see "Zwei Träume" in her *Freundschaft mit Rainer Maria Rilke*, pp. 197-199.
50. Lou Albert-Lasard, *Wege mit Rilke* (Frankfurt a.M., 1952), pp. 184-185.
51. Marie von Thurn und Taxis, *Erinnerungen an Rainer Maria Rilke* (Munich and Berlin, 1932), pp. 100-101.
52. The text of the will is given in J. R. von Salis, *Rainer Maria Rilkes Schweizerjahre*. Dritte, neu bearbeitete Ausgabe. (Frauenfeld, 1952), pp. 209-210.
53. Rilke was particularly interested in the death of his cousin, Oswald von Kutschera, whose grave had been marked by a similar tombstone, similarly prepared. See Rilke's letter of August 4, 1924, to Anton Kippenberg, in *Briefe an seinen Verleger* (Wiesbaden, 1949), II, p. 467.
54. F. W. van Heerikhuizen, *Rainer Maria Rilke: His Life and Work* (London, 1951), p. 377.

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55. Rainer Maria Rilke—Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Briefwechsel* (Zürich and Wiesbaden, 1952), pp. 498-501.
56. Lou Andreas-Salomé, *In der Schule bei Freud* (Zürich, 1958), pp. 206ff.
57. The dots indicate an omission in the text as printed in the *Briefwechsel*.
58. "Íslomáj: zerbrich (es)! Offenbar ein schon in der gemeinsamen ersten Zeit zu immerer Hilfe gebrauchtes Wort." (Pfeiffer's note, p. 553.)
59. *Tagebücher aus der Frühzeit* (Leipzig, 1942), p. 260: diary entry of September 10, 1900. Also *Sämtliche Werke*, III (Wiesbaden, 1959), p. 691. (Hereafter SW.)
60. Rainer Maria Rilke—Marie von Thurn und Taxis, *Briefwechsel* (Zürich, 1951), II, p. 841. To Hedwig Fischer he wrote on December 12, 1925: "Geburtstag haben ist schwer, schwer, eine Sache von angreifender Passivität. . ." *Briefe an das Ehepaar S. Fischer* (Zürich, 1947), p. 95.
61. Rainer Maria Rilke—Marie von Thurn und Taxis, *Briefwechsel*, II, p. 835: September 17, 1925.
- 62: The "Sieben Gedichte" in SW, II, pp. 435-438.
63. Eudo C. Mason, *Rilke* (Edinburgh, 1963), p. 113.
64. Nora Wydenbruck, *Rilke: Man and Poet* (London, 1949), p. 359.
65. *Ibid.*, pp. 359-360.
66. Rilke's correspondence with Frau Wunderly-Volkart is in the Swiss Rilke-Archiv of the Schweizerische Landesbibliothek in Berne. The author wishes to thank Dr. Paul-Emile Schazmann for the permission to examine these letters, as well as others in the Archiv.
67. Maurice Betz, *Rilke vivant* (Paris, 1937), pp. 243-244; Maurice Betz, *Rilke in Frankreich* (Vienna, Leipzig, Zürich, 1948), pp. 251-252.
68. Edmond Jaloux, "Dialogue sur Rainer-Maria Rilke," *Bibliothèque Universelle et Revue de Genève*, (1930), pp. 21-26.
69. The correspondence with Werner Reinhart is in the Swiss Rilke-Archiv.
70. Edmond Jaloux, *Rainer Maria Rilke*, pp. v-vi.
71. Paul Valéry, ["Rainer Maria Rilke"], in *Rilke et la France* (Paris, 1942), p. 198. Valéry said much the same thing to Marie von Thurn und Taxis in his letter of September, 1927: Rainer Maria Rilke—Marie von Thurn und Taxis, *Briefwechsel*, II, pp. 963-964.
72. Rainer Maria Rilke—Gudi Nölke, *Briefwechsel* (Wiesbaden, 1953), p. 132.
73. Katharina Kippenberg, *Rainer Maria Rilke: Ein Beitrag* (Wiesbaden, 1948), p. 363.
74. Christiane Osann, *Rainer Maria Rilke: Der Weg eines Dichters* (Zürich, 1947), p. 321.
75. E. M. Butler, *Rainer Maria Rilke* (Cambridge, 1941), p. 372.
76. Dr. Theodor Haemmerli's report on the last days of Rilke comprises his letter to Marie von Thurn und Taxis of February 25, 1927; Rainer Maria Rilke—Marie von Thurn und Taxis, *Briefwechsel*, II, pp. 954-958.
77. Rainer Maria Rilke—Anton Kippenberg, *Briefe an seinen Verleger*, II, p. 522.
78. Génia Tschernosvitow, "Les derniers mois de Rainer Maria Rilke," *Collection Les Lettres*, IV, Nos. 14-15-16 (1952), pp. 214-220.
79. Rainer Maria Rilke—Baladine Klossowska, *Correspondance* (Zürich, 1954), p. 596.
80. Maurice Betz, *Rilke vivant*, pp. 245-246; *Rilke in Frankreich*, pp. 253-256. The French text can also be found in *Hommage à Maurice* (see note 34), pp. 99-105, where it is misdated as October 29, 1921.
81. H. F. Peters, *Rainer Maria Rilke: Masks and the Man* (Seattle, 1960; new edition, 1963), p. 184.
82. *Rilke vivant*, p. 244; *Rilke in Frankreich*, p. 252.
83. E. M. Butler, p. 373-374; Maurice Zermatten, *Der Ruf der Stille: Rainer Maria Rilkes Walliser Jahre* (Zürich, 1954), p. 125. Translation of *Les années valaisannes de Rainer Maria Rilke* (Lausanne, 1941).
84. Edmond Jaloux, "La leçon de Rilke," in *Rilke et la France*, p. 57.

