

## Edmund de Waal

*letters home*

Potsdamer Straße 77-87, 10785 Berlin  
14 June – 10 August 2024  
Opening: Friday, 14 June, 6 – 8 pm

### Threadsuns

by Paul Celan

Threadsuns  
above the grey-black wilderness.  
A tree-  
high thought  
tunes in to light's pitch: there are  
still songs to be sung on the other side  
of mankind.

Fadensonnen  
über der grauschwarzen Ödnis.  
Ein baum-  
hoher Gedanke  
greift sich den Lichtton: es sind  
noch Lieder zu singen jenseits  
der Menschen.

### Anecdote of the Jar

by Wallace Stevens

I placed a jar in Tennessee,  
And round it was, upon a hill.  
It made the slovenly wilderness  
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,  
And sprawled around, no longer wild.  
The jar was round upon the ground  
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.  
The jar was gray and bare.  
It did not give of bird or bush,  
Like nothing else in Tennessee.

### The Red Wheelbarrow

by William Carlos Williams

so much depends  
upon

a red wheel  
barrow

glazed with rain  
water

beside the white  
chickens

## A Part Song

by Denise Riley

i  
You principle of song, what are you *for* now  
Perking up under any spasmodic light  
To trot out your shadowed warblings?

Mince, slight pillar. And sleek down  
Your furriness. Slim as a whippy wire  
Shall be your hope, and ultraflexible.

Flap thinly, sheet of beaten tin  
That won't affectionately plump up  
More cushioned and receptive lays.

But little song, don't so instruct yourself  
For none are hanging around to hear you.  
They have gone bustling or stumbling well away.

ii  
*What is the first duty of a mother to a child?  
At least to keep the wretched thing alive* – Band  
Of fierce cicadas, stop this shrilling.

My daughter lightly leaves our house.  
The thought rears up: *fix in your mind this  
Maybe final glimpse of her. Yes, lightning could.*

I make this note of dread, I register it.  
Neither my note nor my critique of it  
Will save us one iota. I know it. And.

iii  
Maybe a retouched photograph or memory,  
This beaming one with his striped snake-belt  
And eczema scabs, but either way it's framed  
Glassed in, breathed hard on, and curated.  
It's odd how boys live so much in their knees.  
Then both of us had nothing. You lacked guile  
And were transparent, easy, which felt natural.

iv  
Each child gets cannibalised by its years.  
It was a man who died, and in him died  
The large-eyed boy, then the teen peacock  
In the unremarked placid self-devouring  
That makes up being alive. But all at once

Those natural overlaps got cut, then shuffled  
Tight in a block, their layers patted square.

v  
It's late. And it always will be late.  
Your small monument's atop its hillock  
Set with pennants that slap, slap, over the soil.  
Here's a denatured thing, whose one eye  
rummages  
Into the mound, her other eye swivelled straight up:  
*A short while only, then I come*, she carols –  
but is only  
A fat-lot-of-good mother with a pointless alibi:  
'I didn't  
Know.' Yet might there still be some part for me  
To play upon this lovely earth? Say. Or  
Say *No*, earth at my inner ear.

vi  
A wardrobe gapes, a mourner tries  
Her several styles of howling-guise:

You'd rather not, yet you must go  
Briskly around on beaming show.

A soft black gown with pearl corsage  
Won't assuage your smashed ménage.

It suits you as you are so pale.  
Still, do not get that saffron veil.

Your dead don't want you lying flat.  
There'll soon be time enough for that.

vii  
Oh my dead son you daft bugger  
This is one glum mum. Come home I tell you  
And end this tasteless melodrama – quit  
Playing dead at all, by now it's well beyond  
A joke, but your humour never got cruel  
Like this. Give over, you indifferent lad,  
Take pity on your two bruised sisters. For  
Didn't we love you. As we do. But by now  
We're bored with our unproductive love,  
And infinitely more bored by your staying dead  
Which can hardly interest you much, either.

viii

Here I sit poleaxed, stunned by your vanishing  
As you practise your charm in the underworld  
Airily flirting with Persephone. Not *so hard*  
*To imagine* what her mother *had gone through*  
To be ferreting around those dark sweet halls.

