

Ahead of All Parting *With Rainer Maria in the Alps*

*We are riding in a limousine placed at our disposal
by Princess Marie Taxis. The road winds through
the Swiss Alps. The driver: my friend Hermes.*

1. *Getting to Know Him*

Where there is song there is Orpheus.
So says a 'German' poet, greatly,
With whom I've grown acquainted lately.
We're friends, in fact. The two of us

Are motoring over the Alps now, he
And I. The driver's hand is steady.
Ahead of parting, gone already,
We go the Way. He turns to me:

*I sit among my extra senses
Like a sad king who owns the ruin
Of a world what has he to do in,
Do with? The only real defence is*

*To have none whatsoever. Be—
I know, I know, for-ever dead in
(I add: first you must make your bed in)
Doomed-at-a-glance Eurydice.*

So.—And we share this nebular
Agreement for the rest of time
Whilst Heurtebise on that steep climb
Discreetly drives the motor car.

2.

Rainer Maria sonneteers
Quite *dunkel*-darkly as he sits
Beside me, dropping little bits
Of *Tiefe* as the chauffeur steers.



*Rilke was a Prague native; his mother,
when the victorious Austrians marched
beneath her house, closed the shutters.*

*Alias Hermes in Jean
Cocteau's cinematic poem.—[Mr V]*



Travelling Through Switzerland in a Motor Car

*On the front doors, the Thurn and Taxis coat
Of arms... The princess, brilliant Marie,
Is with me—an old friendship's intimacy.
Hands in a muff, she shares an anecdote.*

*All round us, civilized sublimities
Of valley and mountain snap to attention and
Salute the stately vehicle. The land
Rolls out green carpets, floral tapestries:*

*All duly absorbed through tinted isinglass,
To be metabolised and rendered back
Turned inside out, wearing their deaths. The grass*

*Slips into sleeves of evening, down the black
Seam of a gaze. That rockslide's frozen spill
Never looked so steep, so irretrievable.*

*

Rainer's Book of Hours

*My Russian soul turned from the aureate light.
I sank into myself as down a mine
And there I saw thrones, windows, and the night.
Night offered up to me its blackest wine:*

*I tasted God. Angels were everywhere.
My soul was without form, and full. God's bones
Assembled into hands and wandered there,
Seeking His tongue. They groped through ghosts and stones.*

*Because I doubted him, he could not find me.
I turned away, and he grew vague behind me,
Shrank from his definition—for he dwelt*

*Inside the darkness he had made before
He made the light. I needed less, and more:
Things bounded, wrought, made to be seen and felt.*

*



Inspired by Lou Salomé and trips to Russia.

Credo

*Things felt became my credo, not mere feeling.
Look, always look... So I told Pain and Pleasure:
Your destiny is buttress, vault and ceiling.
Squeeze into silence under massive pressure.*

*Spread through these stained-glass shapes, be the still bliss
In martyrs' eyes when sunbeams bruise them; coil
Your tumult deep inside the wafer's kiss,
The cool, chromatic sheen on chrisem oil—*

*Fling yourselves out now, in convulsive waves,
And find, in Orpheus, your mouth, your breath.
Float down the river of a song no staves*

*Can hold—be one whole note that rings through death
And grows so vast and palpable and round
Earth dwells entirely in that single sound.*

3.

*Rainer, who is his own Maria,
Re-lives the harvest of his dreams,
When the Work came to him. It seems
An angel gave him the idea!*

Château de Muzot, 1922

*It ripens to its hour; I will be spent.
I never thought that it would feel so light,
This strength the Angel gives me. You were meant
For THIS, he says. And I stand up and write.*

*Hearts hinder, hearths hold back... Geese-haunted skies,
O orphaned spaces shivering! Can a breath
Husband the share of all departing cries,
Bless each thing with the shape of its own death?*

*My tower is vigil. Patience makes me rich.
Let statesmen dig excuses from the rubble
They made. They boast of peace. There will be trouble.*

*America floods the emptiness with kitsch—
But our dead still belong to us. Soon Europe
Will taste its harvest: a dark, Orphic syrup.*

*Working as Rodin's private secretary.
New Poems. Later, the Sonnets to
Orpheus, a kind of palinode to these...*



With Baladine Klossowska.