85. Edmond Jaloux, *La dernière amitié de Rainer Maria Rilke* (Paris, 1949), p. 149.
86. J.-F. Angelloz, *Rilke* (Paris, 1952), p. 332.
87. Barnaby Conrad, *Famous Last Words* (New York, 1961), p. 171. It would take much too much space to list all the appearances of the story of the fatal thorn and the Egyptian princess.
88. Génia Tschernosvitow, "Les derniers mois de Rainer Maria Rilke," p. 218.
89. Letter of Kassner to Marie von Thurn und Taxis, from January 5, 1927; in Rainer Maria Rilke—Marie von Thurn und Taxis, *Briefwechsel*, II p. 950.
90. Salis, p. 233.
91. Jaloux, *Rainer Maria Rilke*, p. 66.
92. Heerikhuizen, p. 378.
93. Osann, p. 322.
94. Haemmerli's letter to Marie von Thurn und Taxis, *Briefwechsel*, II, p. 956; Nanny Wunderly-Volkart's letter to Gudi Nölke, *Briefwechsel*, p. 135.
95. Rainer Maria Rilke—Marie von Thurn und Taxis, *Briefwechsel*, II, p. 955.
96. Rainer Maria Rilke—Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Briefwechsel*, p. 640.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 641.
98. Osann, p. 322.
99. Werner Kohlschmidt, *Rainer Maria Rilke* (Lübeck, 1948), p. 167.
100. Hans Egon Holthusen, *Rainer Maria Rilke in Selbstzeugnissen und Bildern* (Hamburg, 1958), p. 163.
101. Rainer Maria Rilke—Gudi Nölke, *Briefwechsel*, p. 135.
102. Katharina Kippenberg, p. 367; Osann, p. 322. (Frau Wunderly-Volkart's letter to Gudi Nölke, however, does not contain another of the deathbed statements adduced by Salis: "Vergessen Sie nie, Liebe, das Leben ist eine Herrlichkeit!", as having been heard by Frau Wunderly-Volkart.)
103. Salis, p. 233.
104. Rainer Maria Rilke—Marie von Thurn und Taxis, *Briefwechsel*, II, p. 953.
105. The letters to Regina Ullmann and Marie Gagarine are on deposit in the Swiss Rilke-Archiv.
106. Génia Tschernosvitow, p. 219; Lalli Horstmann, "Rilke à Valmont," p. 213.
107. The letter is partially printed in Salis, pp. 228-229.
108. Rainer Maria Rilke—Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Briefwechsel*, p. 505.
109. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe aus Muzot* (Leipzig, 1935), pp. 394-395.
110. *Ibid.*, p. 395.
111. Rainer Maria Rilke—Baladine Klossowska, *Correspondance*, p. 602.
112. Edmond Jaloux, *La dernière amitié de Rainer Maria Rilke*, p. 211.
113. Robert Faesi, *Erlebnisse Ergebnisse* (Zürich, 1963), p. 330.
114. Elisabeth von Schmidt-Pauli, *Rainer Maria Rilke: Ein Gedenkbuch* (Basel, 1940), p. 174.
115. Rainer Maria Rilke—Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 459-460: December 29, 1921.
116. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Poems 1906-1907*. Translated by J. B. Leishman (New York, 1957), p. 353.
117. Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Rainer Maria Rilke* (Leipzig, 1928), p. 112.
118. Dieter Bassermann, *Der späte Rilke* (Munich, 1947), pp. 464-465.
119. Heerikhuizen, p. 379.
120. Salis, p. 252.

