»And now and then a white elephant.« Rilke's Worlds

In 1906, the carousel turning in the Jardin du Luxembourg inspired Rainer Maria Rilke to write one of his most well-known poems: *The Carousel* – with its mysterious white elephants appearing at ever shorter intervals – shows how central seeing, precise observation, and alternating perspectives were for Rilke. The exhibition brings together Rilke's life and work in context and gives visitors space to read the detail of his texts carefully, and to see him in different roles: It shows the artistically talented boy from Prague who grew up with military ideals and later did everything he could to be released from military service during the First World War. It shows the writer who sought publicity for himself and for his work from an early stage, and who – contrary to his own claims – did not just live in solitude and write, but carefully fostered his contacts in the art and literature scene. It shows the young author who took the surprising step of marrying the sculptor Clara Westhoff and became a father, but then went to Paris on his own. It shows the successful author who, nevertheless, was dependent on the support of his patrons throughout his life. It shows the traveller who, just as concerned with his creativity as he was with his health, was constantly in search of the best possible places to stay and travelled all over Europe to that end, finally cultivating his garden in Muzot, Switzerland. It shows the poet who wrote not only poetry, but also drama and prose texts, who translated from several languages, and whose »langue prêtée« – French – ultimately became his literary language. It shows the author who suffered writer's block and yet continuously wrote, re-wrote, corresponded with a large number of people, and engaged in epistolary conversation with his readers, which itself sometimes became literature.

LIVING ENVIRONMENTS

Rainer Maria Rilke, born 4 December 1875 in Prague, grew up in a family where truth and idea were bound closely together. His mother came from a wealthy background, his father from a humble one, although supposedly with an aristo cratic history. Both yearned for greater stand ing in the world than their resources could allow; neither was able to realise their social climbing fantasies. Rilke was first raised as a girl, then as a boy – he was to develop his artistic talents, but also to complete training as a military officer. Drawn to soldierly ideals and yet overwhelmed by the realities of the military and later by war service, he created his own worlds in writing. His awareness of his physical and psychological sensitivity was the starting point for his writing.

Rilke was concerned about both – his constitution and his creativity – and that also meant experimenting with different life concepts, many of them inspired by the life reform movement: in cities, in the countryside, in the Worpswede artists' colony, as a solitary individual. Acquaintances, friendships, and relationships were quickly made and just as quickly broken off. Friends sometimes criticised a lack of »deeper empathy« in Rilke's stance regarding the circumstances of the period. Proximity and distance were features of his own family relationships: After a brief period of cohabitation, his marriage to the sculptor Clara Westhoff continued mainly via letters, as did his relationship with his daughter, Ruth.

Son (1)

Rainer Maria Rilke, born René Karl Wilhelm Johann Josef Maria Rilke on 4 December 1875 in Prague, was the second child of Josef Rilke (1839 – 1906) and Sophie (Phia) Entz (1851 – 1931). His sister had died, just a few days old, a year before his birth. René was first raised as a girl, wore white dresses and long hair. Only when he began school in 1882 were his clothing and hair changed. On his parents' wedding anniversary in 1884, his wishes addressed both them and himself:

»May your life be my happiness / Never think back on unhappiness, / never! never! never!« Their marriage broke down that same year.

Son (2)

Phia Rilke devoted herself to her son, playing, singing, and reading with him. However, she also recalled »a very jolly nursery teacher«, who would come to the house several times a week and paint with René. His earliest childhood drawings – which Phia Rilke later dated, with the comment »by my dearest Renetschi, 4 years – 1879« – show a house, an animal, and a water pump with trough. In other drawings, it is probable that difficult details were carried out with the help of an adult.

Son (3)

Throughout Rilke's life, his relationship with his mother was close, but complicated. In letters to others, he described her as »ghastly and dreadful«, but his correspondence with her is characterised by mutual concern and intellectual exchange. He dedicated his book of poetry, published in December 1896, to her »in childlike gratitude and devotion«. In autumn 1923, mother and son – both unwell – sent good wishes to each other in their respective spa locations. After Rilke's death, Phia added notes in coloured pencil to some of the letters he had written her since his childhood, likely as a way to deal with her bereavement.

