

Rainer Maria Rilke

# Sonnets to Orpheus

*Translation by Ed Alexander dedicated to the memory of Jamie Alexander*

Part I

~ 1 - 1 ~

A tree arose. O what pure transcendence!  
O, Orpheus is singing. O, what a higher tree in the ear!  
And then all was still. And yet even in this silence,  
a new beginning, beckoning, and transformation went forth.

Animals thronged from the stillness out of the clear  
and liberated wood from lair and nest;  
and it transpired that not from cunning,  
and not from fear were they so hushed,

but from listening. Bellowing and screeching and roaring  
seemed small in their hearts. And where before  
there was hardly a hut to receive all this,

a den out of the darkest longing  
with an entrance with trembling portals –  
you built temples there for them in their hearing.

~ 1 - 2 ~

She was almost a girl and went forth  
from this unified Joy of song and lyre  
and shone clearly through her veil of Springtime  
and made herself a bed in my ear.

And slept in me. And her sleep was everything.  
The trees at which I ever marveled, these  
tangible distances, the sensible meadow  
and every Marvel that ever struck me.

She slept the world. Singing god, how have  
you completed her, so that she had no desire  
to wake once more. Look, she arose and slept.

Where is her death? Oh, will you not invent  
this Motif before your song is consummated? –  
To where does she descend from me? ...Almost a girl...

~ 1 - 3 ~

A god can do it. But how, tell me, shall  
a man follow him through the narrow lyre.  
His mind is divided. At the crossing of  
two heartways stands no temple for Apollo.

Song, as you teach it, is not desire,  
not wooing for something in the end unattainable;  
song is Being. Easy for the god.  
But when shall we be? And when will he render

the earth and stars upon our being?  
It isn't this, boy, that you love, even if  
your voice then thrusts your mouth open, - learn

to forget your impulsive song. That will pass.  
To sing in Truth, that's another breath.  
A breath of Nothing. A divine wafting. A wind.

~ 1 - 4 ~

Oh, you tender ones, step now and again  
into the Breath that pays you no heed,  
let it part at your cheeks,  
it quivers behind you, united again.

Oh you Blessed Ones, you Whole Ones,  
you who seem the Beginning of Hearts.  
Bows of arrows and targets of arrows,  
tearfully shines your smile more eternally.

Fear not suffering, the heaviness,  
give it back to the weight of the earth;  
heavy are the mountains, heavy are the seas.

Even the trees you planted as children  
became too heavy long ago; you could not bear them.  
But the breezes... but the spaces...

~ 1 - 5 ~

Erect no monument. Just let the rose  
bloom each year in his favor.  
Because it's Orpheus. His metamorphosis  
into this and that. We shouldn't bother ourselves

about other names. Once and for all time  
it's Orpheus, whenever there's singing. He comes and goes.  
Isn't it quite enough, when he sometimes  
outlives the bowl of roses for a few days?

Oh, how he must disappear, so that you all comprehend.  
And even if this disappearing was also fearful to him.  
Because his word transcends his presence,

he's already there, where you cannot accompany.  
The lyre's lattice does not snare his hands  
and he obeys even as he transcends.

~ 1 - 6 ~

Is he among us? No, out of both  
realms grew his expansive nature.  
More aware, he who has known the Willow's Roots  
would bend the Willow's Branches.

If you're going to bed, don't leave  
Bread and Milk on the table – it draws the dead - .  
But he, the conjuror, mixes  
under the mildness of the eyelids

their appearance in everything seen;  
and the magic of earth's incense  
would be as true to him as the clearest relation.

Nothing can ruin the valid symbol for him;  
whether from graves, from rooms,  
let him praise finger ring, clasp, and jug.

~ | - 7 ~

Praising, that's it! like one appointed to praising  
he came forth like iron from the rock's  
silence. His heart, oh ephemeral press  
of a wine which to man is eternal.

