



RAINER MARIA RILKE

NEW POEMS



TRANSLATED BY LEN KRISAK
INTRODUCTION BY GEORGE C. SCHOOLFIELD

Rainer Maria Rilke

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Summary: Rainer Maria Rilke, the most famous (and important) German language poet
of the twentieth century—a master to be ranked with Goethe and Heine—wrote the New
Poems of 1907 and 1908 in transition from his late-nineteenth-century style. They mark
his appearance as a lyrical, metaphysical poet of the modernist sensibility, often using
traditional forms like the sonnet to explore the inner essence, the deep heart, of things—
often, quite literally, things. Influenced by his time spent as Rodin's secretary, Rilke turned
to quotidian life and sought to artistically redeem it in all its possibilities. His exquisite use
of meter and rhyme marks him as a "formalist" and yet a contemporary of Eliot and the
later Yeats, so this translation follows, as closely as English allows, the formal properties of
the original poems, in a line-for-line version, while trying to capture the spare diction and
direct idioms of modernism — Provided by publisher

English and German on facing pages.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Len Krisak

THESE TRANSLATIONS OF RILKE'S *New Poems* began inauspiciously enough, some eighteen years ago, when I found myself in the wholly unanticipated position of being asked by a well-known American poet to translate "The Archaic Torso of Apollo" as a kind of initiatory assignment in a class. When I protested that I knew no German (no more than any dedicated follower of World War II movies, anyway) he feigned astonishment and promptly pointed me in the direction of a well-regarded German-English dictionary and the work of various illustrious translators, including J. B. Leishman and Edward Snow, among many others. "You can figure it out," he advised.

Thus began the project whose fruits you see before you. Admitting to myself that it was finally time to start learning one of the great languages I had somehow neglected to investigate, I started the occasionally agonizing, yet at times surprisingly emotionally rewarding task of teaching myself bits and pieces of German through the difficult medium of Rilke's *Neue Gedichte*. This is not, perhaps, the way I would ordinarily advise someone to begin study of a major European language, but I felt the thrill of a challenge, and so I plunged in. Glacially, Anglo-Saxon syntax and etymology began to insinuate their way into my struggles, as the dictionaries got thumb-worn and the versions of my betters (all fluent readers and speakers of German, of course) came to my rescue, over and over again. Like some sort of Bletchley code-breaker, I was determined to understand the mysteries of adverbial suffixes, the intricacies of compound nouns and what would have to be, eventually, the English word order of German syntactical inversions.

How well those many tasks were accomplished, I leave to the reader and lover of poetry, for it was poetry above all, born of Rilke's amazing imagination and technical skill, that I aimed for.

Any translator—but especially a translator of poetry—owes his reader an account of his practice, out of both necessity and courtesy. In bringing Rilke's *New Poems* over into English, I have followed the simple procedure of determining the formal qualities of each poem and then attempting to duplicate those qualities as closely as possible, while still making a credible poem in English *and* remaining as true as possible to the "literal"

sense of the German. I put *literal* in quotation marks because I do not wish my reader to at any time imagine that I believe a naïve one-for-one correspondence between prose sense and *poetic* meaning is possible. The byways and crooked paths (some of them dangerous) that lurk in translation theory make such a correspondence far too risky a proposition.

So I have tried to translate these poems line-for-line, rhyme scheme-for-rhyme scheme, and, as far as possible, meter-for-meter. Many of Rilke's lines end in so-called feminine rhymes, and in almost all such cases I have opted for English "masculine" (monosyllabic) rhymes.

In the case of the long blank-verse poems that end part 1, I have of course worked in blank verse.

One very special indulgence: I hope it is assumed that I am as aware as any of the very famous half-line (perhaps the only words of Rilke's that persons not interested in poetry can actually quote) that ends "Archaischer Torso Apollos": "Du mußt dein Leben ändern." Or as so many have (rightly) translated it, "You must change your life." But Rilke's sonnet form requires the last line of this well-known poem to rhyme with line 12. Eschewing such utter impossibilities as *knife*, *wife*, *rife*, *strife*, and *fife* (!), I have done that very thing in my translation. Perhaps it is time for a new beginning.