ix

They'd sworn to stay for ever but they went  
Or else I went – then concentrated hard  
On the puzzle of what it ever truly *meant*  
For someone to be here then, just like that  
To not. Training in mild loss was useless  
Given the final thing. And me lamentably  
Slow to 'take it in' – far better toss it out,  
How should I take in such a bad idea. No,  
I'll stick it out instead for presence. If my  
Exquisite hope can wrench you right back  
Here, resigned boy, do let it as I'm waiting.

x

I can't get sold on reincarnating you  
As those bloody 'gentle showers of rain'  
Or in 'fields of ripening grain' – ooh  
Anodyne – nor yet on shadowing you  
In the hope of eventually pinpointing  
You bemused among the *flocking souls*  
*Clustered like bats, as all thronged gibbering*  
*Dusk-veiled* – nor in modern creepiness.  
Lighthearted presence, be bodied forth  
Straightforwardly. Lounge again under  
The sturdy sun you'd loved to bake in.  
Even ten seconds' worth of a sighting  
Of you would help me get through  
This better. With a camera running.

xi

Ardent bee, still you go blundering  
With downy saddlebags stuffed tight  
All over the fuchsia's drop earrings.  
I'll cry 'Oh bee!' to you, instead –  
Since my own dead, apostrophised,  
Keep mute as this clear garnet glaze  
You're bumping into. Blind diligence,  
Bee, or idiocy – this banging on and on  
Against such shiny crimson unresponse.

xii

Outgoing soul, I try to catch  
You calling over the distances  
Though your voice is echoey,

Maybe tuned out by the noise  
Rolling through me – or is it  
You orchestrating that now,

Who'd laugh at the thought  
Of me being sung in by you  
And being kindly dictated to.

It's not like hearing you live was.  
It is what you're saying in me  
Of what is left, gaily affirming.

xiii

Flat on a cliff I inch toward its edge  
Then scrutinise the chopped-up sea  
Where gannets' ivory helmet skulls  
Crash down in tiny plumes of white  
To vivify the languid afternoon –  
Pressed round my fingertips are spikes  
And papery calyx frills of fading thrift  
*That men call sea pinks* – so I can take  
A studied joy in natural separateness.  
And I shan't fabricate some nodding:  
'She's off again somewhere, a good sign  
By now, she must have got over it.'

xiv

Dun blur of this evening's lurch to  
Eventual navy night. Yet another  
Night, day, night over and over.  
I so want to join you.

xv

The flaws in suicide are clear  
Apart from causing bother  
To those alive who hold us dear  
We could miss one another  
We might be trapped eternally  
Oblivious to each other  
One crying *Where are you, my child*  
The other calling *Mother*.

xvi

Dead, keep me company  
That sears like titanium  
Compacted in the pale  
Blaze of living on alone.

xvii

Suspended in unsparing light  
The sloping gull arrests its curl  
The glassy sea is hardened waves  
Its waters lean through shining air  
Yet never crash but hold their arc  
Hung rigidly in glaucous ropes  
Muscled and gleaming. All that  
Should flow is sealed, is poised  
In implacable stillness. Joined in  
Non-time and halted in free fall.

xviii

It's all a resurrection song.  
Would it ever be got right  
The dead could rush home  
Keen to press their chinos.

xix

She do the bereaved in different voices  
For the point of this address is to prod

### **They Flee From Me**

by Thomas Wyatt

They flee from me that sometime did me seek  
With naked foot, stalking in my chamber.  
I have seen them gentle, tame, and meek,  
That now are wild and do not remember  
That sometime they put themselves in danger  
To take bread at my hand; and now they range,  
Busily seeking with a continual change.

Thanked be fortune it hath been otherwise  
Twenty times better; but once in special,  
In thin array after a pleasant guise,  
When her loose gown from her shoulders did fall,  
And she me caught in her arms long and small;  
Therewithall sweetly did me kiss  
And softly said, "Dear heart, how like you this?"

And shepherd you back within range  
Of my strained ears; extort your reply  
By finding any device to hack through  
The thickening shades to you, you now  
Strangely unresponsive son, who were  
Such reliably kind and easy company,  
Won't you be summoned up once more  
By my prancing and writhing in a dozen  
Mawkish modes of reedy piping to you  
– Still no? Then let me rest, my dear.

xx

*My sisters and my mother  
Weep dark tears for me  
I drift as lightest ashes  
Under a southern sea*

*O let me be, my mother  
In no unquiet grave  
My bone-dust is faint coral  
Under the fretful wave*

It was no dream: I lay broad waking.  
But all is turned thorough my gentleness  
Into a strange fashion of forsaking;  
And I have leave to go of her goodness,  
And she also, to use newfangleness.  
But since that I so kindly am served  
I would fain know what she hath deserved.