His voice never deserts him in the dust,  
when the divine example seizes him.  
Everything becomes a vineyard, a grape  
ripened in his sensuous south.

Not even the mold in the crypts of kings  
rebukes him for the praising lies, or  
that a shadow falls from the gods.

He's one of the messengers who stays behind  
but who still holds far into the doors of the dead  
bowls with praiseworthy fruit.

~ | - 8 ~

Only in the space of praising can the lament  
proceed, the Nymph of the weeping spring  
watching over our downfall,  
so that it be clear at the same cliffside

which bears both Door and Altar.  
See how the feeling dawns about  
her still shoulders, that she is the youngest  
among the sisterhood of the spirit.

Joy *knows*, and Longing is acquiescent:  
only Lament is still learning. With maiden hands  
she recounts the old grief all night long.

But suddenly, sharply and unrehearsed,  
she holds up a constellation of our voice  
into the heavens, undisturbed by her breath.

~ | - 9 ~

Only the one who has lifted the lyre  
among the shades, too,  
may presciently restore  
the eternal praise.

Only the one who with the dead has eaten  
poppies which are theirs  
will never again lose  
the most delicate tone.

Even though the reflection becomes  
oft blurred in the pond:  
know the image.

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

~ | - 10 ~

Those of you who have never left my feelings,  
I greet you, antique sarcophagi,  
whom the joyful waters of Roman days  
flow through like a wanderer's song.

Or those so open, like the eyes  
of a cheerful awakening shepherd  
- inwardly full of calm and bee-balm -  
to whom enchanted butterflies fluttered;

all those whom one wrests from doubt,  
I greet them, the mouths once again opened,  
which already knew what silence meant.

Don't we know it, friends, don't we?  
The two draft the hesitant hour  
into the human countenance.

~ | - 11 ~

Look at the sky. Is there no constellation called "The Rider"?  
Because this is uniquely impressed upon us:  
this pride of earth. And a second,  
which drives and holds it and which carries him.

Isn't it just like this, this longing  
nature of being, chased and then bound?  
Path and turning. It only takes a touch.  
New spaces. And the two are one.

But *are* they? Or don't they both mean  
the path they take together?  
Table and Field separate them namelessly.

Even the starry union deceives.  
Yet let us now be glad awhile,  
to believe the image. That will suffice.

~ | - 12 ~

Hail to the Spirit that can unite us;  
for we truly live in images.  
And with baby steps the clocks  
accompany our actual day.

Without knowing our true place,  
we act out of real relation.  
Antennae feel antennae  
and the empty distance bore...

Pure Tension. Oh, Music of the Forces!  
Isn't every disturbance deflected  
from you by our usual busi-ness?

Even if the farmer works and worries  
where the seed turns into summer,  
he never penetrates there. Earth *bestows*.

~ I - 13 ~

Full apple, pear and banana,  
gooseberry... All these speak  
life and death in the mouth... I feel it...  
Read it in the face of a child,

when she tastes them. This comes from afar.  
Is something namelessly, slowly happening in your mouth?  
Where once words were, flow discoveries,  
suddenly freed from the flesh of the fruit.

Dare to speak it, what you call an apple.  
This sweetness, which first condenses,  
in order, in the tasting gently resurrected,

to become clear, awake and transparent,  
equivocal, sunny, earthy, present - :  
Oh, Experience, Feeling, Joy – immense!

~ I - 14 ~

We go about with flower, vine leaf, fruit.  
They speak not only the language of the year.  
Out of the darkness rises a colourful openness  
which has perhaps the glow of jealousy

of the dead about it, who invigorate the earth.  
What do we know of their part in this?  
It has been their way to knead their marrow  
thoroughly into the clay.

Here's the only question: do they do it gladly?...  
Does this fruit, the produce of sullen slaves,  
push up all balled up to us, their masters?

Are they the masters, who sleep by the roots,  
and grant to us out of their surplus  
this hybrid out of dumb strength and kisses?

