

The Panther

His tired gaze -from passing endless bars-
has turned into a vacant stare which nothing holds.
To him there seem to be a thousand bars,
and out beyond these bars exists no world.

His supple gait, the smoothness of strong strides
that gently turn in ever smaller circles
perform a dance of strength, centered deep within
a will, stunned, but untamed, indomitable.

But sometimes the curtains of his eyelids part,
the pupils of his eyes dilate as images
of past encounters enter while through his limbs
a tension strains in silence
only to cease to be, to die within his heart.

~Translated by Albert Ernest Flemming

<https://rilkepoetry.com/>

Archaic Torso of Apollo

We cannot know his legendary head
with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his torso
is still suffused with brilliance from inside,
like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low,

gleams in all its power. Otherwise
the curved breast could not dazzle you so, nor could
a smile run through the placid hips and thighs
to that dark center where procreation flared.

Otherwise this stone would seem defaced
beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders
and would not glisten like a wild beast's fur:

would not, from all the borders of itself,
burst like a star: for here there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life.

From Ahead of All Parting: Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke,
translated by Stephen Mitchell and published by Modern Library. © 1995
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OF THE MARRIAGE AT CANA by Rainer Maria Rilke.

<https://mariodhanaraj.blogspot.com/2016/07/of-marriage-at-cana-by-rainer-maria.html>

Could she be anything but very proud
of him who made the plainest things become
lovely? And was not the high, large accustomed
night as though beside itself when he appeared?

Did not his having lost himself once, also
add unbelievably to his renown?
And did the wisest not change mouth into
ears, to hear him? Had not the house grown

new, at his voice? Ah, surely in those days
she had restrained herself a hundred times
from beaming forth with her delight in him.
And so she followed after him, amazed.

But there on that day at the wedding feast
when, unexpectedly, more wine was needed,
she looked, and begged a gesture at the least
and did not understand when he protested.

Then he did it. And she saw much later
how she had thrust him then upon his way.
Now he'd become a real miracle-maker,
and in this act unalterably there lay

the sacrifice. Yes, written and decreed.
Then on that day, was it prepared already?
She; it was she had driven on the deed
in the blindness of her vanity.

At table, heaped with vegetables and fruits,
she shared the joy, and never understood
that the water from her own tear-ducts,
with this wine, had been transformed to blood.

Translated from German by Stephen Spender

*Taken from the Book: The Life of the Virgin Mary [Das Marien-Laben] by Rainer
Maria Rilke, Vision Press Limited.*

First Duino Elegy

Who, though I cry aloud,
would hear me in the angel orders?
And should my plea ascend,
were I gathered to the glory
of some incandescent heart,
my own faint flame of being
would fail for the glare.
Beauty is as close to terror
as we can well endure.
Angels would not condescend
to damn our meagre souls.
That is why they awe
and why they terrify us so.
Every angel is terrible!
And so I constrain myself and
swallow the deep, dark music
of my own impassioned plea.
Oh, to whom can we turn
in the hour of need?
Neither angel nor man.
Even animals know that we
are not at home here.
We see so little of what
is clearly visible to them.
For us there is only
a tree on a hillside,
which we can memorize, or
yesterday's sidewalks, or

a habit which discovered us,
found us comfortable and moved in.
O and night...the night!
Wind of the infinite
blowing away all faces.
Within our solitude appears
a nearly lovely god
or goddess, all the
heart is ever apt to meet.
Lovers fare no better,
concealing, by their love,
each other's destiny.
Do you still not understand?
Pour your emptiness
into the breeze-
the birds may soar
more swiftly for it.

Yes, springtime needed you!
The very stars, row on row,
sparkled for your attention.
From bygone days a wave rolled
or a violin yielded itself as you
wandered by some open window.
These were your instructions.
But what could you do-
distracted, as you were,
by all of that significance?-
as though each signpost
pointed on beyond itself
towards something higher yet:
a mere prelude to The Beloved!
(Where would you find room to
keep such a one, in amongst
those vast, weird thoughts,
always coming and going,
often spending the night?)