## **A Litany in Time of Plague**

by Thomas Nashe

Adieu, farewell, earth's bliss;  
This world uncertain is;  
Fond are life's lustful joys;  
Death proves them all but toys;  
None from his darts can fly;  
I am sick, I must die.

Lord, have mercy on us!

Rich men, trust not in wealth,  
Gold cannot buy you health;  
Physic himself must fade.  
All things to end are made,  
The plague full swift goes by;  
I am sick, I must die.

Lord, have mercy on us!

Beauty is but a flower  
Which wrinkles will devour;  
Brightness falls from the air;  
Queens have died young and fair;  
Dust hath closed Helen's eye.  
I am sick, I must die.

Lord, have mercy on us!

## **all, as a rule, fall towards their wound**

by Denise Riley

Sheathed in their amber, dove grey, olive silk  
saints clutch a grill or wheel, pincers or spear;  
calm heads anointed by the buttery sunlight  
incline to these instruments of their torture  
turned to starred, yet unvarnished, blazons  
as cloaks drip carmine and rose velvets glow.  
Here the raised axe is no more than its action:  
it hands the decapitated to their merciful rest.  
Would it help me a bit to stroke its mild blade,  
take the edge off old violence; though not gild  
it later, by announcing 'Blessedly, I survived'.  
What hope is there of a purely secular grace?  
Attend, Agnes; your white emblem's bleating.

Strength stoops unto the grave,  
Worms feed on Hector brave;  
Swords may not fight with fate,  
Earth still holds open her gate.  
"Come, come!" the bells do cry.  
I am sick, I must die.

Lord, have mercy on us!

Wit with his wantonness  
Tasteth death's bitterness;  
Hell's executioner  
Hath no ears for to hear  
What vain art can reply.  
I am sick, I must die.

Lord, have mercy on us!

Haste, therefore, each degree,  
To welcome destiny;  
Heaven is our heritage,  
Earth but a player's stage;  
Mount we unto the sky.  
I am sick, I must die.

Lord, have mercy on us!

## **Let no air now be sung**

by Denise Riley

Let no air now be sung, let no kind air -  
sorrow alone reveals a constant pulse.  
A trusted oak deceives the pliant back  
coiled into it like a fern shoot aping an  
archbishop's crook held high as a truth  
paraded through hazy woods in its veil  
to get snapped off by that wild anxiety  
figuring its jail could be quit in a slash  
clean down to her dear bone - it wills  
to twitch its hem aside and motor on.  
Let no air now be sung, let no kind air.

## “The Fourth Elegy”, Duino Elegies

by Rainer Maria Rilke

O trees of life, when does your winter come?  
We are not in harmony, our blood does not forewarn us  
like migratory birds: Late, overtaken,  
we force ourselves abruptly onto the wind  
and fall to earth at some iced-over lake.  
Flowering and fading come to us both at once.  
And somewhere lions still roam and never know,  
in their majestic power, of any weakness.

But we, while we are intent upon one object,  
already feel the pull of another. Conflict  
is second nature to us. Aren't lovers  
always arriving at each other's boundaries?—  
although they promised vastness, hunting, home.  
As when for some quick sketch, a wide background  
of contrast is laboriously prepared  
so that we can see more clearly: we never know  
the actual, vital contour of our own  
emotions—just what forms them from outside.  
Who has not sat, afraid, before his heart's  
curtain? It rose: the scenery of farewell.  
Easy to recognize. The well-known garden,  
which swayed a little. Then the dancer came.  
Not *him*. Enough! However lightly he moves,  
he's costumed, made up—an ordinary man  
who hurries home and walks in through the kitchen.  
I won't endure these half-filled human masks;  
better, the puppet. It at least is full.  
I'll put up with the stuffed skin, the wire, the face  
that is nothing but appearance. Here. I'm waiting.  
Even if the lights go out; even if someone  
tells me “That's all”; even if emptiness  
floats toward me in a gray draft from the stage;  
even if not one of my silent ancestors  
stays seated with me, not one woman, not  
the boy with the immovable brown eye—  
I'll sit here anyway. One can always watch.