THE HENRY SAGAN
R I L K E
COLLECTION

AFTER serving as a physician in the Austrian army during the First World War, Dr. Henry Sagan, a native of Krakau, moved to Berlin and established a medical practice there. At about the same time, he began to seek out material on Rilke, an avocation in which he was encouraged by his friend and fellow collector of Rilkeana, the mathematician Dr. Richard von Mises. (The magnificent fruits of the latter's collecting labors came to rest later on in the Houghton Library of Harvard University.) As Dr. Sagan's widow, Mrs. Rose Sagan, recalls, the young physician, despite the demands of his practice, was ready to go "anywhere and everywhere" in search of new treasures for his growing collection. It is important to note that Dr. Sagan's service in the cause of Rilke was a wholly selfless undertaking; he had no idea whatsoever of getting profit, whether of fame or of money, out of his enthusiasm for Rilke's work and his expertness in the lore of the poet and his times. No attempt was made by the physician, for example, to meet Rilke, an abstention which should be contrasted to the zeal of the many admirers who tried to track the poet to his lair—a pursuit not always undertaken, we may suspect, for poetry's sake alone. During some three decades after Rilke's death the literary world was afforded countless glimpses—some of them very small indeed—into Rilke's blue eyes by per-

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sons who had spent an hour or an afternoon with him, or had met him (sometimes by chance, sometimes not) at a party, in a theater lobby, or on a train. Dr. Sagan, however, was before all else a "Diener am Worte"—and he feared, besides, that his affection might be damped if he confronted its inspiration face to face; we recall how Grillparzer fled from Goethe's Weimar. Nor did Dr. Sagan entertain any scholarly or belletristic ambitions; his collection was undertaken for its own sake (and, to be sure, for its creator's pleasure), not in support of a planned study of Rilke's works or a biography—although we may guess that Dr. Sagan, with his painstaking and reasonable turn of mind, would have been an eminently successful biographer. Like Rilke, Dr. Sagan had come from the eastern marches of the German language realm and from the Austro-Hungarian Empire; thus he had a first-hand knowledge of the ambiance in which Rilke had spent his childhood and youth. Like Rilke, too, he had an affinity for the Romance world. Indeed, we may see something of the biographer's urge (which always contains elements of the autobiographical impulse) in the expeditions which Dr. Sagan, accompanied by his indefatigable wife, undertook to the stations of Rilke's later life. Nevertheless, Dr. Sagan refused to employ this heritage held in common with the poet, or his carefully acquired feeling for the lay of later Rilkean landscapes, in the writings of essays on Rilke, let alone books. Even as he had intentionally kept away from Muzot until after the poet's death, so he shunned the printed page. His published works on Rilke are two: a "bibliographical note" on Rilke's translation of Bossuet's *L'Amour de Madeleine* (in *Philobiblon*, VIII, 1935), and a short

essay on "Rilke's Marionettes" in the *Stechert-Hafner Book News* (November, 1951).

The collection was brought to the United States when the Sagens moved to this country during the 1930's; it continued to grow and even to flourish in the new soil. It was described in the *Stechert-Hafner Book News* of 1951 as "probably the second largest in America," coming only after that of Richard von Mises; today, we can venture the guess, it is one of the largest in the world, surpassed, to be sure, by the von Mises collection and the Rilke-holdings of the Schiller National-Museum at Marbach, as well as by the Rilke-Archiv of the Schweizerische Landesbibliothek at Bern and the materials in the hands of Rilke's daughter at Fischerhude, near Bremen. These latter two collections, however, are distinguished particularly for their manuscript holdings; the collections at Harvard and at Marbach contain a certain amount of manuscript material (including valuable letters), together with extensive holdings in Rilkeana. The Sagan collection consists of material that has appeared in print, from first editions of the works to such ephemera as newspaper notices by unknown hands.

Upon Dr. Sagan's death in 1962, the collection was sold to the University of Kansas Libraries, where an ideal home was provided for it in the Department of Special Collections. One of the remarkable facts about the Sagan collection—again a testimony to the wise and energetic care exercised by its creator—is that its contents have remained in mint condition, for all their fragility and their travels halfway around the world; its home in the library at Lawrence affords the physical protection which such an assemblage of precious (although by no means always good) paper requires, together with excellent working

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conditions for those qualified scholars who wish to take advantage of the collection's resources. It has been preserved, then but surely not mummified. The archive which is closed to scholarship, or whose arrangement (or lack of it) makes scholarship impossible, is no archive at all; it is simply a depository. Happily, the University of Kansas Libraries have established an archive in the word's best sense, a Rilke-archive which should attract scholars both from the United States and from abroad.