*Vera Knoop, whose early death moved
him to write the Sonnets to Orpheus.*

4.

*The catkins fall. And it is right.
A fountain's jet can juggle pounds
Of leaden balls. Up, down they bounce.
Light heavy as honey grows, stone, light.*

*Inside the very womb it grows,
The seed of mortal destiny.
It was your privilege to be
The Poet Murdered by a Rose.*

Omen

*He rose up like a river god, and named me.
To him this marrow and this blood belonged.
Pale emissaries, at his bidding, thronged
The furthest reaches of my veins. They claimed me.*

*The lake spreads out in all directions, vast
Enough to absorb the rawest agony.
Drugs I refuse: my pain belongs to me.
My death is mine. The rose that blossoms last.*

*I am the hospice dying found a home in.
I am becoming all that I have said...
When? Where? Is this the Nowhere without No?*

*Am I among the living or the dead?
The angels cannot tell. They come and go.
The ripeness comes, and everything was omen.*

5.

*These Alps: I see Mount Purgatory
Among them; Earthly Paradise
Of flowering glades. Then do we rise
From here or fall? How ends this story?*

*Lightly. We catkin-fall, my friend.—
Heurtebise, when we reach the summit,
Drive over in a trance-like plummet,
Please, slowly. [O:] Rainer, love the—*



*Leukemia. Sanitarium on Lake
Geneva, 29 December, 1926.*

See the Eighth Duino Elegy.—[Mr V]

'End!', of course, was to have been my last word.



Constellations

Hermes guides us through the last Duino Elegy.

* * *

Even the starry connections deceive.

—Sonnets to Orpheus

*Beyond the shooting galleries, the shrill laugh,
The gaudy prizes winking from the shelves,
I am that shadowy figure with the staff.
Follow me to the outposts of yourselves.*

*Above the mist's rippling handkerchief—
That warm, wept stream—those flocks of sorrow, bleating
Quietly in the dark—stand on this cliff:
Watch as they take their shapes for one last meeting.*

*You raised them over you on cold, clear nights,
Cast over space a skeletal poetry.
Ah, but the space: it grows and grows. Orion*

*The Hunter and his glittering prey, the Lion:
Drifting apart now—tattered little kites—
Shedding their names... Irrevocable... Free.*



Musical Program

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Mahler, *Symphony No. 1 in D Major*. I: Langsam, Schleppend (excerpt). Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Pierre Boulez, conductor.

Page 5

Richard Strauss, *Vier letzte Lieder (Four Last Songs)*. IV: *Beim Schlafengehen*. Text by Herman Hesse. Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, soprano. (Illustration, next page: Matisse, *Icarus*.)

Nun der Tag mich müd gemacht,
soll mein sehnliches Verlangen
freundlich die gestirnte Nacht
wie ein müdes Kind empfangen.

Hände, laßt von allem Tun,
Stirn, vergiß du alles Denken,
alle meine Sinne nun
wollen sich in Schlummer senken.

Und die Seele unbewacht
will in freien Flügen schweben,
um im Zauberkreis der Nacht
tief und tausendfach zu leben.

While Going to Sleep

Now that the day has made me so tired,
my dearest longings shall
be accepted kindly by the starry night
like a weary child.

Hands, cease your activity,
head, forget all of your thoughts;
all my senses now
will sink into slumber.

And my soul, unobserved,
will float about on untrammelled wings
in the enchanted circle of the night,
living a thousandfold more deeply.

Trans. Emily Ezust

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Duruflé, *Requiem*, Op. 9. VII: Lux Aeterna. Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Chorus,
Robert Shaw, conductor.

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Te decet hymnus, Deus, in Sion,
et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem.

Exaudi orationem meam,
ad te omnis care veniet.

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Grant them eternal rest, Lord,
and let perpetual light shine on them.

You are praised, God, in Zion,
and homage will be paid to You in Jerusalem.

Hear my prayer,
to You all flesh will come.

Grant them eternal rest, Lord,
and let perpetual light shine on them.

Trans. Nick Jones