~ I - 15 ~

Hold on....., that tastes good!., but it's already flown.  
... Now only a little music, a tapping, a humming-:  
you warm girls, you silent girls,  
dance the flavour of the tasted fruit.

Dance the orange, who can forget it.  
How, drowning in itself, it resists  
its sweetness. You've all possessed it.  
It has transformed itself to you at a price.

Dance the orange. Project that warmer landscape  
out from yourself so that the ripeness radiates  
in the breezes of the homeland. Thus aglow, peel away

fragrance upon fragrance. Create the relationship  
between the pure, self-denying peel  
and the juice which so happily fills it.

~ I - 16 ~

You, my friend, are lonely because....  
with words and pointing *we*  
gradually make the world our own,  
perhaps its weakest, most dangerous part.

Who points with their finger to a smell? –  
Yet of the powers that threaten us,  
you feel many... you know the dead,  
and you recoil from the magic spell.

You see, now we have to bear together  
bits and pieces as though they were the whole.  
Helping you will be hard. Above all don't

plant me in your heart. I would grow too fast.  
But I will guide *my* master's hand and say:  
This is Esau in his own skin.

~ 1 - 17 ~

In the undermost, entangled,  
root of all the upraised,  
concealed source, into  
which they never saw.

Storm Hat and Hunter's Horn,  
Graybeard's Proverbs,  
men in brother's wrath,  
women like lutes...

Branch pressing on branch,  
not one of them free...  
One! Oh climb... ascend...

But they still break.  
Yet this top one at last  
bends into a lyre.

~ 1 - 18 ~

Don't you hear the newest, master,  
rumbling and heaving?  
Harbingers come,  
who praise it.

Indeed no hearing is whole  
in all the turmoil  
Yet the machine part  
now wants to be praised.

Look at the machine:  
how it rotates and takes its toll  
and deforms and weakens.

If it also has strength from us,  
let it, dispassionately,  
drive and serve.

~ I - 19 ~

Even if the world is quickly changing  
like cloud shapes,  
everything that is perfected  
goes home to the Age Old.

Over the Change and Passage  
wider and freer,  
your pre-lude still lasts,  
god with the lyre.

Sufferings are not understood,  
nor has love been learned,  
and what separates us in death

is not unveiled.  
Only the song over the land  
hallows and celebrates.

~ I - 20 ~

But to you, master, what shall I dedicate, say,  
who taught the creatures their ear? –  
My memories of a spring day  
in the evening, in Russia - , a horse...

The white horse came over alone from the village  
with the hobble on one fore fetlock,  
to be alone for one night on the meadow;  
how the shock of his mane beat

on his neck in time with his mettle,  
with his crudely hobbled gallop.  
How the source of his steadily blood sprang!

He felt the distances, and above!  
He sang and he heard - , the epic cycle  
was enclosed in him. His image – I dedicate.

~ 1 - 21 ~

Spring has come again. The earth  
is like a child that has learned a poem;  
many, O many... For the effort  
of long study she receives the prize.

Her teacher was strict. We liked the  
whiteness of the Old Man's beard.  
Now we can ask what the Green and the Blue  
are called: She knows! She knows it!

Earth, on holiday, you lucky one, play  
now with the children. We want to catch you  
Happy Earth. The Happiest will do it.

Oh, what the teacher taught her, the Much  
and what has been pressed into the roots and  
long, twisted stems: she is singing, she's singing!

~ 1 - 22 ~

We are the Driven  
but the pace of Time  
takes this for trifle  
in the Immutable.

All that hurries  
will soon be over.  
For the Immutable  
now beckons us in.

Boys, don't throw your courage  
away in hastiness,  
not in attempts at flight.

Everything is at rest.  
Darkness and Light.  
Bloom and Book.

~ 1 - 23 ~

Oh, only then, when Flight  
no longer mounts for its own sake  
into ethereal stillness,  
self-sufficient,

thus in luminous profiles  
as the Tool that succeeded  
to play the Darling of the Wind,  
safely bobbing and weaving.