Sing, in your lovelorn
longing, of the losers.
Make their dark fame glisten.
Sing of those whom you are
nearly moved to envy in the
purity of their despair:
hearts more loving in their pain
than many never broken.
Sing again-and yet again-
your altogether insufficient
praise of them.
The hero lives!
His ruin is but a pretext
to be born again.
Depleted Nature calls her lovers
back into her bosom, as though
she had not strength to fashion them anew.
Have you yet sung the bold grief
of Gaspara Stampa so poignently
that another girl, likewise spurned in love,
might be moved to similar transcending passion?
Is it not time these ancient seeds of pain
put forth a flower?...time that, lovingly,
we free ourselves from lovers?...
time we fit ourselves, quivering
like an arrow to its bowstring,
enduring tension with the prospect
of flight exceeding the limits of
the feathered shaft, the string,
the very bow which looses it?
Nowhere may we remain.

Voices, Voices!
Hear, my heart,
as only the holy hear,
lifted from Earth by
celestial command but

taking no notice, so
perfect is their listening.
You could not bear to hear
the voice of God.
Not that, no...
but perhaps attend
the ceaseless murmur of
silence: the vespers
of the untimely dead,
borne upon the wind...
the whispers of the
children who haunted
that cathedral in Naples-
the church in Rome...
the injunction discovered
on a tombstone last year at
Santa Maria Formosa.
All they ask:
“Weep no more for us!
Your tears muddy the
path of our ascent.”

Strange to be no more of Earth.
To quit half learned habits.
To view roses and their kind
no more in human terms.
To be no more a babe in arms
that ever fear to drop you.
To leave the name you are
known by like a child leaves
a broken toy.
Strange to desire nothing.
Strange to watch the
known world dissolve.
Death is very difficult.
Lost time is painfully
reconstructed until the

struggle yields some
slight glimmer of eternity.
The living are mistaken
in their distinctions-
angels often do not know
whether they walk among
the quick or the dead.
So 'tis said.
The storm of eternity roars;
all voices drown in its thunder.

Children who have gone do not require us.
Weaned, they need no mother's breast.
Our joys and sorrows don't concern them.
But we, for whom the mysteries are golden,
still unsolved, our very sustenance-
can we exist without them?
Grief is our spirit's fodder.
Remember the Lament for Linos: how
the first shaft of song shot through
barren air carving a sudden vacuum
in the astonished space where
godlike youth forever vanished,
leaving only a melody, which is
our sole comfort and enchantment.

. . . Rainer Maria Rilke
translated by Robert Hunter

Second Duino Elegy

Every angel is terrible.
Knowing this, I invoke thee,
O Deadly Birds of the Soul.
Gone are the days of Tobias,
when shining Raphael,
awful majesty disguised,
stood at a door, twin
to the youth who gazed
out, curious, upon him.
Should such an archangel
now descend a single step
from behind the stars,
our hearts would rise and
rage until they burst!
Who art thou?

Primordial Perfection!
First darlings of Creation:
mountain summits crimson
in the dawn of genesis-
pollen of Godhead in
resplendent blossom,
essence of light...
halls, stairs, thrones,
places of pure being,
shields shaped of ecstasy,
swirling storms of rapture-
all suddenly ceasing...
mirrors!...commanding all
the scattered sweetness
into themselves again.

When we feel, we do not recoup but
blow until we empty, fading like embers
or trace of perfume, bit by bit.

Should someone say:
“You are the sweet
spring air I breathe,
my heart’s own blood!”...
what can it mean?
Contain us? They? No!
We slip in, out and
round them like wind.
And the beautiful...
Who can hold them?
Fairness pours from their faces
and...gone!-morning
dew in rising sun...
our essence dissipates
like steam from a kettle.
O smile, where do you run,
eyes turned to the sky...
new, warm, receding wave
of the heart’s own sea?
O sorrow:
all these things are what we are.
Is there any taste of us in that
eternity into which we merge?
Do angels reclaim only perfect light,
or does some hint of what we were remain?
Do our faces linger, if only in that
slight way a mother’s face reflects
her unborn child?
They cannot see it in their swirling
return to self! (How could they see it?)

Lovers, had they the time, could
recite words of wonder to the night.
But most things end by concealing us.
Look: trees are!
Our shelters endure.
But we, like mingled winds,

claim no single habitat.
All things conspire to
keep us secret-half,
it seems, from shame
and half in token of
some unspoken hope.