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Able Muse

"The Convalescent"

Agni

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Assisi

"The Dog"

"From the Life of a Saint"

Atlanta Review

"Spanish Dancer"

Avatar Review

"Portrait"

"The Reader"

"The Resurrected One"

"Roman Sarcophagi"

"Samuel Appears before Saul"

Berkeley Poetry Review

"Sappho to Eranna"

"The Square"

Borderlands

"The Portal"

Broadkill Review

"Before the Summer Rain"

Cartys Poetry Journal

"The Abduction"

"The Arrival"

"David Sings before Saul"

"In a Strange Park"

"Mohammed's Summoning"

Eunoia Review

"Leda"

"The Scarab"

Fiddlehead

"Late Autumn in Venice"

First Things

"Magnificat"

Gargoyle

"The Rose Interior"

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Margie

Measure

Muddy River Review

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National Review

New Criterion

New English Review

Newport Review

"The Island"

"The Donor"

"Epitaph of a Young Girl"

"Parting"

"St. Sebastian"

"Adam"

"Eve"

"The Parks"

"Abishag"

"Absalom's Defection"

"The Panther"

"The Swan"

"The Child"

"Before Easter"

"Opium Poppy"

"Alcestis"

"Tombs of the Heterae"

"The Capital"

"The Cathedral"

"The Coat of Arms"

"Communion"

"The Courtesan"

"The Mountain"

"Morgue"

"Crucifixion"

"A Doge"

"A Faded One"

"Island of the Sirens"

"Lady before the Mirror"

"Roman Fountain"

"A Sibyl"

"Archaic Torso of Apollo"

"Birth of Venus"

<i>Off the Coast</i>	"The Adventurer"
	"In the Drawing Room"
	"The Old Woman"
<i>Oxonian Review</i>	"Béguinage"
	"The Flamingos"
	"Joshua's Gathering"
	"The Woman Going Blind"
<i>Pinch</i>	"The Carousel"
<i>Pleiades</i>	"Piano Practice"
	"The Poet"
	"A Portrait of a Lady of the Eighteen-Eighties"
	"Youthful Portrait of My Father"
<i>Plume</i>	"Parrot Park"
	"The Pavilion"
	"Sundial"
<i>Poetry Quarterly</i>	"The Tower"
	"Woman in Love"
	"The Women's Song to the Poet"
<i>Poetry South</i>	"The Bed"
<i>Raintown Review</i>	"The Lace"
<i>Seneca Review</i>	"Dolphins"
<i>Sewanee Theological Review</i>	"God in the Middle Ages"
	"The Last Judgment"
<i>Shadow Road</i>	"The Lunatics"
	"The Madmen in the Garden"
<i>Soundings Review</i>	"Roman Campagna"
<i>SpinDrifter</i>	"Emigrant Ship"
<i>Standpoint</i>	"The Alchemist"
	"The Angel"
	"The Prisoner"

Think Journal

“Falconry”
“Final Evening”
“Love Song”
“The Mount of Olives”
“Pink Hydrangea”
“The Temptation”

Toronto Quarterly

“Black Cat”

Unsplendid

“Corrida”
“Death Experience”
“The Egyptian Mary”
“The Site of the Fire”
“Snake-Charming”

Warwick Review

“The Gazelle”
“The Group”

Xenith

“Tanagra”

INTRODUCTION

George C. Schoolfield

THE STERLING MEMORIAL LIBRARY at Yale owns twenty-one separate English translations of Rilke's *Duineser Elegien*, and the author of the present introduction has four more in his personal library. The popularity of the *Elegies* with translators stems not only from their centrality in a statement of Rilke's worldview, but also because, on a more mundane level, they are relatively easy to translate. They are not rhymed and are couched in an irregular, iambic and dactylic meter. On the other hand, *Neue Gedichte* has attracted few translators because of the technical difficulties its poems present; with only a few exceptions, they are rhymed, and are in regular stanzaic forms, in particular, the sonnet or variations of that form. To date there have been four translations of *Neue Gedichte* into English, the earliest by J. B. Leishman (1964), the next by Stephen Cohn (1992), a rich selection by Edward Snow (2001), and the most recent by Joseph Cadora (2014). These four are now joined by Len Krisak's translation. All five of these translations are to be praised for their palpable energy and the bravery with which they address the manifold difficulties of the poems, but Krisak's translation, it seems to me, comes closest to replicating Rilke's poems' vitality and their subtleties of diction and form.