The collection may be divided into two major parts: 1) works and letters by Rilke himself, together with translations of the same; and 2) writings on Rilke of every conceivable nature, from obituaries to full-length biographies, from reviews of his books at their appearance to critical and interpretive monographs, from celebratory verse and prose to parodies. An especially valuable subdivision belonging, as it were, to both parts, valuable because so much of it cannot be obtained today (and who, as a matter of fact, has been aware of the existence of a good part of it?), is the mountain of newspaper clippings. In some cases they are by the poet himself; more frequently they have been produced by that busy army of causeurs, critics, anonymous reporters, scholars, friends and enemies who for one reason or another put their thoughts and words on Rilke into the newspaper's flimsy form. More will be said of this subdivision or subcollection later on.

The wanderer through the Sagan collection begins his tour, naturally enough, with the products of Rilke's own pen. He sees familiar items: collected works, selected works, the so-called collected correspondences from the later 1920's and the 1930's, and the individual epistolary exchanges with various friends, ladies as a rule, the

majority of which appeared after 1945. What captures his eye, however, is the shelf of first editions; all of a sudden he is reminded, as he frequently should and must be, that Rilke was a struggling poet, and even a versifier, before he became a literary god and, in the opinion of some admirers, almost a god in divine fact as well. The explorer sees fascicles two and three of *Wegwarten*, which the twenty-year-old intended to distribute to the working men and women of golden Prague; was the recipients' German good enough for them to appreciate the gift? He sees first editions of *Larenopfer*, *Traumgekrönt*, and *Advent*, of the play *Ohne Gegenwart*, of the stories *Am Leben hin*; he opens a copy of *Mir zur Feier* and finds the dedication to "Frau Lizzy"; the book was printed in 1899, but the recipient is Lizzy Gibson, Rilke's hostess at Villa Furborg in the industrial community of Jonsered, outside Gothenburg, a mansion in whose sheltering walls Rilke spent the autumn of 1904. The dedication reminds us of the changes which had taken place between the book's publication and the book's gift; Rilke—Rainer Maria now, no longer René—had emerged from the crowd of sensitive youths who write verse, had long since left Prague behind him, had made a start toward becoming a European celebrity. There is an edition of *Vom lieben Gott und Anderes* from 1900, the initial form of what became the *Geschichten vom lieben Gott*, there is the novella triptych, *Die Letzten*, from 1902, and the Rodin monograph which Bard published in 1903, there is a first edition of *Das Stunden-Buch* from 1905, again with a dedication to Lizzy Gibson and her husband James—or Jimmy, as Gibson's friends called him, a practice Rilke followed. The interpretive scholar will be especially interested in a set of the printings of *Das Buch der Bilder*,

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including the thin version which Rilke's feckless Dano-German publisher, Axel Juncker, brought out in 1902, and the "second, much augmented edition" of 1906. Then he may turn to the various castings of *Die Weise von Liebe und Tod*, in which the brave cornet is transformed from Otto Rilke into the more poetic Christoph. (Or was Rilke still nursing a grudge at Otto Modersohn, who had dared to marry Paula Becker?) And—to name but a few more of the items in this department—he will see the *Neue Gedichte* in first editions; a copy of *Der neuen Gedichte anderer Teil* bears Rilke's inscription to the publisher Samuel Fischer and his wife, Hedwig, a publisher with whom Rilke stood in well, while not being a member of his stable. For now Rilke's home was the Insel-Verlag, directed by the sympathetic and clever Anton Kippenberg. The new Rilke had been formed, the ever more self-critical and exclusive poet of the later Paris days, of war-time Munich, and of the Swiss sanctuary; the products of this last decade-and-a-half are likewise present in the collection. But an oddly touching dedication is to be found in a copy of *Das Marienleben* (1913), to "Meiner lieben Paula" from "herzlichst, René." We assume that Paula is his Prague cousin, with whom he still uses his old name of the century past; and the book he gives her is in itself a momentary and intentional return to a style long past.

The section devoted to Rilke's letters is somehow less exciting; these volumes, put together by heirs and editors, cannot conjure up the poet as the first editions of the works do. Yet how pleased we are, just the same, at beholding a full set of some sixty items, ready for use by the scholar. A next section, of translations *by* Rilke, is followed by translations *of* Rilke, a collection including

famous items (Witold Hulewicz's Polish version of the *Duino Elegies*; Malte's return, as Rilke called it, into his own tongue: Inga Junghanns' *Malte Laurids Brigges Optegnelser*; the *Geschichten vom lieben Gott* and the superb French *Malte* by Maurice Betz, the gifted Alsatian who was Rilke's translator and friend; the English renderings by Jessie Lemont, McIntyre, Leishman, Spender, and the rest), and items by no means as well-known: Lou Albert-Lasard's transformation of certain poems into French, an Italian and a Polish *Cornet*, a Spanish *Sonette an Orpheus*, *Späte Gedichte* in Italian, *Von der Landschaft* in Dutch, *Über Gott* in Japanese, *Das Buch von der Armut und vom Tode* in Czech. A carefully assembled battery of translations from a major poet's oeuvre does not serve, by the way, merely as a demonstration of the extent of his fame; if wisely employed, it can also be a most handy aid for the scholar and critic. For a translation is an interpretation: is it not worthwhile to know what Rilke's intimates, Inga Junghanns and Betz, thought a particular passage in *Malte* meant? (Even as we value the testimony of musicians who played Beethoven or Brahms under the composer's direction.) Is it not worthwhile to get the opinion of such experienced Rilke-craftsmen as Herter-Norton or Leishman? Here, in the Sagan collection, the scholar can examine the interpretations in translation form, as he needs them, one after another, and then come to his decision—without delay.