Only when a pure Whither  
outweighs the boyish pride  
in growing machines, will,

overwhelmed with victory,  
the one who has come close to the distance,  
be that which his flight really attained.

~ 1 - 24 ~

Should we reject our age old friendship with the great  
never solicitous gods, because they don't know  
the hard steel which we so precisely design,  
or suddenly seek them on a map?

These powerful friends who take the dead from us  
never ever brush against our wheels.  
We have removed our banquets far away - , our  
baths and their Messengers which have been for a long time

too slow for us, we continuously overtake. Lonelier and now  
dependant on ourselves alone, but without recognizing each other,  
we no longer lay out our paths as lovely Meanders,

but straight. Only in boilers do the  
former fires burn and heave the hammers which  
grow heavier. We, however, lose strength, like swimmers.

~ 1 - 25 ~

However I will now once more remember you,  
you whom I knew like a flower of which  
I knew not the name and show you to them, you who  
were taken away, the beautiful playmate of the invincible cry.

At first a dancer, who, suddenly paused,  
the body full of hesitating, as if one had cast  
her youth in bronze: Sad and longing - . then  
from the higher achievers her music fell into the transformed heart.

Sickness was near. Already overpowered by the shadows,  
her blood darkened, yet, as if momentarily suspect,  
it flowed forth in its natural Spring.

Again and again, by darkness and depth interrupted,  
it glowed earthly. Until after horrible throbbing, it  
strode through the hopelessly Open Door.

~ 1 - 26 ~

But you, O Divine One, still sounding to the end,  
until beset by the swarm of disdained Maenads,  
you outshouted their cries with Order, you Beautiful One.  
And in the midst of the Destroyers, arose your upbuilding music.

There was none that could destroy your head and lyre,  
no matter how much they ranted and raged: and  
all the sharp stones which they flung at your  
heart became to you like pillows gifted with hearing.

In the end, they battered and broke you, driven by vengeance,  
while all the while your harmony resonated in lions and cliffs  
and in the trees and birds. You're still singing there.

Oh, you lost god! You eternal trace.  
Only because enmity at last tore you to pieces,  
are we the listeners and the mouth of nature.

# Part II

≈ II — 1 ≈

Breathing, you invisible poem!  
World-space in pure exchange  
with its own Being. Counterweight  
in which I rhymerically occur.

Solitary waves, whose  
gradual sea I am;  
most sparing You of all possible Seas, -  
Space winner.

How many of these locations in space  
were already in me? Many winds  
are like my son.

Do you know me, Air, you, still full of places  
once mine? You, once a smooth rind,  
Rounding and leaf of my words.

≈ II — 2 ≈

Just as sometimes the hurriedly closer page  
catches the *real* stroke from the Master:  
so mirrors often absorb the sacred  
single smile of girls.

Whenever they assay the morning, alone,-  
or in the gleam of subservient lights.  
And in the breathing of the *real* faces, later,  
only a reflection occurs.

Ah, the earth, who knows her losses?  
Only the one who despite all, with sounds of praise,  
sings the Heart, the Heart born into the Whole.

~ 11 - 3 ~

Mirrors: no one has knowingly described  
what you are in your essence.  
You, intermissions in time as if  
filled with gaping holes like sieves.

You, quiet spendthrifts of the empty hall –  
when twilight falls, wide as the woods...  
and the crystal chandelier penetrates  
your impenetrability like a sixteen point stag.

Sometimes you are full of paintings.  
A few seem to have actually entered you -,  
others you sent shyly by.

But the loveliest will remain, until  
beyond in her withheld cheeks,  
the transparent and released Narcissus presses in.

~ 11 - 4 ~

Oh, this is the animal that is not.  
They didn't know it and in every aspect –  
its movement, its bearing, its neck,  
even unto the light of its quiet gaze – they loved it.