The most famous lines in the double cycle are probably the opening of the sonnet "Der Panther," "Sein Blick ist vom Vorübergehn der Stäbe / so müd geworden, daß er nichts mehr hält." Leishman has "His gaze those bars keep passing is so misted / with tiredness, it can take in nothing more"; Cohn, "The bars which pass and strike across his gaze / have stunned his sight: the eyes have lost their hold"; Snow, "His gaze has from the passing of the bars / grown so tired, that it holds nothing anymore"; and Cadora, "From endless passing of the bars, his gaze / has wearied—there is no more it can hold." And finally, Krisak has "Scanning the bars, his gaze is grown so numb / that there is nothing left that it can hold." Rilke's linguistic discipline has infused all his translators. But it seems that Krisak has the advantage in the naturalness of his diction and the vitality of his verse.

A Bohemian-German from Prague, Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926)—christened René, probably at the behest of his Francophile mother—was already pre-eminent among younger lyricists in the German

tongue when the first part of *Neue Gedichte* came out in December 1907 at the new, upscale Leipzig publishing house, Insel. His several previous verse-collections, mostly under less prestigious imprints, had borne catchier titles: *Leben und Lieder* (Life and Lyrics, 1894), *Wegwarten: Lieder, dem Volke geschenkt* (Wild Chickory, Songs Given to the People, 1896), *Larenopfer* (Sacrifices to Household Gods, 1896), *Traumgekrönt* (Dream-Crowned, 1897), *Advent* (1898), *Mir zur Feier* (In My Honor, 1899), and *Das Buch der Bilder* (The Book of Pictures, 1902). Rilke's first publication at Insel was *Das Stunden-Buch, enthaltend die drei Bücher, Vom mönchischen Leben/Von der Pilgerschaft/Von der Armuth und vom Tode* (The Book of Hours, Containing the Three Books: Of Monkish Life; Of Pilgrimage; Of Poverty and of Death, 1905).

Now though, the poet told Anton Kippenberg, who had just taken over Insel from other hands, he wanted only a single word, *Gedichte*. The poems were “almost all from the years 1905–1907 . . . only two or three” had been composed earlier. One of these was the aforementioned “Der Panther,” from late 1902 or early 1903. An overwhelmed newcomer to Paris, Rilke had watched the captive beast padding back and forth in its cage at the Jardin des Plantes. Paris would remain Rilke's base until July 1914, when he departed on what he assumed would be a short excursion to Germany, to look in on Kippenberg and the publisher's literarily acute spouse, Katharina, in Leipzig.

Anton Kippenberg (1874–1950), a keen student both of book-marketing and of Rilke's carefully underplayed vanity, advised him “strongly” to call his new book *Neue Gedichte*—this in a letter of August 17, 1907, on the model “of Goethe, Heine, [Emanuel] Geibel, [Gottfried] Keller, and many others.” On August 19, Rilke acquiesced, adding that, as far as he could tell, a second volume would shortly join the first, written “aus ähnlicher Betrachtung und Bewältigung des Angeschauten” (from similar consideration and mastering of what has been seen)—a mysterious and important phrase. As a concession from Kippenberg's side, he wanted the present publication (of 1907) to be given the subtitle “Volume One.” Patiently but firmly, Kippenberg advised him on August 22 to drop the idea: they would stick to his straightforward *Neue Gedichte*, and “if a second volume does come along, then nothing would prevent its being titled” as such. Actually, the second part was already underway in Rilke's notebooks; it appeared quite promptly in November 1908 as *Der Neuen Gedichte anderer Teil* (The Second Part of the New Poems).

The aesthete Rilke was much concerned about quality of paper, style of pagination, typeface (he thought Insel's choice was “charming”) and so forth; in Kippenberg he had found the right man to honor his wishes. Insel could produce lavishly handsome books: a comparison, say, with William Morris's Kelmscott Press is not out of the way. But Kippenberg also had a salesman's profitable vision. A few years later, he would

institute the Insel-Bücherei, a series of cheap but tasteful pocket-sized volumes. Its initial entry and its best-seller during the First World War would be Rilke's *Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke* (1899 and 1906, translated as *The Lay of the Love and Death of the Cornet Christoph Rilke*), about the poet's putative ancestor, a youth who had fallen fighting the Turks in the seventeenth century. (It mattered little for sales that the Turks were now allies of the Central Powers, Germany and Austro-Hungary.)