Still another department ancillary to the original works is that in which separate publications of Rilke's poems (or prose), included in journals and anthologies, have been collected. Almost all this material can be found in other places, to be sure; in books put together by

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Rilke himself, in the *Gesammelte Werke* and the *Ausgewählte Werke*, and, of a certainty, in the recently completed *Sämtliche Werke*. However, its perusal will offer another journey into things past, into Rilke's early life. It is a peculiar sort of delight to find Rilke's contribution to *Ein Wiener Stammbuch, Dem Director der Bibliothek und des historischen Museums der Stadt Wien Dr. Carl Glossy zum 50. Geburtstage 7. März 1898 gewidmet*; the young man from the provincial capital was making an attempt—a not very successful one, as it turned out—to break into the literary and artistic circles of the *Kaiserstadt*, a city which he did not like, but which he felt he must capture. And it is interesting to find the same young man, grown more mature and far more famous, publishing in Professor Sauer's *Deutsche Arbeit*, a solid Prague German bulwark against the Czechs, in Vienna's *Die Zukunft*, in Hamburg's *Der Lotse*, in Munich's plush *Hyperion Almanach*, and, remarkably, allowing his "Dame vor dem Spiegel" to grace the *Lohse-Blätter vom praktischen Luxus* (circa 1910). What Rilke published during the war years, and where, would make a fascinating little study; even in the 1920's, he let his poems come out in places other than Kippenberg's *Insel-Almanach*, of which he was the principal star—albeit he told young Carl Viëtor in a well-known letter that he was opposed to publication in anthologies, an understandable point-of-view in a poet so strongly given to cyclical composition. Toward the end of his life, Rilke's lyrics appeared, for example, in historically oriented treasuries of German verse (Ernst Aeppli's *Deutsche Lyrik vom siebzehnten Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, 1924) as well as in sophisticated new magazines (Ernst Rowahl's *Vers und Prosa: Monatsschrift*), in whose pages

“Drei Gedichte aus dem Umkreis ‘Spiegelungen’ ” made their debut—poems written at Muzot shortly before. Finally, it should be added that the caveat to Viëtor did not prevent representative Rilke-sonnets from being enlisted in the service of the youthful professor’s garland, *Deutsche Sonette aus vier Jahrhunderten*; since then, the anthologizing of Rilke has never abated, as the Sagan collection bears witness.

The world through which we have just passed, a world that might be called the world of “primary” Rilke, made up of words come directly from his hand or through the medium of translation, has been of a bewildering size; we have only followed the main road through the woods, noting whatever pressed itself upon our attention. Weeks or months could be spent in the exploration and the staking out of its countless side paths. Yet in the other part of the collection’s forest, the vegetation, though of the same noble lineage as that lying behind us, is richer still and infinitely more tangled. It consists of what others have written about the man and his works; as recently as ten years ago, it might have been prophesied that Rilke would shortly begin to rival the great Goethe in the magnitude of the secondary literature to which he had given rise. (During the last decade, a marked decrease in the number of publications on Rilke has become apparent; what the causes are, and whether the slimming down is a sign of health or not—that is another story, or pair of stories.) The wanderer in these woods had better approach the stand of bibliographies first; they will at least show him that the material is, somehow, manageable, can somehow be put into order—but let him beware of imagining, even for a second, that any of the bibliographies will contain all the items assembled by

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Dr. Sagan. The scholar likes to think that he knows the bibliographies in his field, at least; but in the Sagan collection he will find lists he may not have heard of before, the catalogue of an exhibit on Rilke and Rodin, and the catalogue of a Rilke collection by an unnamed collector, published at Berlin in 1934. From the bibliographies the next step is to the biographies, the good (Angelloz), the sentimental (Wydenbruck), the philosophical (Buddeberg)—no surprises here, to be sure, but we cannot help thinking that in this archive, taken as a whole, the author who plans a new and complete biography of Rilke would best be able to go about his task, urged on not least by the shortcomings of his predecessors, whose works are assembled before him on the shelves.