Am I not right? You, to whom life tasted  
so bitter after you took a sip of mine,  
the first, gritty infusion of my will,  
Father— who, as I grew up, kept on tasting  
and, troubled by the aftertaste of so  
strange a future, searched my unfocused gaze—  
you who, so often since you died, have trembled

for my well-being, within my deepest hope,  
relinquishing that calmness which the dead  
feel as their very essence, countless realms  
of equanimity, for my scrap of life—  
tell me, am I not right? And you, dear women  
who must have loved me for my small beginning  
of love toward you, which I always turned away from  
because the space in your features grew, changed,  
even while I loved it, into cosmic space,  
where you no longer were—: am I not right  
to feel as if I *must* stay seated, must  
wait before the puppet stage, or, rather,  
gaze at it so intensely that at last,  
to balance my gaze, an angel has to come and  
make the stuffed skins startle into life.  
Angel and puppet: a real play, finally.  
Then what we separate by our very presence  
can come together. And only then, the whole  
cycle of transformation will arise,  
out of our own life-seasons. Above, beyond us,  
the angel plays. If no one else, the dying  
must notice how unreal, how full of pretense,  
is all that we accomplish here, where nothing  
is allowed to be itself. Oh hours of childhood,  
when behind each shape more than the past appeared  
and what streamed out before us was not the future.  
We felt our bodies growing and were at times  
impatient to *be* grown up, half for the sake  
of those with nothing left but their grownupness.  
Yet were, when playing by ourselves, enchanted  
with what alone endures; and we would stand there  
in the infinite, blissful space between world and toy,  
at a point which, from the earliest beginning,  
had been established for a pure event.

Who shows a child as he really is? Who sets him  
in his conatellation and puts the measuring-rod  
of distance in his hand? Who makes his death  
out of gray bread, which hardens—or leaves it there  
inside his round mouth, jagged as the core  
of a sweet apple?... Murderers are easy  
to understand. But this, that one can contain  
death, the whole of death, even before  
life has begun, can hold it to one's heart  
gently, and not refuse to go on living,  
Is inexpressible.

## “Die Vierte Elegie”, Duineser Elegien

von Rainer Maria Rilke

O Bäume Lebens, o wann winterlich?  
Wir sind nicht einig. Sind nicht wie die Zug-  
vögel verständigt. Überholt und spät,  
so drängen wir uns plötzlich Winden auf  
und fallen ein auf teilnahmslosen Teich.  
Blühn und verdorn ist uns zugleich bewußt.  
Und irgendwo gehn Löwen noch und wissen,  
solang sie herrlich sind, von keiner Ohnmacht.

Uns aber, wo wir Eines meinen, ganz,  
ist schon des andern Aufwand fühlbar. Feindschaft  
ist uns das Nächste. Treten Liebende  
nicht immerfort an Ränder, eins im andern,  
die sich versprochen Weite, Jagd und Heimat.

Da wird für eines Augenblickes Zeichnung  
ein Grund von Gegenteil bereitet, mühsam,  
daß wir sie sähen; denn man ist sehr deutlich  
mit uns. Wir kennen den Kontur  
des Fühlens nicht: nur, was ihn formt von außen.

Wer saß nicht bang vor seines Herzens Vorhang?  
Der schlug sich auf: die Szenerie war Abschied.  
Leicht zu verstehen. Der bekannte Garten,  
und schwankte leise: dann erst kam der Tänzer.  
Nicht der. Genug! Und wenn er auch so leicht tut,  
er ist verkleidet und er wird ein Bürger  
und geht durch seine Küche in die Wohnung.

Ich will nicht diese halbgefüllten Masken,  
lieber die Puppe. Die ist voll. Ich will  
den Balg aushalten und den Draht und ihr  
Gesicht aus Aussehn. Hier. Ich bin davor.  
Wenn auch die Lampen ausgehn, wenn mir auch  
gesagt wird: Nichts mehr—, wenn auch von der Bühne  
das Leere herkommt mit dem grauen Luftzug,  
wenn auch von meinen stillen Vorfahrn keiner  
mehr mit mir dasitzt, keine Frau, sogar  
der Knabe nicht mehr mit dem braunen Schielaug:  
Ich bleibe dennoch. Es giebt immer Zuschaun.