Glad to receive royalties but, exquisitely well-mannered, never harping on money, Rilke was also strangely unconcerned about other realities of the book business. On August 18, 1908, when Kippenberg was about to leave for a vacation in the Tyrol, in Paris, Rilke, having just mailed the manuscript of the second part of *Neue Gedichte* to the Leipzig headquarters, essayed a tardy feeler about title changes. (From here on, the two volumes of *Neue Gedichte* will be referred to as *NGI* and *NGII*.) "For a moment I thought of naming the [second] volume after the poem 'Rosa Hortensie' [Pink Hydrangea], which it contains, and later renaming the first volume after the verses evoking the 'Blue One' ["Blaue Hortensie," Blue Hydrangea, in *NGI*]; but dropped the idea immediately." Did he think, however fleetingly and impracticably, of directing his readership's attention to the central role of flowers in the twin volumes? "Die Rosenschale" (The Bowl of Roses) concludes *NGI*. "Das Rosen-Innere" (The Rose Interior) startles, at first, with its sudden appearance amid the many portraits of women in *NGII*.

In the letter of August 18, Rilke also revealed a discovery he had made about *NGII*: "As I put the poems of *NGII* in order, I got the impression as though the new volume could be fitted quite neatly to the earlier one. Its course [*Verlauf*] is almost parallel, only somewhat loftier, it seems to me, moving toward greater depth [!] and with more distance. If a third volume may be joined to these two, a similar intensification in an ever more factual control of reality will have to be accomplished, from which, quite on its own, the broader meaning and clearer validity of all things will occur." This third part of *Neue Gedichte*, described so laboriously here, was never produced. Its *disjecta membra* were edited by Rilke's daughter, Ruth Sieber-Rilke, and Insel's Ernst Zinn, and published by Insel (since 1945 removed to Wiesbaden) as *Gedichte 1906–1926* (1952) and then as volume 2 of the *Sämtliche Werke* (Collected Works, 1956). (A translation, *Poems 1906–1926*, by J. B. Leishman, appeared the same year. A suite of "phallic hymns," "Sieben Gedichte," of 1915 was held back in 1952 but also saw the light of day in 1956.)

NGI was dedicated to the Rhenish banker Karl Von der Heydt and his wife Elisabeth, "in friendship." The formulation was meant, one suspects, to emphasize Rilke's proud equality with his benefactors, not as a gesture of grateful subservience. As time went by, the financier's favor

was largely shunted to Rilke's wife, the sculptress Clara Westhoff-Rilke (1878–1954). Yet Rilke continued to call the couple “dear friends.” When Von der Heydt planned a trip to the United States, Rilke commiserated with him: “I really can’t conceive of that late-born continent, or perhaps I’m prejudiced against it.” What would he have thought of his present-day popularity in these United States?

NGII was inscribed “À mon grand Ami Auguste Rodin.” Back in September, 1902, Rilke had joined his wife (in separate quarters but, for the nonce, at the same street address) in Paris: Rodin had invited Clara to work in his studio. Knowing the couple's straitened circumstances, and learning that the husband planned a monograph about him (which appeared in 1903), Rodin hired Rilke to help with the sculptor's extensive correspondence. Unfortunately, Rilke prided himself on his ignorance of English—did he share Napoleon's contempt for the nation of shopkeepers? He was also restless, an inveterate traveler, absent often as not from his post of duty. It has been theorized that “Der Gefangene” (The Prisoner, *NGI*) expresses his distress at the strictures of his job. A terrible blow-up ensued, on Rodin's part, and Rilke was fired. All the same, he wrote to the enraged master, assuring him, whatever may have occurred, of his undying devotion. In time, the odd couple made up, to a degree, and the secretaryship was forgotten. Two decades later, Rilke told his Polish translator, Witold Hulewicz, that Rodin (1840–1917) was “brusque and impenetrable, seldom baring his soul,” which must not have been the case on the day of Rilke's dismissal. Nonetheless, *Neue Gedichte*, the product of Rilke's unceasing labor with words, bore the stamp of Rodin's dictum, “Travailler, toujours travailler” (work, always work), a motto shared by the sculptor's great contemporaries in pictorial art, Cézanne and Van Gogh. Paris, Rodin's home ground, was the place of the final composition of the majority of the *Neue Gedichte*.