Noble (Hi)story (1)

After his health forced him to abandon his officer career, Rilke's father only attained the rank of Inspector of the private Bohemian Northern Railway Company. It ensured his son the privilege of reduced-price first-class rail travel, but was a disappointment for his wife and his family, who claimed to descend from ancient Carinthian nobility. Rilke referred repeatedly to the family motto. In *The Love and Death of Cornet Christopher Rilke*, he cast a forebear as his protagonist and demanded an exact copy of the family coat-of-arms for the title page.

Noble (Hi)story (2)

The family coat-of-arms with sighthounds rampant – visible in a seal that belonged to Rilke's paternal great-grandfather, which he probably used as an official, rather than a personal seal – held a particular fascination for Rilke. As a youth, he reproduced it as a decorative device on a birthday poem for his mother. Later, he also used the coat-of-arms as a letter seal and cultivated a »language of the seals«, as he wrote to his actress friend, Elya Maria Nevar. A version of the family coat-of-arms even adorns his gravestone, in accordance with the stipulations of his will.

Noble (Hi)story (3)

In addition to his paternal genealogy, Rilke was interested in his mother's Alsatian family history. His research was frustrated by his grandmother, who had been »so heedless and rigorous in destroying surviving [sources]«. His choice of writing environments frequently signalled self-ennoblement, even in times of inflation and expropriation of feudal property. However, in 1922, he rejected, in aristocratic style, the offer of Maximilian Egon II, Prince of Fürstenberg, of a period of residence in the baroque Wartenberg Palace – he feared disruptive »daytrippers«.

Military and War (1)

From 1886 to 1891, Rilke attended military school in St. Pölten and Mährisch-Weißkirchen (now Hranice in Přerov). He found the atmosphere and military drill oppressing. In 1889, he wrote his mother, »I feel in my core that I am not suited to be a soldier.« Yet, two years later, in November 1891, he described the military as the only »estate to which I am suited«. Many of his drawings reflect the ideal of the dashing mounted soldier. Ca. 1890/91, Rilke drew a saluting hussar and quoted the refrain of a popular song from Carl Millöcker's operetta *Die Jungfrau von Belleville*: »We of the cavalry are never abashed by the likes of this!«

Military and War (2)

Even as a child, Rilke was fascinated by uniforms, weapons, medals, and decorations. His infant imagination was dominated by knights, lansequenets, and soldiers, and these populated his drawings: marching, saluting, fighting, before, during, and after battle. His time at school in St. Pölten and Mährisch-Weißkirchen made Rilke aware of the darker aspects of the military. In the mid-1880s, employing the style of contemporary caricaturists, he sketched scenes from the everyday life of the military, conveying martial hierarchies and the condescending vanity of certain officer types.

Military and War (3)

In early August 1914, in direct response to the outbreak of war, Rilke wrote *Fünf Gesänge* (Five Songs): They celebrate the »War God«, but call him the »terrible God«, and contrast »battle- desire« with »battle-pain«. A few weeks later, writing to his publisher Juncker, Rilke distanced himself from his verses: »You won't get any ›war songs‹ from me, not with the best will. You can read a few songs, written in the first days of August, in the new (war) almanac from Insel –, but they are not to be viewed as war songs and I do not want them to be used again elsewhere.«

Military and War (4)

In 1915, Austria enlisted large numbers of conscripts, including 39-year-old Rilke, whose training in the military schools made him particularly suitable – at least on paper. He was mustered in November in Munich, deemed »fit« – despite a lung condition and general physical weakness –, and was obliged to join up as a Landwehr-infantryman in early 1916. In late January 1916, he was transferred to the office services of the Vienna War Archive. In June 1916, thanks to a coordinated campaign by Katharina Kippenberg, supported by influential individuals in politics and the arts, Rilke was released from service.

Military and War (5)

Occasionally, compelling appeals reached Rilke in his lethargy during the war years. In 1917, his friend, the Socialist Sophie Liebknecht (1884–1964), advised him to concern himself more with the present »just as it is, in all its horror« and, »through reading newspapers and deeper empathy in general«, to forge a »more real position« on contemporary conditions. In early 1918, Hermann Hesse (1877–1962) asked Rilke to support his book collections for German prisoners of war in France. Rilke immediately instructed Insel Verlag to send books to the value of 50 Marks, »in particular the Book of Hours«.