Indeed it never *was*. But because they loved it,  
a pure animal came into being. They always made it room.  
And in that room, plain and open,  
it easily raised its head and hardly needed

to be. They feed it no grain,  
only the possibility that it could be.  
And this gave such strength to the animal,

that a horn grew out of its brow. A single horn.  
It came, pure white, to a virgin -  
and was in the mirror-silver and in her.

~ 11 — 5 ~

Flower muscle that opens the Anemone's  
meadow-morning bit by bit,  
until into her lap the polyphonic  
light of the brazen skies pours down,

into the quiet blossom-star of  
the extended muscle of eternal reception,  
often *so* overpopulated with abundance,  
that the sunset's signal to rest

is scarcely able to return you the  
far extended petal-edges:  
You, the Resolve and Strength of *how many* worlds!

We, the Violent Ones, we last longer.  
But *when*, in which one of all these lives  
are we finally open and receivers?

~ 11 — 6 ~

Rose, you throning one, to those in antiquity,  
you were a chalice with a simple rim.  
But to *us*, you are the full, innumerable flower,  
the inexhaustible object.

In your richness, you seem like cloak over cloak,  
covering a body composed of nothing but light;  
but your every single petal is simultaneously  
the shunning and the denial of all attire.

For centuries your fragrance has been calling  
its sweetest names over to us;  
suddenly it lies on the air like fame.

Nonetheless, we don't know what to call it, we make a guess...  
and memory goes over to it,  
for which we have plead from recallable hours.

~ II — 7 ~

Flowers, kin at last to the arranging hands,  
(hands of girls from then and now),  
which lay on the garden table from edge to edge  
drooping and mildly injured,

awaiting the water which will once more  
recover them from incipient death -, and now  
once again raised between the streaming poles  
of feeling fingers which are quite capable

of doing more than you suspected, you light ones,  
when you found yourselves once again in the vase  
slowly cooling and giving off the warmth of the girls

like confessions from you, like weary, dreary sins  
begun by being plucked, reconciling  
you again to those who were bound to you in blooming.

~ II — 8 ~

You few playmates of former childhood  
in the scattered gardens of the city:  
how we found each other and timidly pleased each other  
and, like the lamb with the speaking scroll

spoke like silent ones. Whenever we were happy,  
it belonged to no one. Whose was it?  
And how it vanished among all the passing people  
and in the anxiety of the long year.

Carriages rolled by us, indifferent, drawn past.  
Houses stood around us, stark, but unreal – and not  
one of them ever knew us. What *was* really in the All.

Nothing. Only the balls. Their splendid arcs.  
Not even the children... But sometimes one would step,  
an ephemeral one, underneath the falling ball.

*in memoriam Egon von Rilke*

≈ 11 — 9 ≈

Boast not, you judges, of dispensable torture  
and that iron no longer shackles the neck.  
No heart is elevated, not one - , because a  
welcome spasm of mercy more tenderly grips you.

What it received through the ages, the scaffold  
now gives back, like children their toys from  
last year's birthday. Into the pure, into the  
high, into the open-gated heart, he enters differently, the god

of true mercy. He would come more powerfully  
and sweep more glorious about him, as divinities are wont to do.  
More that a wind for the great, safe ships.

Not less than the secret subtle awareness  
that wins us silently within  
like a child from an eternal pairing quietly playing.

≈ 11 — 10 ≈

All we have gained is threatened by the machine  
as long as it persists to exist in spirit rather than in obeying.  
Lest the more beautiful lingering of the glorious hand no longer entice,  
it cuts the stone more precisely for more resolute building.

It stays nowhere behind, so that we could even one outrun it  
And it remain in the quiet factory, self-oiling.  
It is life, - it thinks it knows best how to do;  
and with equal resolve, orders, creates, and destroys.

But existence is still enchanted; in a hundred  
places it is still the origin. A playing of  
pure powers which touches no one who does not kneel and wonder.