Hab ich nicht recht? Du, der um mich so bitter  
das Leben schmeckte, meines kostend, Vater,  
den ersten trüben Aufguß meines Müssens,  
da ich heranwuchs, immer wieder kostend  
und, mit dem Nachgeschmack so fremder Zukunft  
beschäftigt, prüftest mein beschlagnes Aufschaun,—  
der du, mein Vater, seit du tot bist, oft



in meiner Hoffnung, innen in mir, Angst hast,  
und Gleichmut, wie ihn Tote haben, Reiche  
von Gleichmut, aufgiebst für mein bißchen Schicksal,  
hab ich nicht recht? Und ihr, hab ich nicht recht,  
die ihr mich liebte für den kleinen Anfang  
Liebe zu euch, von dem ich immer abkam,  
weil mir der Raum in eurem Angesicht,  
da ich ihn liebte, überging in Weltraum,  
in dem ihr nicht mehr wart ....: wenn mir zumut ist,  
zu warten vor der Puppenbühne, nein,  
so völlig hinzuschauen, daß, um mein Schauen  
am Ende aufzuwiegen, dort als Spieler  
ein Engel hinmuß, der die Bälge hochreißt.  
Engel und Puppe: dann ist endlich Schauspiel.  
Dann kommt zusammen, was wir immerfort  
entzwein, indem wir da sind. Dann entsteht  
aus unsern Jahreszeiten erst der Umkreis  
des ganzen Wandeln. Über uns hinüber  
spielt dann der Engel. Sieh, die Sterbenden,  
sollten sie nicht vermuten, wie voll Vorwand  
das alles ist, was wir hier leisten. Alles  
ist nicht es selbst. O Stunden in der Kindheit,  
da hinter den Figuren mehr als nur  
Vergangnes war und vor uns nicht die Zukunft.  
Wir wuchsen freilich und wir drängten manchmal,  
bald groß zu werden, denen halb zulieb,  
die andres nicht mehr hatten, als das Großsein.  
Und waren doch, in unserem Alleingehn,  
mit Dauerndem vergnügt und standen da  
im Zwischenraume zwischen Welt und Spielzeug,  
an einer Stelle, die seit Anbeginn  
gegründet war für einen reinen Vorgang.

Wer zeigt ein Kind, so wie es steht? Wer stellt  
es ins Gestirn und giebt das Maß des Abstands  
ihm in die Hand? Wer macht den Kindertod  
aus grauem Brot, das hart wird,—oder läßt  
ihn drin im runden Mund, so wie den Gröps  
von einem schönen Apfel? ..... Mörder sind  
leicht einzusehen. Aber dies: den Tod,  
den ganzen Tod, noch *vor* dem Leben so  
sanft zu enthalten und nicht böse zu sein,  
ist unbeschreiblich.

## “The Tenth Elegy”, Duino Elegies

by Rainer Maria Rilke

Someday, emerging at last from the violent insight,  
let me sing out jubilation and praise to assenting angels.  
Let not even one of the clearly-struck hammers of my heart  
fail to sound because of a slack, a doubtful,  
or a broken string. Let my joyfully streaming face  
make me more radiant; let my hidden weeping arise  
and blossom. How dear you will be to me then, you nights  
of anguish. Why didn't I kneel more deeply to accept you,  
inconsolable sisters, and, surrendering, lose myself  
in your loosened hair. How we squander our hours of pain.  
How we gaze beyond them into the bitter duration  
to see if they have an end. Though they are really  
our winter-enduring foliage, our dark evergreen,  
*one* season in our inner year—, not only a season  
in time—, but are place and settlement, foundation and soil  
and home.

But how alien, alas, are the streets of the city of grief,  
where, in the false silence formed of continual uproar,  
the figure cast from the mold of emptiness stoutly  
swaggers: the gilded noise, the bursting memorial.  
Oh how completely an angel would stamp out their market  
of solace,  
bounded by the church with its ready-made consolations:  
clean and disenchanting and shut as a post-office on Sunday.  
Farther out, though, the city's edges are curling with  
carnival.  
Swings of freedom! Divers and jugglers of zeal!  
And the shooting-gallery's targets of prettified happiness,  
which jump and kick back with a tinny sound  
when hit by some better marksman. From cheers to chance  
he goes staggering on, as booths with all sorts of attractions  
are wooing, drumming, and bawling. For adults only  
there is something special to see: how money multiplies,  
naked,  
right there on stage, money's genitals, nothing concealed,  
the whole action—, educational and guaranteed  
to increase your potency .....  
.... Oh, but a little farther,  
beyond the last of the billboards, plastered with signs for  
“Deathless,”  
that bitter beer which seems so sweet to its drinkers  
as long as they chew fresh distractions in between sips.....,  
just in back of the billboard, just behind, the view becomes  
*real*.