However, if he—this presumptive and perhaps presuming biographer—were encouraged to do better by the display of the biographies already written, he might very well throw up his hands in terror and run away upon beholding what follows: for he must confront the *other* literature on Rilke, the studies of the works themselves, from early to late, from initial criticism to scholarly and quasi-scholarly discussion, and the efforts to write not a whole *vitam poetae*, but to illuminate one or another of its segments. Should we like to know, for example, what an intelligent critic and man-of-letters, Berthold Viertel, thought of *Malte Laurids Brigge* when it appeared, then we take out Y347, an issue of *Die Fackel* from 1910. On the other hand, if we want to learn how someone of more scholarly inclinations received the novel, then we must turn to Hans Berendt's remarks in the *Mitteilungen der literaturhistorischen Gesellschaft* from 1911 (Y596). Should formal aspects of Rilke's verse intrigue us, then we shall come across not only such standard works as

Kurt Berger's and H. M. Belmore's, but also the less readily available investigations of Ernst Mannheimer (from *Der Gral* for 1931), of Annemarie Wagner (on "Unbedeutende Reimwörter und Enjambement in der neueren Lyrik" from *Mnemosyne* for 1930), and of Gertrud Wilker-Huersch: the inaugural dissertation of the Austrian-Swiss poetess, *Gehalt und Form im deutschen Sonett* (Bern, 1952). Should we have the courage to look at that central and ambiguous symbol in Rilke's work, the rose, we shall be sustained, maybe, by the thought that we can find pioneering and out-of-the-way contributions on the problem, the essays by Werner Wolf of 1930. Should we be foolhardy enough to want to chase Rilke's "religion" down the labyrinthine ways once again, we shall search for little (in the way of secondary literature, that is) which we cannot find in the Sagan collection, even unto the ponderings of one Roderich von den Hoff (who sounds like a comical character in a Wilhelm Raabe short story), tucked away in a journal with the ominously solemn title of *Das heilige Feuer: Religiöskulturelle Monatsschrift*. Indeed, we can readily be swamped by essays in the style of August Faust's "Der dichterische Ausdruck mystischer Religiosität bei Rilke," which came out in *Logos: Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie der Kultur* in 1922, when Rilke was about to enter a last and clearly un-mystical stage of his development. (Like so many writers on Rilke from the 1920's and 1930's, Faust had been hypnotized by *Das Stunden-Buch*, of 1905; the affliction had abated somewhat by the 1940's: see Hermann Kunisch's essay, "Die Religiosität Rainer Maria Rilkes" in *Die Kirche in der Welt*, 1947.) But, changing the subject, let us make a little test concerning a less popular but equally valid topic, Rilke and educa-

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tion; immediately we find "Rilke und die deutsche Schule" from *Die deutsche Schule*, 1931, not a particularly easy item to come by. In a still more positivistic realm, let us try "Rilke and his Polish translator"; the Sagan collection provides Franz Doubek's essay from *Die Horen* of 1930. Rilke and his banker friend, Karl von der Heydt? The collection has *Dokumente der Freundschaft* (1927).

As for Rilke's connections with his fellow giants of literature, a host of deliberations are present, even Claude Aveline's little reflection on a somewhat surprising trio, "Stendhal, Rilke and die portugiesische Nonne" from *Lancelot* (1950), and Georg Lukács' placing of a plague on the houses of both Rilke and George in *Oesterreichisches Tagebuch* (1948). In short, there is almost no Rilke-problem on which the researcher will not find the item whose existence he did not suspect at all. The author of a dissertation on Rilke as a writer of letters could find the most obscure item for his bibliography here, a miniscule essay by one Heinrich Temborius in *Die Literatur* (1930); the investigator of *Das Buch der Bilder* would discover the initial critical reactions to that ambiguous work; the student of the Prague Rilke could find an essay from 1896 by Karl Credner on "Larenopfer von René Maria Rilke" and from 1897 on "René Rilke, der Verfasser von 'Leben und Lieder'," as well as the words of Paul Leppin from 1901 on "Prager Dichter." And need it be added that Dr. Sagan collected as carefully in the secondary literature composed in other languages as he did in the German realm? Let us return to the roses for a moment; we find the little book of Natalie Meauprince from 1952. Or the letters? There is a notice from *La Grande Revue* of 1935 by Wolf-Franck on "La correspondance de Rainer Maria Rilke." Or, should we

wish to hear a Portuguese voice on Rilke and Mariana Alcoforado, there is Albin Eduard Beau's "Rainer Maria Rilke e as cartas da Soror Mariana."

