

Rilke

Sonnets to Orpheus

selected poems
with new translations
and photographs
by Cliff Crego

selected *Sonnets to Orpheus* [FIRST PART]

I



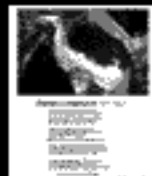
There rose a tree. .

XIV



*We are involved with
flower*

III



A god can do it.

XVIII



*Do you hear the New,
Lord,*

V



Erect no monument.

XIX



*Even when the world
swiftly changes,*

VII



*Only in the fields
of Praise*

XXI



*O, what her teacher
taught her,*

IX



*Only he who has
lified his lyre*

XXII



*We are the driving
ones.*

XII



*Even when the farmer
cares and toils,*

FIRST PART



(Image: Cloud of Starlings, Fall Poplar—North America)

Sonnets to Orpheus I [FIRST PART]

There rose a tree. O pure transcendence!
O Orpheus sings! O high tree of the ear.
And all was still. Yet in the stillness
new beginning, summoning, and change sprang forth.

From the silence, creatures pushed out
of the clear, open forest from lair and nest;
and then it happened, that they were not
so quiet because of cunning or fear,

but because of listening. Shrieks, cries, roars
seemed small in their hearts. And where once
scarcely a hut stood to receive this,

a crude shelter made of the darkest of longings
with trembling posts at its entrance way,—
there you created a temple in their hearing.

Rainer Maria Rilke
(tr. Cliff Crego)



(Image: The Sound of White Water Rushing—the Alps)

Sonnets to Orpheus III [FIRST PART]

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

Song, as you teach him, is not desire,
not the touting of some final achievement;
Song is Being. Easy for a god.
But when are we to be? And when does he turn

towards our existence the Earth and the Stars?
This is nothing, young one, that you love, when
the voice pushes the mouth open,—learn

to forget such murmurings. They will pass.
True singing is a different kind of breath.
A breath around nothing. A sigh in a god. A wind.

Rainer Maria Rilke (tr. Cliff Crego)



(Image: House Leeks with Clovers, south-facing rockgarden, end of June—the Alps)

Sonnets to Orpheus V [FIRST PART]

Erect no monument. Let but the rose
flower each year on his behalf.
For Orpheus *is*. His metamorphosis
is in all things. We should not burden

ourselves with other names. Now and forever
Orpheus is when there is song. He comes and goes.
Isn't it already enough when he outlasts
the bowl of roses but by a few day?

O how he must disappear, so that you may understand!
Even when he himself worries about disappearing.
In that his word the present moment transcends,

he is already there, where you are not accompanied.
The lyre's lattice doesn't force his hands.
And he obeys, in that he transgresses.

Rainer Maria Rilke (tr. Cliff Crego)



Sonnets to Orpheus VII

[FIRST PART]

Only in the fields of Praise may Complaint
go, the nymphs of the plaintive spring,
watching over our defeats,
that they would be clear on the same rock

that carries the arch and the altars.—
See, on her quiet shoulders dawns
the feeling that she was the youngest
among the siblings of sentiment.

Joy *knows*, and Longing remains constant,—
only Complaint still learns; with a girl's hands
she counts through the nights the old wrongs.

But then suddenly, unpracticed and askew,
she fetches a star-image of our voice
in the night sky, one that doesn't cloud her breath.

Rainer Maria Rilke
(tr. Cliff Crego)

(Image: At Timberline, Summer's End. looking East—the Alps)



(Image: Summer Rockgarden, on granite—the Alps)

Sonnets to Orpheus IX [FIRST PART]

Only he who has lifted his lyre
also among the shadows
may his boundless praise
possibly repay.

Only he who has eaten poppies
with the dead,
will never again lose even
the softest of sounds.

Though the pool's reflection
often blurs before us:
Know the image.

First in the double world
do voices become
eternal and mild.

Rainer Maria Rilke (tr. Cliff Crego)



(Image: Paradise Lilies, south-facing slope, end of June—the Alps)

Sonnets to Orpheus XII [FIRST PART]

Hail to the spirit that would connect us;
in that we live truly in figures.
And with small steps pass the hours
beside our authentic day.

Without knowing our true place,
we are moved to action by real relation.
Antennae feel antennae,
carried by empty distance . . .

Pure tension. O Music of powers!
Is not through this venial industry
every disturbance deflected from you?

Even when the farmer cares and toils,
to that place where the seed itself transforms,
he does not reach. The Earth bestows.

Rainer Maria Rilke (tr. Cliff Crego)



(Image: Purple Gentian—the Alps)

Sonnets to Orpheus XIV [FIRST PART]

We are involved with flower, grapeleaf, fruit.
They speak not just the language of the year.
Out of the darkness rises colorful revelation,
having perhaps the shine on it of the jealousy

of the dead, who strengthen the earth.
What do we know of the part they play?
It has always been their nature, with their
free marrow, to invigorate the clay.

But still we ask: do they enjoy doing it? . . .
Does this fruit, the work of heavy slaves,
fortified, press up to us, to their Masters?

Or are they the Masters, those who sleep with roots
and grant us out of their superabundance
this hybrid thing made of mute energy and kisses.

Rainer Maria Rilke (tr. Cliff Crego)



(Photo: Late summer Fireweed—the Alps)

Sonnets to Orpheus XVIII [FIRST PART]

Do you hear the New, Lord,
rumbling and shaking?
Prophets are coming
who shall exalt it.

Truly, no hearing is whole
around such noise,
and yet the machine's part
too will have its praise.

See, the machine:
how it turns and takes its toll
and pushes aside and weakens us.

Though it draws energy from us,
it, without passion,
drives on and serves.

Rainer Maria Rilke (tr. Cliff Crego)



(Image: Looking East, Rhine River Watershed—the Alps)

Sonnets to Orpheus XIX [FIRST PART]

Even when the world swiftly changes,
as the form of clouds,
all things completed fall
back into the Primordial.

Above stride and change,
further and freer,
your prelude endures,
god with a lyre.

Sufferings have not been seen,
Love has not been learned,
and what removes us in Death,

has not been revealed.
Only the song over the land
hallows and rejoices.

*Rainer Maria Rilke
(tr. Cliff Crego)*



(Photo: Dwarf Pines, Alpine Moor—end of March, the Alps)

Sonnets to Orpheus XXI [FIRST PART]

Spring has again returned. The Earth
is like a child that knows many poems,
many, o so many For the hardship
of such long learning she receives the prize.

Strict was her teacher. The white
in the old man's beard pleases us.
Now, what to call green, to call blue,
we dare to ask: she knows, she knows!

Earth, now free, you happy one, play
with the children. We want to catch you,
joyful Earth. Only the most joyful can do it.

O, what her teacher taught her, such plenitude,
and that which is pressed into roots and long
heavy, twisted trunks: she sings, she sings!

Rainer Maria Rilke (tr. Cliff Crego)



(Image: Wild Granite Ridgeline, before Fall snows—the Alps)

Sonnets to Orpheus XXII

[FIRST PART]

We are the driving ones.
But the march of Time
takes him as but a trifle
into the ever-permanent.

Everything which hurries
will soon be over;
for it is the lingering
that first initiates us.

Young ones, o put your mettle
not into the quick achievement,
not into the attempted flight.

Everything is now at rest:
Darkness and light,
blossom and book.

Rainer Maria Rilke
(tr. Cliff Crego)

21 selected poems
with new translations
and photographs
by Cliff Crego

*All but two of the photographs
were made in the central
European Alps,
very close to where
Rilke composed his 55
Sonnets to Orpheus in 1922.*

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Rilke

*new translations
by Cliff Crego*



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