

Rilke

Sonnets to Orpheus

selected poems
with new translations
and photographs
by Cliff Crego

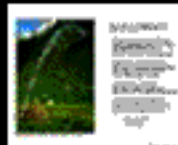
selected *Sonnets to Orpheus* [SECOND PART]

I



*Breathing, you
invisible poem!*

XV



O fountain mouth,

IV



O this is the creature

XVI



*Only the dead drink
from the spring heard
by us here,*

V



*We, the violent ones,
we last longer.*

XX



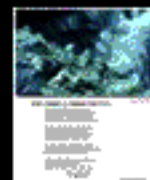
*Between the stars,
how far;*

X



*Words gently end at the
edge of the Unsayable . . .*

XXIX



*And to the rushing
waters speak: I am.*

XIII



*Be ahead of all
departure,*

XIV



See the flowers,

SECOND PART



(Image: New Snow, Mountain Fall; November—the Alps)

Sonnets to Orpheus I

[SECOND PART]

Breathing, you invisible poem!
Ceaselessly going round your own
Being pure exchanged worldspace. Counterpoise,
in which I rhythmically reclaim myself.

Solitary waves, whose
gradual sea I am;
you the sparest of all possible seas,—
space rewon.

How many of the these regions of space/
have already been inside of me. Many winds
are as if they were my son.

Do you recognize me, air, full of places once my own?
You, once smooth rind,
curve and leaf of my words.

Rainer Maria Rilke
(tr. Cliff Crego)



(Image: Cottongrass Moor—the Alps)

Sonnets to Orpheus IV [SECOND PART]

O this is the creature that does not exist.
They knew nothing and yet without a doubt
—his gait, his posture, his neck, down
to the silent light of his gaze—they had loved.

Indeed, it wasn't real. But because they loved,
it became a pure animal. Always, they gave it space.
And in that space, clear and spare
it raised lightly its head and needed scarcely

to be. They nourished it not with grain,
but with only the possibility that it truly was.
And this gave such strength to the animal

that it grew a horn from its brow. But one horn.
It passed in its whiteness a young maiden—
and appeared in the silver mirror, and in her.

*Rainer Maria Rilke
(tr. Cliff Crego)*



(Image: Ox-eye Daisies and Windflowers (Anemones (Pulsatilla alpina))—the Alps)

Sonnets to Orpheus V [SECOND PART]

Flower-muscle, that the windflower
morning meadow gradually encloses,
till the polyphonic light of the shrill
heavens pours into its womb,

in the outstretched muscle of the quiet
flower-star of infinite reception,
many times so overpowered with fullness,
that the moment's rest before darkness

can hardly return to you the once
again hastened back edges of leaves:
you, resolution and power of how many worlds!

We, the violent ones, we last longer.
But when, in which of all lives,
are we finally open and receivers.

Rainer Maria Rilke (tr. Cliff Crego)



(Photo: Staghorn Summac Fall—North America)

Sonnets to Orpheus X [SECOND PART]

All achievement is threatened by the machine, as long
as it dares to take its place in the mind, instead of obeying.
That the master's hand no longer shines forth in fine lingerings,
now it cuts to the determined design more rigidly the stone.

Nowhere does it remain behind, that for once we might escape
as it oils and abides by itself in the silent factories.
It has become Life,—it thinks it can do everything best
and with like determination orders and creates and destroys.

And yet for us Being is still enchanted; on a hundred
planes is still origin. A play of pure energies
touched by no one who has not knelt down and is amazed.

Words gently end at the edge of the Unsayable . . .
And Music, ever new, out the most trembling of stones,
builds in unusable space its deified house.

Rainer Maria Rilke (tr. Cliff Cregg)



(Image: Shepherd's Hut, spring snowmelt; May—the Alps)

Sonnets to Orpheus XIII [SECOND PART]

Be ahead of all departure, as if it were already
behind you, like the winter which is almost over.
For among winters there is one so endlessly winter,
that, wintering through it, may your heart survive.

Be forever dead in Eurydice—, singing ascent,
praising ascent, returning to pure relation.
Here, among the disappearing, be, in the realm of decline,
be the ringing glass that shatters even as it sounds.

Be—and yet know Not-being's condition,
the infinite ground of your innermost movement,
that you may bring it to completion but this one time.

To that which used-up, as to nature's abundant
dumb and mute supply, the unsayable sums,
joyfully add yourself and the result destroy.

Rainer Maria Rilke (tr. Cliff Crego)



Sonnets to Orpheus XIV

[SECOND PART]

See the flowers, they who are true to the earthly,
to whom we lend Fate from Fate's edge,—
but who knows! when they their faded ones repent,
is it left to us, to be the repenter for them.

Everything wants to float. We go about like weights,
laying ourselves on everything, from heaviness enthralled;
o how we are things for weakened teachers,
for they have achieved eternal childhood.

If they were to take one in inner slumber and sleep
deeply with things—: o how he would become light,
different to a different day, out of the common depths.

Or he would remain perhaps; as they flowered and praised
him, the converted one, who now is their equal,
silent siblings all among the winds of the meadows.

Rainer Maria Rilke
(tr. Cliff Crego)

(Image: Arnica with Butterfly, at timberline—the Alps)



(Image: Springwater Fountain, late May at 1800 meters—the Alps)

Sonnets to Orpheus XV [SECOND PART]

O fountain mouth, giver, you mouth which
speaks inexhaustibly of that one, pure thing,—
you, mask of marble placed before
the water's flowing face. In the background

the aqueducts' source. Further, beyond
all the graves, on the slopes of the Apennines,
they bring you your stories, that then,
upon the black aging of your chin,

pour over into the vessel below.
This is the ear that sleeps, laid down,
the ear of marble, into which you always speak.

An ear of the Earth. Only with herself
alone does she thus converse. Insert a jug,
and it seems to her that you interrupt.

*Rainer Maria Rilke
(tr. Cliff Crego)*



(Image: Child, before mountain rain—the Alps)

Sonnets to Orpheus XX [SECOND PART]

Between the stars, how far; and yet, as one learns from that which is close,
between how many things still further.

One, for instance, a child . . . And next to it, another—
o how incomprehensibly far removed.

Fate, perhaps it measures us with spans of being
that appear to us strange;
Think of how many spans there are from girl to man,
when she both shuns and watches him.

Everything if far—, and nowhere does the circle close.
See the plate on the gaily prepared table,
how uncommon the fish's face.

Fish are mute . . . , one once thought. Who knows?
But in the end, is there not a place where one, what for
fish would be language, without them speaks?

Rainer Maria Rilke (tr. Cliff Crego)



(Image: Fall Ice, Mountain Spring—the Alps)

Sonnets to Orpheus XXIX [SECOND PART]

Silent friend of many distances, feel
how your breath still multiplies all space.
In the darkness of the belfry's high beams,
let yourself ring. That which weakens you

will grow strong on such nourishment.
Move in and out of transformation.
What is your most painful experience?
Is the drinking bitter, then become wine.

Be in this night of a thousand excesses,
magic power at the crossroads of your senses,
the meaning of their rare encounter.

And when the earthly has forgotten you,
say to the quiet land: I flow.
And to the rushing waters speak: I am.

*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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*new translations
by Cliff Crego*



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