O Lovers, completed in
one another, I turn
to you to ask of us.
Is there certainty in your embraces?
Look at it this way...
my hands sometimes recognize each other
and offer sanctuary to my weary face.
This yields some slight sensation.
But what proof of existence is that?
You who fan the fires of one another's
passion till, overcome, you cry
"No more!"-who, beneath lover's hands,
swell like purple grapes at harvest;
who subside, that the other may
more completely come to be:
I ask you about us.
I know the blessed touch
abides with you-that what
love cherishes does not decay;
immortality oozes from those caresses-
a promise, almost, of eternity.
And yet, when you've weathered
the shy fear of first glances,
the sighs of longing at the window,
the first-never again that first-
garden promenade together:
O lovers, are you then as you were?
When you raise the glasses
of each other's lips to drink,

thirst to thirst,
where does the drinker vanish?

Were you not awed by
the easy attitudes of
Grecian graveyard statuary?
Did not love and farewell
sit lightly on their shoulders,
as though compounded of an
essence unknown to us?
Remember how the hands
rested without pressure
despite apparent strength?
Their very poses seem to say:
“It is given us to touch this way.
If the gods press us harder...
that is for the gods to say.”
If only we could discover
such a singular human place-
pure, determined, self-contained,
our own fruitful soil between
the river and the stone!
But our hearts outrun us.
We cannot capture their essence by
lingering before consoling statuary,
nor by contemplation of those godlike forms
containing all for which we yearn
in monumental measure.

. . . Rainer Maria Rilke
translated by Robert Hunter

https://sonnetstoorpheus.com/book1_1.html

https://www.sonnetstoorpheus.com/book1_1.html

Rainer Maria Rilke "Sonnets to Orpheus"

1.

There the tree rises. Oh pure surpassing!
Oh Orpheus sings! Oh great tree of sound!
And all is silent, And from this silence arise
New beginnings, intimations, changings.

From the stillness animals throng, out of the clear
Snapping forest of lair and nest;
And thus they are stealthy not from cunning
Not from fear

But to hear. And in their hearts the howling, the cry,
The stag-call seem too little. And where before
Was but the rudest shelter to receive these,

A refuge fashioned out of darkest longing
Entered, tremulo, the doorpost aquiver, -
There You have fashioned them a temple for their hearing.

3.

A god has the power. But tell me, shall a man
Wring the same from a slender lyre?
His senses are awry. And there stand no temples of Apollo

At the crossings of two heart-lines.

Song, by Your example, does not concern desire,
Nor pursuit and attainment of its object;
Song is - to be. Trifling for the god;
But when shall we be? And when does He

Alter the earth and the stars in our being?
This is not, my lad, a matter of your passions, though
Your voice throw open your lips, - learn

To forget that you sang out. That is fleeting.
True singing is breath of another kind.
A breath that aims nowhere. Pneuma within the god. A zephyr.

5

Raise no monument. For it is the roses
Which salute Him year by year with their petals.
This, you see, is Orpheus. His transformations
Run through this and through that. No need

To trouble ourselves with other names. All signs and tokens
Are Orpheus, if they sing. He winds through everything.
And is it not much if from time to time He broods over
The hanging rose hips for some days yet?

Oh, but He must fade, and we must understand that!
And what if He himself fears this need to waste away?
When His speech transcends the here and now.

Already He is there where we cannot follow Him.
The frets of the lyre cannot compel His hands.
He obeys when he transgresses.

Facebook Allen Ginsberg Posted 9/21/25 10:52 a.m.

Leonard Cohen's birthday today, born in Montreal in 1934, the great musical bard would have been 91.

Robert Sward: You once said that "the angels of mercy are other people". What does that mean? And what is the relationship between angels and language?

Leonard Cohen: I don't know. One of the things I always liked about the early Beatnik poetry – Ginsberg and Kerouac and Corso – was the use of the word "angel". I never knew what they meant, except it was a designation for a human being and that it affirmed the light in an individual. I don't know how I used the word "angel". I've forgotten exactly, but I don't think I ever got better than the way Ginsberg and Kerouac used the word in the early 'fifties. I always loved reading their poems where they talked about angels. (Leonard Cohen, 1984 – from an interview with Robert Sward / leonardcohenfiles.com/)
photo: Ginsberg and Cohen, 1976, photographer unknown. If anyone knows please post in the comments, been searching for that for ages.

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<https://allenginsberg.org/2013/09/spontaneous-poetics-140-rilke/>

