

Into the Blue Reach

*Selected Poems and Prose by
Rainer Maria Rilke*

Translated by

Ingrid Amalia Herbert

and

Alison Kolodinsky



Black Lawrence Press
New York

Inhalt

I

- 14 [Vergiß, vergiß]
- 16 Zum Einschlafen zu sagen
- 18 Lied
- 20 Liebes-Lied
- 22 [Welche Wiesen duften deine Hände]
- 24 Die Liebende
- 26 [Nenn ich dich Aufgang oder Untergang]
- 28 [Irgendwo blüht die Blume des Abschieds]
- 30 Der Tod der Geliebten
- 32 [Wie das Gestirn, der Mond]

II

- 36 [Jetzt wär es Zeit]
- 38 Vorgefühl
- 40 [Du musst das Leben nicht verstehen]
- 42 Der Panther
- 44 [Ich fürchte mich so vor der Menschen Wort]
- 46 Menschen bei Nacht
- 48 Der Dichter
- 50 Engellieder
- 58 Abend
- 60 Für Hans Carossa
- 62 Herbsttag
- 64 Ernste Stunde
- 66 [Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen]
- 68 [Vor lauter Lauschen und Staunen]
- 70 Schlußstück

Contents

I

- 15 [Forget, forget]
17 To Say for Going to Sleep
19 Song
21 Love Song
23 [Which meadows scent your hands]
25 Woman in Love
27 [Do I name you rising or falling]
29 [Somewhere the flower of parting blooms]
31 The Death of the Beloved
33 [As the heavenly body, the moon]

II

- 37 [Now would be the time]
39 Presentiment
41 [You do not need to understand life]
43 The Panther
45 [I so fear the word of mankind]
47 Human Beings by Night
49 The Poet
51 Angel Songs
59 Evening
61 For Hans Carossa
63 Autumn Day
65 Grave Hour
67 [I live my life in widening rings]
69 [For the sake of listening and wondering]
71 End Point

A special note of gratitude to
Uta Rollins and Karen Samuels
for never breaking faith with us.

This book is dedicated with love
to our husbands, Andreas and Rick.

INTRODUCTION

Shortly after 9/11, I flew to Germany for the first time. My friend, Uta Rollins, and I were traveling to Bavaria to visit her family. I nearly decided against going because only two weeks had passed since that infamous day, but at the last minute I decided to keep my ticket. Little did I know that, had I stayed behind, this book would never have been born.

While we were there, we attended a birthday party given in honor of Uta's brother. Since I had nothing on hand to offer as a gift, I gave him what I'd brought along to read on the trip: Stephen Mitchell's well-known *Ahead of All Parting: The Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke*. He was genuinely thrilled with this gift.

Before we left Germany, Uta's brother gave me, as a kind of gift in return, the first CD of the Rilke Projekt, entitled "Bis an alle Sterne/To all the stars." The award-winning Rilke Projekt consists of three audio CDs, the first of which had been released nine months earlier in January, 2001. On each track, Rilke's poems or prose pieces are performed by actors and/or vocalists with the accompaniment of an orchestra.

The masterminds behind the Rilke Projekt are Richard Schönherz and Angelica Fleer who went on to compose the two sequels, "In meinem wilden Herzen/In my wild heart," and "Überfließende Himmel/Overflowing heavens," released in 2002 and 2004 respectively. A DVD was released as well in April of 2005, made from tapes of the hugely successful international tour and starring many of the original cast.

Receiving that CD was the beginning of *Into the Blue Reach*. When I returned home in October 2001, I began to research the

texts performed on each of the tracks of “Bis an alle Sterne.” I was so taken by the riveting performances, the wonderful music, and the beautiful German language that I began to buy volumes of poetry by various English translators of Rilke, hoping to discover what the words performed on each track meant. (All of the liner notes, unfortunately for me, were in German.) My bookshelves, now heavy with volumes of Rilke, are home to the works of many notable translators including Stephen Mitchell, Edward Snow, John J. L. Mood, C. F. MacIntyre, Joanna Macy, M. D. Herbert Norton, Robert Bly, Galway Kinnel, Bernard Frank, J. B. Leischman, and Walter Arndt. Although these volumes offered me some wonderful reading, many of the poems performed on “Bis an alle Sterne” remained a mystery.

In 2003, Uta’s sister, Ingrid Herbert, came to Florida for a visit. I had met Ingrid previously, but it was at this time that Uta suggested Ingrid and I work together. Ingrid is bilingual and has a keen interest in Rilke and poetry, though she is not a poet herself. From the very first moment I mentioned what I was after—to decipher all the tracks on “Bis an alle Sterne”—Ingrid was game.