Words still fade gently before the Inutterable...  
and music, ever new, builds out the most  
tremulous stones in unusable space her deified house.

~ 11 — 11 ~

Many of Death's ordered rules have arisen,  
you on-conquering man, since you persisted in hunting;  
yet more of you than trap and net I know, you strip of sail  
which they hung down into cavernous Karst.

Softly they let you in, as you were a sign  
to celebrate peace. But then: right at the very edge a boy gave you a twist,  
- and out of the caves, night threw a handful of pale, tumbling doves into the light...  
But *even* that is correct.

Far from the observer be every breath of pity,  
not only from the hunter alone, who watchfully  
and carefully completes that which reveals itself as timely.

*Killing is a form of our wandering sorrow...*  
What happens to us ourselves  
is pure in the serene spirit.

~ 11 — 12 ~

Will the transformation. Oh, be animated for the flame  
wherein a thing which boasts of change eludes you,  
that projecting spirit which masters the earthly,  
in the swing of the Dancer loves nothing as much as the point of turning.

Whatever shuts itself up into the Remaining *is* already starkness.  
Does it imagine itself safe in the shelter of inconspicuous grey?  
Wait, from out of the distance of Hard warns something Hardest.  
Woe - : an absent hammer rises!

Whoever pours himself out as a spring, is known by knowledge  
and she leads him enraptured through serene creation  
which often ends with beginning and with ending begins.

Every happy space is a child or grandchild of separation  
through which they go astounded. And the transformed  
Daphne wills, since she feels her laurels, that you change yourself into wind.

~ 11 — 13 ~

Stay ahead of all parting, as if it were behind you,  
like winter that has just passed.  
Because among winters one is so endlessly Winter,  
so that, hibernating, once and for all your heart transcends.

Remain dead in Eurydice - , ascend more singingly,  
ascend more praisingly back into pure relation.  
Here among the vanishing, BE, in the realm of decline,  
be a ringing glass that has already shattered in the sound.

BE — and at the same time know the condition  
of Not-Being, the infinite Basis of your inner Vibration,  
so that you may completely fulfill it this one time.

To those used as well as to the muffled and mute  
Provision of full nature, the unspeakable sums,  
count yourself joyfully in and negate the number.

~ 11 — 14 ~

Look at the flowers, which are faithful to the earthly,  
to which we lend fate from the edge of the fate, -  
but who knows it! If they rue their wilting,  
it is for us to be their regret.

Everything wants to float. Thus we go around  
like weights, laying everything on ourselves, delighted with gravity;  
Oh, what sort of boring teachers we are for things,  
because they are blessed with eternal childhood.

If one took them into innermost sleep, and slept  
deeply with things - : oh how lightly he would come,  
out of the common deep differently from day to day.

Or perhaps he would stay; and they would bloom  
and praise him, the convert, who is now like one of them,  
all of those quiet brethren in the wind of the meadow.

≈ 11 — 15 ≈

Oh, fountain-mouth, you giver, you mouth  
that inexhaustibly speaks of the One, the Pure, -  
you, before the water's flowing face, you  
marble mask. And in the background

the heritage of the aqueducts. From far away,  
past graves, from the slope of the Apennines,  
they bring you your speaking, which then  
spills over the blackened aging of your chin

into the basin before.  
This is the Ear laid down to sleep,  
the marble Ear, into which you always speak.

An ear of the earth. She only speaks with  
herself like this. If a pitcher intrudes,  
it seems to her that you are interrupting.

≈ 11 — 16 ≈

Torn open again and again,  
the god is the place which heals.  
We are sharp because we want to know,  
but he is serene and diffuse.

Only the pure, consecrated libation  
he takes not differently in his world  
since he sets himself motionless  
against the free end.

Only the dead drink  
out of the spring heard here by us,  
if the god signals them silently, the dead.

Only the noise is offered to *us*.  
And the lamb pleads for its bell  
out of the quieter instinct.