There is a danger, to be sure, for the scholar in this enchanted world of seemingly limitless resources: that he will linger in it, obsessed by the belief that there is ever more secondary literature to be found, digested, evaluated—that, somewhere in the archive, still another item lies hidden at which he must look before he begins to write. Indeed, an almost sinister refinement lies in the fact that the collection contains a very large section comprising *reviews* of the secondary literature. After we have read Hans Wilhelm Hagen's monograph on *Rilkes Umarbeitungen*, will we not want to read Hannah Arendt's opinion of the book? After we have dived, filled with curiosity, into Pietro de Nicola's "Sulla presunta psicopatia ossessiva e dissociativa del poeta Rainer Maria Rilke" from the *Archivio di Psicologia Neurologia e Psichiatria* for 1948, are we not obligated to look back to Eva Siebels' review of "Italienische Rilke-Forschung" in *Dichtung und Volkstum* of a decade before, in order to find out what Italian predecessors in long-distance (and *post mortem*) psychoanalysis de Nicola may have had? And, surely, some reference in Siebels' article will make us try another path—toward another goal—through the archive's rewarding maze. With such riches at hand, we may remain to gorge ourselves for years, until at last we emerge, gray-haired, and cannot understand how time and our scholarly careers have fled away. The scholar who wishes to return to the outside world with his vigor unimpaired must extract a pledge from himself before he enters the archive's gates: that he will maintain the sternest self-control throughout his journey. (Still, would it not be

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amusing to hesitate for a moment more, to see what hides behind the title of Werner Leibbrand's "Die Stilistik des Sterbens," from *Synopsis: Studien aus Medizin und Naturwissenschaft*? And who could resist the temptation of looking up an item listed as Y545, A. E. Housman's "Rilke in Translation" from the journal *New Verse*? Dr. Sagan created a lotus land, whether he meant to or not.)

Let us assume, though, that the wanderer at last escapes these perils: he will immediately find himself exposed to new ones as he looks at the obituaries and the valedictions (some of them mentioned in the preceding lecture), the recollections, large and small, of those who knew the poet, the works about Rilke's relatives, friends, and acquaintances (Aleksis Rannit on Clara Westhoff-Rilke, Hilde Herrmann on Paula Modersohn-Becker, Manuel Gasser on Adrienne Monnier, even an essay by a friend of Rilke on the style of an authoress who celebrated Rilke, Elisabeth Schmidt-Pauli on Monique Saint-Helier). And, as a pendant, works by Rilke's friends and acquaintances from Rudolf Christoph Jenny's *Noth kennt kein Geboth* to a complete set of the works of Lou Andreas-Salomé and the various publications of Maurice Betz, who was a distinguished man of letters as well as being Rilke's translator. The wanderer reminds himself that he must brush these tentacles aside; yet he wonders if he has time to look at Max Osborn's book on Leonid Pasternak (to find the Rilke references), or see what Wilhelm von Scholz has to say about the friend who so quickly outgrew him, or to take a glance at the insulting remarks of Wilhelm Weigand in his *Welt und Weg: Aus meinem Leben* (1940): his jibes would be refreshing, in the midst of so much eulogy, did we not consider their

source. Discipline must be preserved at all costs now; the explorer dares only to peek out of the corner of his eye at the runs of journals and almanacs with which Rilke had some association—*Insel-Schiff* and *Ver Sacrum*, *Deutsche Arbeit* and *Neuland*. The musical settings of Rilke's verse cannot make our fugitive tarry, determined as he is to finish his journey; if he were fresh, then he might try to hum a few bars from Hans Effenberger's setting of "Herbst" (wondering, meanwhile, who Effenberger was), or he might try to learn what August Wenziger made of that late poem so beloved of Rilke-reciters, "Ausgesetzt auf den Bergen des Herzens." His memory of what he has just seen is more of a danger for him than is the music inspired by Rilke's verses; he would like to run back into the thickest part of the forest, for a glance at what Anja Mendelssohn has to say of Rilke's calligraphy—somewhere he has noticed her book, *Der Mensch in der Handschrift*. On the way, he could look up another title of which he has made a mental note, Georges Nicole's "Katherine Mansfield et Rilke en Valais." He might open those first editions of Rilke's dramas, or he might satisfy his altogether unreasonable longing to see the young poet's "Fernsichten (Skizzen aus dem Florenz des Quattro-Cento)," as it was printed in the *Revue franco-allemande* for 1899; a journal with a foretaste of the "good Europeanism" Rilke would later embody. The "Fernsichten" can be readily found, of course, in the fourth volume of the *Sämtliche Werke*, but there they have lost whatever frail magic they may have possessed in their original surroundings.