And so our collaboration began—the two of us emailing one another across the Atlantic. Although emailing notes back and forth was time-consuming and sometimes frustrating, the beauty of that particular method was that all our ideas were in print. We’d email the most general and the minutest of details and ideas to each other; not just definitions and conjectures, but also prosody, scansion, etc., which I taught her as we went along.

Things moved more quickly when we could work together, day after day, for a few weeks at a time, in person. This we did on four occasions over three and a half years. Ingrid flew to Florida or to Bowen Island where my husband and I have a summer home. When we worked at my house, we worried about nothing but Rilke

until my husband rang the dinner bell. Two translators have never been more spoiled. During the spring of 2005, I was able to spend more than two weeks at her home in Germany.

By the early winter of 2006, we finished the book: twenty-five poems and prose pieces in all, containing translations for every track on “Bis an alle Sterne.” We also included other translations: three poems (“Engellieder/Angel Songs,” “Ernste Stunde/Grave Hour,” and “Vorgefühl/Presentiment”) from the second CD, as well as two poems from the third CD—(“Herbsttag/Autumn Day”) and an untitled poem “[Vor lauter Lauschen und Staunen]/ [For the sake of listening and wondering].” *Into the Blue Reach* also includes three of Rilke’s poems which are not part of the Rilke Projekt: (“Abend/Evening”), (“Der Dichter/The Poet”), and (“Schlußstück/End Point”).

Many have asked us how we worked together: I didn’t speak, read or write German and Ingrid is not a poet. Surprisingly, it worked out perfectly. We discovered early on that Ingrid was most comfortable translating without any aids, other than her dictionary and thesaurus. Here is how we’d begin: Ingrid would write out her translation without consulting any other translator’s work. Then we would go over it together, scan each line, discuss the meaning and intention of Rilke’s work, and talk about the overall text in its relationship to the period in which Rilke wrote it. Only when we had completed our own translation or were especially curious about a specific line did we consult the work of another translator, if a translation could be found.

Neither Ingrid nor I mean to minimize the tremendous contribution people such as Edward Snow and Stephen Mitchell have made. Were it not for both of these men in particular, Rilke would not be as well-read as he is in the United States.

But now on the scene are translators who work in much the same way as Ingrid and I do. The Russian-born translator, Larissa Volokhonsky, and her American-born husband, Richard Pevear, collaborate to produce works which have garnered considerable acclaim. Their most recent release of Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* follows many novels by Dostoevsky, Chekhov, and Gogol. Volokhonsky and Pevear describe their two-step process in the following way: she hammers out a literal translation of the work, and he adapts her translation into stylistically meaningful English. Then they begin reviewing the drafts together until each is satisfied.

In other aspects of the work, Ingrid and I have broken with some of the practices of our peers. Where American and Canadian translators often choose to keep end rhymes, for example, we decided to break that rule. It was a choice that we made early on. Instead, we use internal rhyme so as to maintain the integrity of both sound and meaning as much as possible. We paid particular attention to keeping the number of feet per line. Although this was not always feasible, we worked painstakingly to do so whenever possible.

Nor did we interject words that were not Rilke's own. To do so is enticing, but because we were a team it was easier to help each other avoid that trap. This was probably the singular issue that bothered us the most: that many translators substituted or padded translations with words which were not in Rilke's work, whether it be for the sake of an end rhyme or illuminating a passage. To remain faithful to the original language was always at the forefront of our work. In just this way, we will continue to translate Rilke's poems and prose.

Alison Kolodinsky
Bowen Island, BC
July 18, 2008

[Vergiß, vergiß]

Vergiß, vergiß, und laß uns jetzt nur dies
erleben, wie die Sterne durch geklärten
Nachthimmel dringen, wie der Mond die Gärten
voll übersteigt. Wir fühlten längst schon, wies
spiegelnder wird im Dunkeln; wie ein Schein
entsteht, ein weißer Schatten in dem Glanz
der Dunkelheit. Nun aber laß uns ganz
hinübertreten in die Welt hinein
die monden ist—

- Paris, Sommer 1909

[Forget, forget]

Forget, forget, and let us now live
to see only this, how the stars pervade
the bared night sky, how the cirque of the moon
fully scales the gardens. For so long
we've sensed how reflection deepens in the dark;
how a gleam emerges, a white shadow
in the sheen of darkness. But now
let us completely step into the world
which is moon—

- Paris, summer 1909

Zum Einschlafen zu sagen

Ich möchte jemanden einsingen,
bei jemandem sitzen und sein.
Ich möchte dich wiegen und kleinsingen
und begleiten schlafaus und schlafein.
Ich möchte der Einzige sein im Haus,
der wüßte: die Nacht war kalt.
Und ich möchte horchen herein und hinaus
in dich, in die Welt, in den Wald.
Die Uhren rufen sich schlagend an,
und man sieht der Zeit auf den Grund.
Und unten geht noch ein fremder Mann
und stört einen fremden Hund.
Dahinter wird Stille. Ich habe groß
die Augen auf dich gelegt;
und sie halten dich sanft und lassen dich los,
wenn ein Ding sich im Dunkel bewegt.