Exceptions, among them “Lied vom Meer” (Song of the Sea), come from Capri—in this instance the Piccola Marina—and, like other Capri poems, the “Song” was apparently never revised, and is the earliest poem in *NGII*. Rilke had arrived at Frau Alice Faehndrich's Villa Discopoli on his thirty-first birthday, December 4, 1906, and would linger until May 1907. He returned on February 29, 1908, remaining until April. The journeys to Capri sent him, of course, through Rome and Naples. Yet “Römische Sarkophage” (Roman Sarcophagi) and “Römische Fontäne” (Roman Fountain), the latter of which would achieve classroom status as the exemplar of a “Ding-Gedicht” (literally, a poem about an object), were completed in Paris in May 1906, workings-up of notes and memories from the Rilke couple's Roman residence of 1903–4. The unlovely and unsettling Neapolitan poems of *NGII*—“Vor-Ostern” (Pre-Easter), “Der Balkon” (The Balcony), and “Auswanderer-Schiff” (Emigrant-Ship)—were all three finished in a Parisian late summer: the quasi-photograph

of a family squeezed together but lacking a father (gone to America?) in 1907, the paschal preparations (with their ghastly displays), and the ominous harbor scene in 1908. Obliquely, and unusually for him, Rilke took notice of a major social phenomenon, the great migration from Southern Italy to the Americas.

Rilke had staked out a literary claim on Russia by means of *Das Buch der Bilder* and *Das Stunden-Buch*; the sole poem in *Neue Gedichte* with a Russian *mise-en-scène* is “Nächtliche Fahrt Sankt Petersburg” (Night Drive, *NGII*), finished in Paris in August 1907. It was a sort of farewell; meeting Maxim Gorki on Capri (April 1907), Rilke found that his spoken Russian was fading. “Night Drive” goes back to impressions gained on Rilke’s two Russian trips with Lou Salomé, April–June 1899 and May–August 1900. And it was written against the grain—Rilke disliked the capital on the Neva as un-Russian, too westernized; he caught the city’s irreality during the “white nights” of early summer, adding an imaginary Peter the Great as its mad founder, possessed by an *idée fixe*. At the same time, Rilke was mindful of an unforgiving geological fact—Saint Petersburg was built on infrangible (Finnish) granite. Madness, unrelenting actual madness, is also the stuff of two poems in *NGII*, “Irre im Garten” (Lunatics in the Garden) and “Die Irren” (The Lunatics). On his way back to Paris from Viareggio (April 1903), Rilke made a stop in Dijon to see the works of the sculptor Claes Sluter (1340s–1405/6), in particular the Fountain of the Prophets (ca. 1392) at the Chartreuse de Champmol, in Rilke’s day utilized as a madhouse. Who can forget the ingressus of “The Lunatics”? “Und sie schweigen weil die Scheidewände / weggenommen sind aus ihrem Sinn”; Krisak: “And they are quiet since the walls are breached / inside their minds.” The twin poems were (likewise) completed in Paris, in August and September of 1907, five years and some months after the busman’s holiday in Burgundy. Rilke had a notable and useful ability to husband poems, or impressions for poems, squirreling them away until their time was ripe.

On June 25, 1908, his Capri hostess, Frau Faehndrich, died suddenly at 51 of typhoid fever. She was never memorialized with a poem. But Rilke’s translation of Elizabeth Barrett-Browning’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese* was made at the Villa Discopoli with her essential aid in March–April 1907, and appeared at Insel the next year. The first edition was dedicated to her, “Born Baroness von Nordeck zur Rabenau, in Memory of Work in Common,” words amended after her death. Could one imagine that Rilke felt some small regret that Frau Faehndrich had come down a little in the world by marrying her late husband, a district magistrate? Frau Faehndrich was a sister-in-law of the “Frau Nonna” for whom Rilke wrote “Letzter Abend” (Last Evening). “Frau Nonna,” born Julie Ducius von Wallenberg, had been the bride of Count Dodo von Bethusy-Huc, an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army when he

fell at the Battle of Königrätz-Sadowa in the “Summer War” of 1866, lost to Bismarck’s Prussia. Her brief widowhood ended when she wed Adalbert Baron von Nordeck zur Rabenau. On Rilke’s first stay at the Villa Discopoli (where he was quartered in his very own “pink cottage”), the other guests, with the poet’s exception, had been to the mantle born. “Frau Nonna” herself was also the stepmother of the late, lamented Countess Luise von Schwerin, and the twenty-four-year-old Countess Manon zu Solms-Laubach, whom Rilke mentored and whose parents he knew—if that need be said in this nest of gentlefolk.

