

Duino Elegies & The Sonnets to Orpheus: A Dual-Language Edition (Vintage International)

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Available for the first time in a single volume, Rainer Maria Rilke's two most beloved sequences of poems rendered by his most faithful translator. Rilke is unquestionably the twentieth century's most significant and compelling poet of romantic transformation and spiritual quest. His poems of ecstatic identification with the world exert perennial fascination. In Stephen Mitchell's versions of Rilke's two greatest masterpieces readers will discover an English rendering that captures the lyric intensity, fluency, and reach of his poetry. Stephen Mitchell adheres impeccably to Rilke's text, to his formal music, and to the complexity of his thought; at the same time, Mitchell's work has authority and power as poetry in its own right.

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) is one of the greatest lyric German poets. Born in Prague, he published his first book of poems, *Leben und Lieber*, at age nineteen. He met Lou Salomé, the talented and spirited daughter of a Russian army officer, who influenced him deeply. In 1902 he became the friend, and for a time the secretary, of Rodin, and it was during his twelve-year Paris residence that Rilke enjoyed his greatest poetic activity. In 1919 he went to Switzerland where he spent the last years of his life. It was there that he wrote his last two works, *Duino Elegies* (1923) and *The Sonnets to Orpheus* (1923).

About the Translator:

Stephen Mitchell was born in Brooklyn in 1943 and studied at Amherst, the University of Paris and Yale. Considered one of the preeminent translators of his generation he has translated many classic texts including *Gilgamesh*, *The Bhagavad Gita*, *Tao Te Ching* and *the Book of Job*. THE SONNETS TO ORPHEUS

FIRST PART

I

A tree ascended there. Oh pure transcendence!
Oh Orpheus sings! Oh tall tree in the ear!
And all things hushed. Yet even in that silence
a new beginning, beckoning, change appeared.

Creatures of stillness crowded from the bright
unbound forest, out of their lairs and nests;
and it was not from any dullness, not
from fear, that they were so quiet in themselves,

but from just listening. Bellow, roar, shriek
seemed small inside their hearts. And where there had been
at most a makeshift hut to receive the music,

a shelter nailed up out of their darkest longing,
with an entryway that shuddered in the wind-
you built a temple deep inside their hearing.

II

And it was almost a girl and came to be
out of this single joy of song and lyre
and through her green veils shone forth radiantly
and made herself a bed inside my ear.

And slept there. And her sleep was everything:
the awesome trees, the distances I had felt
so deeply that I could touch them, meadows in spring;
all wonders that had ever seized my heart.

She slept the world. Singing god, how was that first
sleep so perfect that she had no desire
ever to wake? See: she arose and slept.

Where is her death now? Ah, will you discover
this theme before your song consumes itself?-
Where is she vanishing? . . . A girl almost . . .

Other Books

Duino Elegies, Deluxe Edition, The first-ever English translation of Rilke's landmark poetry cycle, by Vita and Edward Sackville-West \u00ad- reissued for the first time in 90 years In 1931, Virginia and Leonard Woolf's Hogarth Press published a small run of a beautiful edition of Rainer Maria Rilke's Duino Elegies, in English translation by the writers Vita and Edward Sackville-West. This marked the English debut of Rilke's masterpiece, which would eventually be rendered in English over 20 times, influencing countless poets, musicians and artists across the English-speaking world. Published for the first time in 90 years, the Sackville-Wests' translation is both a fascinating historical document and a magnificent blank-verse rendering of Rilke's poetry cycle. Featuring a new introduction from critic Lesley Chamberlain, this reissue casts one of European literature's great masterpieces in fresh light.

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