To Say for Going to Sleep

I would like to sing someone to sleep,
to sit beside someone and be.

I would like to rock you and calm you by singing
and go with you from and to sleep.

I would like to be the only one in the house
who knew: the night was cold.

And I'd like to listen inward and out
into you, the world, the woods.

The clocks call to each other by striking,
and one sees to the bottom of time.

And yet, below, a strange man walks
and rouses a strange dog.

After that comes stillness.

I have laid my eyes upon you wide;
and they hold you softly and let you go,
when some thing moves in the dark.

Lied

Du, der ichs nicht sage, daß ich bei Nacht
weinend liege,
deren Wesen mich müde macht
wie eine Wiege.

Du, die mir nicht sagt, wenn sie wacht
meinetwillen:
wie, wenn wir diese Pracht
ohne zu stillen
in uns erträgen?

- - -

Sieh dir die Liebenden an,
wenn erst das Bekennen begann,
wie bald sie lügen.

- - -

Du machst mich allein. Dich einzig kann ich vertauschen.
Eine Weile bist du, dann wieder ist es das Rauschen,
oder es ist ein Duft ohne Rest.

Ach, in den Armen hab ich sie alle verloren,
du nur, du wirst immer wieder geboren:
weil ich niemals dich anhielt, halt ich dich fest.

Song

You, whom I do not tell, that by night
I lie weeping,
whose tranquil nature quiets me
like a cradle.

When, for me, you stay awake
you do not tell:
how would it be if
we inwardly endured this splendor,
without it being eased?

- - -

Look at the lovers,
once the confession has begun,
how soon they lie.

- - -

You make me alone. I confound only
you with other things. Sometimes it is you,
at times it is the murmur, or a scent without a trace.
Ah, from my arms I have lost them all,
you only, you are born again and again:
because I never hindered you, I hold you fast.

Liebes-Lied

Wie soll ich meine Seele halten, daß
sie nicht an deine rührt? Wie soll ich sie
hinheben über dich zu andern Dingen?
Ach gerne möcht ich sie bei irgendwas
Verlorenem im Dunkel unterbringen
an einer fremden stillen Stelle, die
nicht weiterschwingt, wenn deine Tiefen schwingen.
Doch alles, was uns anrührt, dich und mich,
nimmt uns zusammen wie ein Bogenstrich,
der aus zwei Saiten *eine* Stimme zieht.
Auf welches Instrument sind wir gespannt?
Und welcher Geiger hat uns in der Hand?
O süßes Lied.

Love Song

How shall I hold back my soul, so that
it does not touch yours? How shall I
lift it over you toward other things?
Ah I would like to hold it safe
with what is lost in the darkness
at an unknown silent place, which
does not keep swaying when your depths stir.
Yet everything that touches us, you and me,
brings us together like the stroke of a bow
that draws *one* voice from two strings.
On what instrument are we made taut?
And what fiddler has us in his hand?
Oh sweet song.

[Welche Wiesen duften deine Hände]

Welche Wiesen duften deine Hände?
Fühlst du wie auf deine Widerstände
stärker sich der Duft von draußen stützt.
Drüber stehn die Sterne schon in Bildern.
Gib mir, Liebe, deinen Mund zu mildern;
ach, dein ganzes Haar ist unbenützt.

Sieh, ich will dich mit dir selbst umgeben
und die welkende Erwartung heben
von dem Rande deiner Augenbraun;
wie mit lauter Liderinnenseiten
will ich dir mit meinen Zärtlichkeiten
alle Stellen schließen, welche schau.

[Which meadows scent your hands]

Which meadows scent your hands?
Do you feel how the fragrance is sustained
all the more by your resistance.
Already the stars pose in images above.
Give me, love, your mouth to soothe;
ah, your untouched hair.

See, I wish to encompass you with you
and lift the fading anticipation
from the edges of your brows;
for you, with all my tenderness
solely like the eyelids' inner pages
I want to close all places which look.