A malicious critic once wrote that, for the Baltic-German nobleman and author, Eduard von Keyserling (1855–1918), “Humanity begins only with barons.” The same could be said, “a truth with [some] modifications,” of Rilke. Sadly, *his* father, Josef Rilke, had been a mere warrant officer in the “k. und k.” (“kaiserlich and königlich”: imperial and royal) army. But “Jugend-Bildnis meines Vaters” (Youthful Portrait of My Father) obfuscates a little: “Under the fully braided ornaments — / his uniform imperially slim —: // the sabre’s basket hilt . . .”: the father is nobly turned out. Rilke’s alter ego in the novella *Die Letzten* (The Last Ones, 1902), Harald Malcorn, imagines that he comes from the ancient Carinthian nobility, although he lives, with his mother, high up (no elevator) in a shabby apartment building. Rilke seems to have taken the Carinthian phantasy seriously.

Two of Rilke’s contemporaries, who remain anonymous in *Neue Gedichte*, can be identified. The object of “Todes-Erfahrung” (Death Experience, *NGI*) had been his hostess at Castle Friedelshausen in Hessa (July–September 1905), the above-mentioned Countess Schwerin; his memorial for her was written on Capri on the first anniversary of her passing, January 24, 1907. The other, in *NGI*’s “Bildnis” (Portrait), was a more or less fitting correspondence to the Countess’s appearance in *NGI*, the tragedienne Eleonora Duse (1859–1924), on whom the patent of nobility of high art had been conferred (as, he must have thought, it had been on himself). Duse’s death, while on tour, would violently upset Rilke because it occurred, of all places, in a Pittsburgh hotel. A quarter-century earlier, the grand master of *decadentismo*, Gabriele d’Annunzio (1864–1938), one of her lovers, had portrayed her, not altogether kindly, in his Venetian novel *Il fuoco* (The Flame of Life, 1901). The “great poet Stelio Effrena” (d’Annunzio) sails in a gondola at eventide with his mistress, the actress La Foscarina (Duse), and from afar they see the campaniles of San Marco and San Giorgio Maggiore—reason enough for Rilke to begin his Venetian suite (*NGII*) with “la Duse’s” portrait.

Following the first stay on Capri, Rilke returned to Paris for a working summer, as was his wont. The manuscript of *NGI* was readied for dispatch to Kippenberg, and Rilke prepared himself for a lecture tour to Prague—where his beloved father had died in March 1906—Breslau (since 1945

Wrocław), and Vienna. (There, during a public reading from his works, in a city he affected to detest, he would be interrupted by a nosebleed famous in the annals of literary history: Hugo von Hofmannsthal gallantly offered to read for him, but the offer was declined.) Of more immediate and lasting import, though, had been an exhibit of paintings and water-colors by Paul Cézanne at the Salon d'Automne. Rilke visited daily from October 6 until it closed; Cézanne died at his home in Aix-en-Provence on October 22, turning the show's final days into a funeral tribute. Rilke recorded his impressions, likewise daily, in letters to his wife. His companion was a painter, Mathilde Vollmoeller (1876–1943). The *Briefe über Cézanne*, written to Clara and published by her in 1952, are valued as a part of Rilke's own creative oeuvre; Joel Agee translated them in 1988 (reprinted in 2002). Again, if Rilke ever thought of embracing a profession—in the apt formulation of August Stahl, a *doyen* of Rilke-studies—it would have been as curator of an art museum. Mathilde was the ideal guide, “ruhig und nicht literarisch abgelenkt” (calm and not literarily distracted), that is, focused on the paintings themselves, not on interpreting whatever story they might tell, “ganz malerisch geschult und schauend” (thoroughly schooled as a painter and looking): “Schauen” becomes Rilke's Open Sesame. As Vollmoeller put it: “Wie ein Hund hat [Cézanne] davorgesessen und einfach geschaut, ohne alle Nervosität und Nebenabsicht” (Like a dog, [Cézanne] sat there and simply looked, without any nervousness and secondary intention). “Der Schauende” (The Observer) of 1901, in *Das Buch der Bilder*, is not an observer in the new, Cézanne-esque sense: he watches a tempest in progress outside the room where he sits, and draws a moral from it, reflecting on the pettiness of human endeavor and the grandeur of nature's power. Rilke's subsequent use of the word means what the great artist—sculptor, painter, or Rilke hopes, poet—does or should do. The transformation of “Schauen” had occurred even before the Cézanne revelation. Von der Heydt, a literary hobbyist, had reviewed *Das Stunden-Buch* for the venerable *Preussische Jahrbücher*, volume 123 (January 1906), and Rilke thanked him in verse, “So will ich gehen schauender und schlichter” (I'll proceed thus, more seeing and more simply [*sic*]). Similarly, thanking the Countess Manon for an epistolary report on her trip home from Capri to Germany through art-rich Italian cities, he called it “the reminiscence of your attentive seeing” (“den Nachklang Ihres aufmerksamen Schauens”).