Military and War (6)

Hypochondria, psychosomatic disorders, and anxieties accompanied Rilke his whole life. He considered psychoanalysis many times, but, concerned about its effect on his creativity, could not bring himself to undergo it. Lou Andreas-Salomé shared his reservations: On 13 January 1913, she warned that »the correction would involve the most dreadful break. I believe that you must suffer, and will always do so«. When, in 1916, Rilke was struggling with military service in Vienna, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) invited him on 18 February »to obtain relief through a conversation«. However, Rilke preferred to find a way out of his psychological »entombment« through writing.

Life Concepts (1)

Rilke frequently complained of illness and homesickness during his time at military school. In 1891, he abandoned his officer training. He attended the commercial college in Linz, but was forced to leave and return to Prague after a scandal involving an affair with a maid servant. In Prague, his uncle financed his private secondary education. Dr. Theodor Petrina (1842–1928) reported in April 1893 that Rilke had an »hereditary nervous disposition« and had »become highly neurasthenic in consequence of arduous study«. Later, Rilke addressed his

overwrought condition and connected it with the loss of his lover.

Life Concepts (2)

In summer 1897, influenced by Lou Andreas-Salomé, Rilke changed his eating habits. He informed his grandmother, Caroline Entz, probably before Christmas 1897, that he was »both vegetarian and anti-alcoholic, meaning, at every dinner party: a spoilsport«. He noted the addresses of vegetarian restaurants in his notebooks. In November 1918, a procurist for the vegetarian restaurant Ceres in Munich, a »main establishment for alcohol-free wines from the ›Nektar‹ company«, offered to obtain »Burgundy wine from Worms« for him, but the price was »very high, however«.

Life Concepts (3)

In summer 1904, Rilke went to Sweden to convalesce; that autumn, he was the guest of the manufacturer James Gibson and his wife at Villa Furuborg near Göteborg. Letters to Clara Rilke-Westhoff describe air baths and walking barefoot »over the hoar frosty moor«, followed by putting on »a wonderful feeling along with my clothes«. At the same time, he sent her the »outline of my feet, so that you have it in case the reform shoes come to be made. I would like to have a pair of sandals.«

Husband (1)

In late summer 1901, Rilke, recently returned from Russia, spent a second, longer period in the Worpswede artists' colony, where he met the sculptor Clara Westhoff. On 30 October 1900 he sent her not a letter, »but rather something prior to a letter« in which he hoped she could »hear [his poem Sang] in the re-reading«. The relationship intensified in early 1901 in Berlin: Rilke and Westhoff decided to marry. On 15 February 1901, he celebrated »the first morning […] in this new life« and explained: »You know I am called: René. I have been called Rainer only since the end of my time in Munich.«

Husband (2)

On her return from Berlin to Worpswede, Clara Westhoff sent Rilke a telegram. Its contents – »you are everything and everything belongs to you« – likely refer to the engagement that took place on or around 15 February 1901. Their circle of friends are astounded by the engagement. Otto Modersohn cannot imagine »these two so different people« together. Only after their marriage in a registry office on 27 April 1901 does the couple disclose through an announcement that they have »set up their home« in Westerwede. In November 1901, Rilke's grandmother Caroline Entz received the picture taken of the couple in the summer.

Husband (3)

On the occasion of their first Christmas together, Rilke dedicated his collection of novellas *The Last Ones* – published at the end of November 1901 – to his wife: »We built a home for this book and you faithfully advised me in it.« Their home together was to »grow on granite« and be there for their daughter Ruth, born 12 December 1901, when her parents »see distant destinations«. Financially, both house and family stood on unstable ground: Already in September 1901, Rilke pulled out all the stops in a letter to his father-in-law, Friedrich Westhoff, to persuade him to give them 1,000 Marks.

Husband (4)

Despite the artistic exchange that he noted in his diary, Rilke did not stay long in Worpswede. In summer 1902, he asked Julie Weinmann for financial support for a stay in Paris. The »small household« in Westerwede was to be dissolved; Rilke-Westhoff and he had »decided to live for our work, each as a restrained bachelor, just as before«. Both were also prepared to accept »a geographical separation«. Although the couple was always in touch by letter, phases of work in each other's company – such as in summer 1905 at Castle Friedelhausen – were rare in the coming years.