The wanderer thinks that he is free now—until he catches sight of the boxes containing the ephemera, the newspaper clippings and the rest. All of a sudden, he

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becomes convinced that he has been sentenced to this paradise for life. Having fled two thousand snares on sturdier paper, he will fall prey to the some six hundred bits of newsprint the boxes conceal. Here, as before, are pieces of Rilke himself, the critiques he wrote around the turn of the century, some of his poems, his "Dank an den Lesezirkel Hottingen," scissored from the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of 1932. There are letters which have had the ill fortune of being printed in a newspaper's limbo; to Erich Klossowski, the erstwhile husband of Rilke's great and good friend, "Merline," to Hanns Ulbricht, to Walter Mehring—the last concerning the attacks Rilke received in the German press for daring to write French poetry. Other clippings are reviews of the volumes of Rilke's letters, of translations of Rilke's verse, of studies and of memoirs. Flagging attention perks up once more: an essay from 1914 on Rilke's most ambitious drama, *Das tägliche Leben*, has been uncovered. Is there time to read Katherine Ann Porter's report on the English version of *Rilke und Benvenuta*, the silly and revelatory book by Magda von Hattingberg? To read Regina Ullmann's words on the *Briefe aus den Jahren 1906 bis 1907*, letters written by a man who had changed her life and whom she revered? Rilke received a full measure of piety from the people who surrounded him in life and from posterity; there is plenty of evidence of it here. Nonetheless, after we have burrowed for a long time in the piles of paper before us, we can locate clippings which bear such titles as "Rilke ohne Postament" (a review of Peter Demetz's book on the Prague years) and "Rilke ohne Weihrauch." They are few in number, and, in their tone, they are less expressions of pleasure at the treatment of Rilke from a factual-biographical standpoint than expressions of

Schadenfreude that a rascal has been exposed. German criticism frequently has trouble in locating the golden mean.

But facts, useful facts of all sorts, are hidden among the clippings, too: "Rilke in Belgien" by Ossip Kalenter, "Rilke in Skandinavien" by Hermann Epp, "Rilke als Rezensent" by Robert Faesi, himself both a critic and a creative writer. An article's appearance in a newspaper—a European newspaper—does not necessarily mean that it is a flimsy piece of work. All the same, the scholar may tell himself that the investigation of these solid essays may be put off until later, when he needs their special fund of information. For the present he cannot resist the lure of the title, "Der alte Fontane hält Rilke für eine Dame"; what tragi-comedy of the Berlin literary salons of the 1890's lies behind it? Meanwhile, juxtapositions smile enticingly at us: "Bei Hemingway wie bei Rilke: Über die Gefahren der Selbstnachahmung" and "Rilke, Andersen, Meyrink in melodramatischer Wiedergabe." The contents are trivial, no doubt, but the headings have been able to arouse the tired Old Adam of our curiosity. It is difficult to think up excuses for our weakness of moral fiber in such cases; a scholar should always husband his time, and the rule is doubly true for the scholar who is worn out by his labors. Good arguments for delving into patently biographical tidbits are more easily come by: we do not need to apologize for succumbing to: "Über Rilkes Abstammung," "Schulhefte der Liebe: Auf den Spuren des Kadetten Rainer [sic] Maria Rilke," "Rilke und Kainz," "Rilke und die Juden," "Rilke und das Kriegsarchiv," "Zum Wandel in Rilkes Handschrift," "Rilke und der weisse Terror," "War Rilke ein Don Juan?". Our perverse hunger for recollections of Rilke can be excul-

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pated on similar grounds of a would-be biographer's legitimate interest, recollections entrusted to the press by Camill Hoffmann, Hans Leip, Oskar Loerke, Emil Orlik, Otto Pick, Erich Pfeiffer-Belli, Siegfried Trebitsch, Walter Tritzsch, Charles Vildrac, Contat-Mercanton. Nor are the memories limited to Rilke; the ladies whose clutches he most wanted to escape are confined in these precincts together with him. His wife is here, depicted sympathetically (by B. Rijdes in "Herinnering aan Clara Rilke-Westhoff"), and his mother, depicted variously—the mother who put the first germ-cells of poetry into him, whom he came to detest, and who outlived him. Remembering Rilke's fear of Phia Rilke's presence, we thrust the clippings back into their Pandora-boxes, heave a sigh of regret and relief, and leave the archive.

In 1915, Rilke concluded his ode to the Swedish poet Bellman with the lines:

Wir kommen voller Fülle zu den Toten,
Was haben wir gesehn!

Filled to the brim, half-dead from exhaustion, the scholar comes to the end of his forced march through the Sagan collection: "Was hat *er* gesehn!"

It cannot be said that he has visited a collection without flaws, without omissions. No archivist, no collector can make such a claim, nor would he want to do so. The collector's thrill is the search for the next and missing item, and he would probably abandon the vice of collecting forthwith if he thought that he would someday achieve completeness. But the collector, in pursuit of the perfection he does not want to reach, has given the scholar a perfect tool—a perfect tool because it seduces the scholar into believing that he can possess an absolute

mastery of his subject, and then teaches him that he will never have it.

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