~ II — 17 ~

Where, in which blissfully watered gardens, on which trees, from which tenderly unfurled blossom-calyxes do the exotic fruits of consolation ripen? These precious ones, like perhaps you'll find in

the trampled meadow of your poverty. Time and time again you marvel over the size of the fruit, over its wholesomeness, the smoothness of the rind, and that the flightiness of the bird didn't snatch it from you, nor the jealousy

of the worm below. Are there then trees frequented by angels and so uniquely tended by invisible, slow gardeners so that they bear us without belonging to us?

Haven't we ever been able, we shadows and shades through our behavior which ripens and withers too quickly to disturb the equanimity of those calm summers?

~ II — 18 ~

Dancer: oh you transposition  
of all transience into motion: how you presented it!  
And that final pirouette, this tree out of motion,  
did it not take possession of the hard-swung year?

Did not its treetop suddenly blossom with stillness,  
that only a moment ago was enveloped with your swinging?  
And above here, wasn't she Sun, wasn't she Summer,  
the warmth, the immeasurable warmth out of you?

But it bore it too, it bore, your tree of ecstasy.  
Are these not its tranquil fruits: the Pitcher,  
striped as it ripened, and the still riper Vase?

And in the pictures: doesn't the drawing remain,  
which sketched your eyebrows' dark stroke  
quickly on the surface of its own turning?

~ 11 — 19 ~

Somewhere the gold dwells in the hospitable bank  
and has the confidence of thousands. Yet that  
blindman, that beggar, is himself to the copper penny  
like a lost place, like the dirty corner under the dresser.

In the row of shops, money is quite at home  
and dresses itself to the eyes in silk, carnations and fur.  
He, the silent one, stands in the breathless pause  
of all that money which breathes both waking and sleeping.

Oh, may it close by night, this ever open hand.  
Tomorrow, fate will fetch it again, and daily  
hold it forth: bright, wretched, eternally indestructible.

If only someone, an observer, would finally in wonder  
grasp and praise its long persistence.  
Expressible only to the singer, audible only to the deity.

~ 11 — 20 ~

Between the stars, how far; and yet how much farther still,  
do we learn from the here and now.  
Someone, for example, a child... and next to him a second –  
oh how incomprehensibly distant.

Fate, perhaps it measures us with Being's span  
so that it seems foreign to us.  
Think: how many spans are there from a maid to a man,  
when she avoids and obsesses.

Everything is far - , and nowhere does the circle close.  
Gaze in the platter on the gaily prepared table,  
how odd the faces of the fish.

Fishes are mute..., one used to think. Who knows?  
But isn't there ultimately a place where one speaks  
what would be the fishes' language *without* them?

~ 11 — 21 ~

Sing the gardens, my heart, the ones you don't know,  
like gardens poured in glass, clear, untouchable.  
Waters and roses of Ispahan or of Shiraz,  
sing of them blissfully, praise them, the incomparable.

Show, my heart, that you never miss them.  
That they have you in mind, their ripening figs.  
That you consort with their breezes which  
rise to your face through the blossoming branches.

Avoid the mistake of thinking something  
goes missing in the decision once taken, namely: to be!  
Silken thread, you become part of what's woven.

Whichever image you've united with internally  
(even if it's a moment out of a life of pain),  
feel that whole praiseworthy tapestry is intended.

~ 11 — 22 ~

Oh, in spite of fate: the glorious overflowings  
of our existence, foamed over into parks, -  
or like men of stone beside the bases  
of high portals, lodged under balconies!

Oh, the brazen bell that daily lifts its clapper  
against the sullen day by day.  
Or the *one*, in Karnak, the column, the column  
which survives practically eternal temples.

Today the excess plunges past, the very one,  
but only as Haste, out of the horizontal yellow  
day into night which is magnified blindingly with light.

But the frenzy passes and leaves no traces.  
Curves of the flight through the air and those who led them  
perhaps not one is in vain. But only as thought.