Husband (5)

On 27 August 1902, after exactly two years, Rilke left Worpswede and travelled to Paris, where he had been commissioned to write a monograph about Auguste Rodin. »Do you feel that I am close to you?« he wrote to Clara Rilke-Westhoff. He saw in his work with Rodin a foundation for his relationship with her, transcending the physical distance between them: She had »opened paths [to me], and not just any, you have opened up my paths to me, the paths that I will now go, day by day. I will learn a lot from Rodin, his life, and his work; – but you have prepared me for it.«

Westhoff's Rilke portrait

After taking private lessons in Munich, the sculptor Clara Westhoff (1878 – 1954) undertook further training in the Worpswede artists' colony and in Paris, where she also attended classes given by Auguste Rodin. She created the first of three Rilke portraits in summer 1901 in Westerwede: The Rodin-influenced composition of the austerely stripped-back head sculpture with its inclined pose and softly modelled facial features is not a representational, but rather an intimate portrait, giving expression to the inner, intellectual and psychological emotions. For Rilke, this work demonstrated Westhoff's independence and inimitability. – Grafische Sammlung DLA

Father (1)

Now separated from his family and just arrived in Paris, Rilke had »sometimes a great longing« for his young daughter. What the family's future would look like was still open – »if only everything was clear with us«, he wrote to Clara Rilke-Westhoff on 5 September 1902. Searching for advice on how two artistic people with a child should shape their life and work, Rilke turned the very next day to the pedagogue Ellen Key, whose bestseller *The Century of the Child* he had studied, annotated, and reviewed.

Father (2)

Ruth Rilke rarely saw her father. Periods spent together as a family, as in summer 1906 on the Wacholderhöhe in Bad Godesberg with the von der Heydt banking family, were an exception. Rilke maintained an epistolary relationship with his daughter, often in ignorance of many details of her daily life. In December 1911, he congratulated her on her birthday with an *Evening Song*, reminded her to send Christmas letters to her grandmother and great-grandmother, who »otherwise [receive] nothing else«, concluded the letter with a sketched genuflection, and requested a »curtsey« from Ruth.

Father (3)

Due to their infrequent meetings, what Rilke did know about Ruth was often »things that are already long past, perhaps you are already completely different«. In his letters, it was often fictional configurations that created intimacy. On Ruth's birthday in December 1920, Rilke sent her not only an accounts book, but also trans formed her message that a dog had run up to her into a story: His friend, the Wolfhound Prince, had recently died and his »cousin« had been »instructed to go to you«. The relationship between father and daughter functioned through epistolary storytelling.

Father (4)

In the notebook that Ruth Rilke gave her father in 1918, she painted a small watercolour, possibly of a house in Fischerhude, where she had moved with her mother that year. Rilke frequently decorated his letters with small sketches: Just as he had done in her childhood, he conveyed his greetings through a drawn genuflection in which he doffs his hat. Ruth Sieber-Rilke received a photograph, taken in Sierre, of her smiling father in 1924, for the first birthday of her daughter, Christine Sieber.

LITERARY BUSINESS

»You know it is important to me that I bring my coming things together with a single publisher. Only it must be someone who, all ideals aside, would display a certain (not excessive) financial generosity, which my circumstances unfortunately do not allow me to forgo,« Rilke wrote on 8 November 1905 to Carl Ernst Poeschel, who managed Insel Verlag together with Anton Kippenberg. After initial, not always successful, attempts to find publishers for his texts, from 1901 the writer's first publisher was Axel Juncker, for whom he was active as an editor as well as an author. In 1905, he switched to Insel Verlag and found in Kippenberg his publisher, who set about building up his publishing house and Rilke, the author, in concert. Rilke's wish to bring all his works under one publishing roof was thus fulfilled. However, it was not possible for him to live solely on the earnings from his publications, readings, and talks; throughout his life, he relied on »a degree of kindness« from the Kippenbergs, but also from a whole network of patrons, (female) friends, and admirers. He expressed his gratitude for their support – financial resources, benefits in kind, accommodation, and other forms of assistance – through dedications and commemorative transcripts, included them in his projects. Yet, Rilke, the recipient of many donations and subsidies, also acted as a mentor, supporting young female writers who sought his advice as an author, as well as aspiring visual artists.