As Rilke had written in his letter of August 18, 1908 to Kippenberg, it is not at all difficult to discern matching series or cycles of theme (and sometimes tone) between *NGI* and *NGII*. For example, see the so-called Cathedral poems in *NGI* (“L'Ange du Méridien,” “Die Kathedrale” [The Cathedral], “Das Portal” [The Portal], “Die Fensterrose” [The Rose Window], “Das Kapital” [The Capital] and “Gott im Mittelalter” [God in the Middle Ages]), humanly reduced, is answered in *NGII*

by verses about two figures from the façade of Notre Dame de Paris, “Adam” and “Eva.” (The justly famous series may have been touched off by the uncomfortable excursion Rilke and the Rodins made on a cold and blustery January 29, 1906 to Chartres. Unlike Henry Adams (1904), Rilke was not inspired to include that other equally imposing ecclesiastical monument of northwestern France in a poem, the seagirt Mont Saint-Michel.) Another case of correspondences occurs between the poems inspired by the Flemish excursion of July–August 1906 undertaken by Rilke with Clara and little Ruth in tow, giving rise to, among other poems, “Der Turm” (The Tower), containing the equivocal phrase “behangen wie ein Stier” (Krisak: “like a bull were hung”) and a series ending with Rilke’s oddly stationary challenge to the stormy North Sea poetry of Heinrich Heine, “Die Insel,” which bears the subtitle *Nordsee* (The Island, North Sea). The Rilke family had put up in one of the myriad seaside tourist hotels at Oost-Duinkerke, just across the Belgian-French border from Dunkerque—destined to become, a generation later, the scene of one of history’s great military evacuations. The Rilkes’ stay at the beach remained—as far as one knows—deep-sixed in his letters. The complement in *NGII*, of course, is the great harvest of Venetian poems, also presaged in *NGI* by the scandalous tip of the poet’s hat to “The Courtesan.”

Both parts of *Neue Gedichte* begin with classical subjects or allusions, followed by Biblical topics. Yet as *NGI* moves toward its conclusion, another sizable classical cycle intervenes, four long poems in a block before the painterly ending of “Die Rosenschale.” This quartet may seem somehow out of place—intruders by reason not only of their length but their absence of rhyme and stanzaic structure. Rilke’s daughter Ruth, her husband Carl Sieber, and an Insel editor, Ernst Zinn, omitted all four from Rilke’s *Ausgewählte Werke* (Selected Works, 1938). Three of them, the fascinating and seductive description of relics of ancient harlotry along the Appian Way, “Hetären-Gräber” (Tombs of the Hetaerae), “Orpheus, Eurydike, Hermes,” and “Geburt der Venus” (The Birth of Venus) were composed in prose during the Rilke couple’s Roman stay (1903–4); two of them—“Orpheus” and “Venus”—were recast in verse in the peace and quiet of Furuborg, the chateau of the industrialist John Gibson, in Jonsered outside Gothenburg. (The Swedish feminist Ellen Key had assumed the existential task of finding suitable Nordic roosts for the poet.) In June of 1904, coming from Rome, Rilke had been sheltered at a rather dilapidated manor house, Borgeby, at Flädie in southern Sweden: some of the results were “Abend in Skåne” (Evening in Scania) in *Das Buch der Bilder*, and, in *Neue Gedichte*, “In einem fremden Park” (In a Strange Park). A poem about the apple orchard at Borgeby, written on August 2, 1907, at the request of the jack-of-all-arts Ernst Norlind, who was about to wed Borgeby’s owner, repeats the lesson of patience,