~ 11 — 23 ~

Summon me to that hour of yours  
that never stops resisting you:  
imploringly near like the face of a dog,  
but always turned away again,

just when you think you've grasped it at last.  
That which is thus withdrawn is yours the most.  
We are free. We were dismissed there  
where we at first thought ourselves welcomed.

Fearfully, we clamor for a resting place,  
we who are too young sometimes for that which is old,  
and too old for that which never was.

We are, only just where we nonetheless give praise,  
because, ah, we are the branch and the blade  
and the sweetness of ripening danger.

~ 11 — 24 ~

Oh this joy, always new, out of furrowed clay!  
Practically no one has helped the earliest venturers.  
Despite this, cities arose on blissful bays,  
water and oil filled the jars nonetheless.

Gods: we plan them first in bold sketches  
which crabbed fate destroys for us again.  
But they are the immortals. Look, we can  
hear the one who will hear us in the end.

We, a thousand year generation: mothers and fathers,  
ever fuller and fuller with the future child,  
so that one day, transcending, it convulses us, later.

We, so endlessly ventured, what time we have!  
And only silent Death knows what we are  
and what he always gains when he lends to us.

~ 11 - 25 ~

Hark now, you can already hear the sound  
of the harrows at work; once again the human rhythm  
in the reserved quietude of the stark  
pre-spring earth. Not stale at all

does the Approaching appear to you. That which  
has come to you so often, appears to you to  
come again like something new. Always hoped for,  
you never apprehended it. It apprehended you.

Even the leaves of overwintered oaks appear  
in the evening a future Brown.  
Sometimes the breezes give each other a sign.

The bushes are black. Yet mounds of manure  
lie a deeper black in the fields.  
Every hour that passes grows younger.

~ 11 — 26 ~

How a bird's cry seizes us...  
Just any crying, once created.  
But children already, at play outdoors,  
cry out beyond real crying.

Cries of fate. In the middle realms  
of this world realm (into which the holistic  
Bird-cry passes, like men in dreams - ),  
they drive their wedges edges.

Woe, where are we? Freer and freer,  
like kites torn free,  
we chase about in mid air, edges rippling with laughter.

Tattered by the wind. — Command the criers,  
Oh, singing god! So that they awaken resounding,  
bearing like a current the head and the lyre.

~ 11 — 27 ~

Does time, the destroyer, really exist?  
At rest on the mountain, when does it destroy the castle?  
This heart, which belongs eternally to the gods,  
when will the Demiurge overpower it?

Are we really so anxiously fragile  
as fate would make us aware?  
Is childhood, so deep and full of promise  
in its roots — later, stilled?

Ah, the ghost of transience  
passes through the simplest receptor  
as if it were but smoke.

Just like us, as we are, so driven,  
we still have worth to the intransient  
powers for a divine purpose.

~ 11 - 28 ~

Oh, come and go. You, still practically a child,  
complete for a moment the figure of the dance  
as the constellation of one of those dances  
in which we overstep, in passing, the mute

order of nature. For she roused herself  
fully attentive only where Orpheus sang.  
You were still the one inspired from thence  
and easily offended if a tree took

a long time to consider following you in your hearing  
you still knew the place where the lyre raised itself  
in sound - ; in the unheard of centre.

For this you sought the lovely steps  
and one hoped to turn the friend's  
face and step towards the holy celebration.

~ 11 - 29 ~

Quiet friend of many distances, feel  
how your breath is enhancing Space.  
From darkened belfries' beams, peal out.  
Whatever feeds on you

will become stronger from this nourishment.  
Go in and out of transformation.  
What is your most painful experience?  
If your drink is bitter, turn into wine.

Be in this night of abundance  
the magic power at the crossroad of your senses,  
the meaning of their rare encounter.

And if the earthly has forgotten you,  
say to the quiet earth: I run.  
To the rushing water speak: I am.