Children are playing, and lovers are holding hands, to the  
side,  
solemnly in the meager grass, and dogs are doing what is  
natural.

The young man is drawn on, farther; perhaps he is in love  
with a young

Lament..... He comes out behind her, into the meadows.

She says:

-It's a long walk. We live way out there...

Where? And the youth  
follows. He is touched by her manner. Her shoulders, her  
neck—, perhaps  
she is of noble descent. But he leaves her, turns around,  
looks back, waves... What's the use? She is a Lament.

Only those who died young, in their first condition  
of timeless equanimity, while they are being weaned,  
follow her lovingly. She waits  
for girls and befriends them. Shows them, gently,  
what she is wearing. Pearls of grief and the fine-spun  
veils of patience.—With young men she walks  
in silence.

But there, in the valley, where they live, one of the elder  
Laments  
answers the youth when he questions her:—Long ago,  
she says, we Laments were a powerful race. Our forefathers  
worked  
the mines, up there in the mountain-range; sometimes even  
among men you can find a polished nugget of primal grief  
or a chunk of petrified rage from the slag of an ancient  
volcano.

Yes, that came from up there. We used to be rich.—

And gently she guides him through the vast landscape of  
Lament,  
shows him the pillars of the temples, and the ruined walls  
of those castles from which, long ago, the princes of Lament  
wisely ruled the land. Shows him the tall  
trees of tears and the fields of blossoming grief  
(the living know it just as a mild green shrub);  
shows him the herds of sorrow, grazing,— and sometimes  
a startled bird, flying low through their upward gaze,  
far away traces the image of its solitary cry.—  
In the twilight she leads him out to the graves of the elders  
who gave warning to the race of Laments, the sibyls and  
prophets.

But as night approaches, they move more softly, and soon

the sepulchre rise up  
like a moon, watching over everything. Brother to the one on  
the Nile,  
the lofty Sphinx—; the taciturn chamber's  
countenance.  
And they look in wonder at the regal head that has silently  
lifted the human face  
to the scale of the stars, forever.

Still dizzy from recent death, his sight  
cannot grasp it. But her gaze  
frightens an owl from behind the rim of the crown. And the  
bird,  
with slow downstrokes, brushes along the cheek,  
the one with the fuller curve,  
and faintly, in the dead youth's new  
sense of hearing, as upon a double  
unfolded page, it sketches the indescribable outline.

And higher, the stars. The new stars of the land of grief.  
Slowly the Lament names them:—Look, there:  
the *Rider*, the *Staff*, and the larger constellation  
called *Garland of Fruit*. Then, farther up toward the Pole:  
*Cradle; Path; The Burning Book; Puppet; Window*.  
But there, in the southern sky, pure as the lines  
on the palm of a blessed hand, the clear sparkling M  
that stands for Mothers...—

But the dead youth must go on by himself, and silently the  
elder Lament  
takes him as far as the ravine,  
where shimmering in the moonlight  
is the fountainhead of joy. With reverence  
she names it and says: —Among men  
it is a mighty stream.—

They stand at the foot of the mountain-range.  
And she embraces him, weeping.

Alone, he climbs on, up the mountains of primal grief.  
And not once do his footsteps echo from the soundless path.

But if the endlessly dead awakened a symbol in us,  
perhaps they would point to the catkins hanging from the  
bare  
branches of the hazel-trees, or  
would evoke the raindrops that fall onto the dark earth in  
springtime.—

And we, who have always thought  
of happiness as *rising*, would feel  
the emotion that almost overwhelms us  
whenever a happy thing *falls*.

### “Die Zehnte Elegie”, Duineser Elegien

von Rainer Maria Rilke

Daß ich dereinst, an dem Ausgang der grimmigen Einsicht,  
Jubel und Ruhm aufsinge zustimmenden Engeln.  
Daß von den klar geschlagenen Hämmern des Herzens  
keiner versage an weichen, zweifelnden oder  
reißen Saiten. Daß mich mein strömendes Antlitz  
glänzender mache; daß das unscheinbare Weinen  
blühe. O wie werdet ihr dann, Nächte, mir lieb sein,  
gehärmt. Daß ich euch knieender nicht, untröstliche  
Schwestern,  
hinnehm, nicht in euer gelöstes  
Haar mich gelöster ergab. Wir, Vergeuder der Schmerzen.  
Wie wir sie absehn voraus, in die traurige Dauer,  
ob sie nicht enden vielleicht. Sie aber sind ja  
unser winterwähriertes Laub, unser dunkles Sinngrün,  
eine der Zeiten des heimlichen Jahres—, nicht nur  
Zeit—, sind Stelle, Siedelung, Lager, Boden, Wohnort.

Freilich, wehe, wie fremd sind die Gassen der Leid-Stadt,  
wo in der falschen, aus Übertönung gemachten  
Stille, stark, aus der Gußform des Leeren der Ausguß  
prahlt: der vergoldete Lärm, das platzende Denkmal.  
O, wie spurlos zerträte ein Engel ihnen den Trostmarkt,  
den die Kirche begrenzt, ihre fertig gekaufte:  
reinlich und zu und enttäuscht wie ein Postamt am Sonntag.  
Draußen aber kräuseln sich immer die Ränder von  
Jahrmarkt.

Schaukeln der Freiheit! Taucher und Gaukler des Eifers!  
Und des behübschten Glücks figürliche Schießstatt,  
wo es zappelt von Ziel und sich blechern benimmt,  
wenn ein Geschickterer trifft. Von Beifall zu Zufall  
taumelt er weiter; denn Buden jeglicher Neugier  
werben, trommeln und plärren. Für Erwachsene aber  
ist noch besonders zu sehn, wie das Geld sich vermehrt,  
anatomisch,  
nicht zur Belustigung nur: der Geschlechtsteil des Gelds,  
alles, das Ganze, der Vorgang—, das unterrichtet und macht  
fruchtbar .....

.... Oh aber gleich darüber hinaus,  
hinter der letzten Planke, beklebt mit Plakaten des 'Todlos',  
jenes bitteren Biers, das den Trinkenden süß scheint,  
wenn sie immer dazu frische Zerstreungen kaun ...,  
gleich im Rücken der Planke, gleich dahinter, ists *wirklich*.  
Kinder spielen, und Liebende halten einander,—abseits,  
ernst, im ärmlichen Gras, und Hunde haben Natur.  
Weiter noch zieht es den Jüngling; vielleicht, daß er eine  
junge  
Klage liebt ..... Hinter ihr her kommt er in Wiesen. Sie  
sagt:  
—Weit. Wir wohnen dort draußen ....

Wo? Und der Jüngling  
folgt. Ihn rührt ihre Haltung. Die Schulter, der Hals—,  
vielleicht  
ist sie von herrlicher Herkunft. Aber er läßt sie, kehrt um,  
wendet sich, winkt... Was solls? Sie ist eine Klage.

Nur die jungen Toten, im ersten Zustand  
zeitlosen Gleichmuts, dem der Entwöhnung,  
folgen ihr liebend. Mädchen  
wartet sie ab und befreundet sie. Zeigt ihnen leise,  
was sie an sich hat. Perlen des Leids und die feinen  
Schleier der Duldung.—Mit Jünglingen geht sie  
schweigend.

Aber dort, wo sie wohnen, im Tal, der Älteren eine, der  
Klagen,  
nimmt sich des Jünglinges an, wenn er fragt:—Wir waren,  
sagt sie, ein Großes Geschlecht, einmal, wir Klagen. Die  
Väter  
trieben den Bergbau dort in dem großen Gebirg; bei  
Menschen  
findest du manchmal ein Stück geschliffenes Ur-Leid  
oder, aus altem Vulkan, schlackig versteinerten Zorn.  
Ja, das stammte von dort. Einst waren wir reich.—

Und sie leitet ihn leicht durch die weite Landschaft der  
Klagen,  
zeigt ihm die Säulen der Tempel oder die Trümmer  
jener Burgen, von wo Klage-Fürsten das Land  
einstens weise beherrscht. Zeigt ihm die honen  
Tränenbäume und Felder blühender Wehmut,  
(Lebendige kennen sie nur als sanftes Blattwerk);  
zeigt ihm die Tiere der Trauer, weidend,—und manchmal  
schreckt ein Vogel und zieht, flach ihnen fliegend durchs  
Aufschaun,  
weithin das schriftliche Bild seines vereinsamten Schreis.—

Abends führt sie ihn hin zu den Gräbern der Alten  
aus dem Klage-Geschlecht, den Sibyllen und Warn-Herrn.  
Naht aber Nacht, so wandeln sie leiser, und bald  
mondets empor, das über Alles  
wachende Grab-Mal. Brüderlich jenem am Nil,  
der erhabene Sphinx—: der verschwiegenen Kammer  
Antlitz.  
Und sie staunen dem krönlichen Haupt, das für immer,  
schweigend, der Menschen Gesicht  
auf die Waage der Sterne gelegt.

Nicht erfaßt es sein Blick, im Frührtod  
schwindelnd. Aber ihr Schauen,  
hinter dem Pschent-Rand hervor, scheucht es die Eule. Und  
sie,  
streifend im langsamen Abstrich die Wange entlang,  
jene der reifsten Rundung,  
zeichnet weich in das neue  
Totengehör, über ein doppelt  
aufgeschlagenes Blatt, den unbeschreiblichen Umriß.

Und höher, die Sterne. Neue. Die Sterne des Leidlands.  
Langsam nennt sie die Klage:—Hier,  
siehe: den Reiter, den Stab, und das vollere Sternbild  
nennen sie: *Fruchtkranz*. Dann, weiter, dem Pol zu:  
*Wiege; Weg; Das Brennende Buch; Puppe; Fenster*.  
Aber im südlichen Himmel, rein wie im Innern  
einer gesegneten Hand, das klar erglänzende *M*,  
das die Mütter bedeutet .....—

Doch der Tote muß fort, und schweigend bringt ihn die  
ältere  
Klage bis an die Talschlucht,  
wo es schimmert im Mondschein:  
die Quelle der Freude. In Ehrfurcht  
nennt sie sie, sagt:—Bei den Menschen  
ist sie ein tragender Strom.—

Stehn am Fuß des Gebirgs.  
Und da umarmt sie ihn, weinend.

Einsam steigt er dahin, in die Berge des Ur-Leids.  
Und nicht einmal sein Schritt klingt aus dem tonlosen Los.

Aber erweckten sie uns, die unendlich Toten, ein Gleichnis,  
siehe, sie zeigten vielleicht auf die Kätzchen der leeren  
Hasel, die hängenden, oder

meinten den Regen, der fällt auf dunkles Erdreich im  
Frühjahr.—

Und wir, die an *steigendes* Glück  
denken, empfänden die Rührung,  
die uns beinah bestürzt,  
wenn ein Glückliches *fällt*.



## **Sonnet to Orpheus VI**

by Rainer Maria Rilke

Is he native to this realm? No,  
his wide nature grew out of both worlds.  
They more adeptly bend the willow's branches  
who have experience of the willow's roots.

When you go to bed, don't leave bread or milk  
on the table: it attracts the dead—  
But may he, this quiet conjurer, may he  
beneath the mildness of the eyelid

mix their bright traces into every seen thing;  
and may the magic of earthsmoke and rue  
be as real for him as the clearest connection.

Nothing can mar for him the authentic image;  
whether he wanders through houses or graves,  
let him praise signet ring, gold necklace, jar.

## **Sonett an Orpheus VI**

von Rainer Maria Rilke

Ist er ein Hiesiger? Nein, aus beiden  
Reichen erwuchs seine weite Natur.  
Kundiger böge die Zweige der Weiden,  
wer die Wurzeln der Weiden erfuhr.

Geht ihr zu Bette, so laßt auf dem Tische  
Brot nicht und Milch nicht; die Toten ziehths—.  
Aber er, der Beschwörende, mische  
unter der Milde des Augenlids

ihre Erscheinung in alles Geschaute;  
und der Zauber von Erdrauch und Raute  
sei ihm so wahr wie der klarste Bezug.

Nichts kann das göltige Bild ihm verschlimmern;  
sei es aus Gräbern, sei es aus Zimmern,  
rühme er Fingerring, Spange und Krug.