Publishing (1)

Even before completing his school leaving examinations in 1895, Rilke tried to get a publisher for his first poems. He needed one thing above all: patience. In 1893, Cotta Verlag rejected *Life and Songs*. The poetry collection, Rilke's first book publication, appeared in late 1894 with Kattentidt in Strasbourg. Around the same time, he offered his *Novellas and Sketches* to Stuttgart publisher, Adolf Bonz. Bonz was certainly impressed by the »snappily written«

prose texts, but hesitated over their suitability for a publication »in book form« – and asked for revisions. The volume only appeared in 1898.

Publishing (2)

Searching for publication opportunities, Rilke rarely overlooked a publisher or a journal and was able to garner initial, although mixed, successes. The publisher Entsch, who brought out his play *Without Presence* in late 1897, was sceptical that it would have any widespread success, because: »Your play is so peculiar.« In 1900, the journal *Die Insel* accepted Rilke's *Stories of God*, but also expressed reservations. The offered fee was »not very lavish«, the author was told, as the »success of the book is very uncertain«.

Publishing (3)

The relationship between Rilke and Insel Verlag began in 1900 with *Stories of God*, but there was an initial hiatus until 1905, when his *Book of Hours* achieved a breakthrough. From then on, Anton Kippenberg published Rilke's works. He paid his author the rates usual at the time, generally giving him 15 percent of the sales price – as he did, for example, with *Sonnets to Orpheus*. Rilke received »400 Mark for every 10,500 examples« for *The Love and Death of Cornet Christopher Rilke*, published in summer 1912 as the first volume of the Insel-Bücherei series. 8,000 volumes of the first edition were sold within three weeks.

Publishing (4)

Rilke became a role model for the Prague Circle: In 1904, Max Brod contacted him for the first time and, in August 1916, in the middle of war, asked him for a contribution to the Zionist weekly journal *Die Selbstwehr*. He wanted Rilke to write about the »Jewish element« in Prague, about whether this element shaped the city in any particular way, possibly even whether this made it different to other cities. In 1924, Brod solicited Rilke again, writing to him in Switzerland via Insel Verlag. He requested a publication on the

subject of »German poets of Czechoslovakia« for the newspaper *Prager Tagblatt*.

Promoting (1)

In 1901, the Berlin publisher Axel Juncker became Rilke's first proper publisher. The author not only published with Juncker, Rilke also advised him. In early 1901, he recommended the poems of the still largely unknown Margarete Susman to Juncker: »Poems such as this are rare, rare such women«. In January 1902, he offered his services to Juncker as a »literary assistant«. In 1903/04, acting as a kind of scout, Rilke wrote a series of official reviews. His assessments were severe – for example, he quite categorically advised »great caution in accepting women's works«.

Promoting (2)

When, in August 1908, Regina Ullmann asked Rilke to assess *The Sermon on the Plain*, she felt her »whole life in distress«. Impressed by her dramatic poetry, Rilke became her mentor, repeatedly using his publishing connections and his networks for her benefit. The little »Agnus Dei in wax«, as Ullmann described Rilke in 1915, was instrumental in obtaining a stipend for her in November 1926. Among his protégées was Marthe Hennebert. The penniless young woman became a kind of *ersatz* daughter, for whom he provided financial support and sought opportunities for artistic development and income.

Promoting (3)

Rilke wrote to his lover, Baladine Klossowska on 27 November 1920: »Last night, I sat down to work and wrote my little preface to ›Mitsou‹ all in one go.« In *Mitsou*, Klossowska's son, Balthasar, nicknamed Baltusz, narrates, through a series of forty ink drawings, the story of a cat that approached him and then disappeared. Impressed by the artistic skill of the young illustrator, Rilke not only looked for a publisher for the picture book, but even wrote a foreword. His »petit collaborateur« thanked him for his support on 28 November.

Being promoted (1)

From around 1905, the Berlin banker and art collector Karl von der Heydt and his wife Elisabeth were Rilke's most important patrons. Soon after meeting them, he was their guest at Villa von der Heydt on the Wacholderhöhe in Bad Godesberg. On departing, he penned a poem in their guestbook. In a letter from September 1907, Rilke asked his wife for advice: Should he, even though he wanted »really, to give up public dedications«, dedicate the first part of the *New Poems* to Karl von der Heydt? The book was published in December 1907 and was dedicated to »Karl and Elisabeth von der Heydt, in friendship«.

Being promoted (2)

In a letter dated 11 June 1915, Rilke wrote to Hertha Koenig, whom he had met in Berlin five years earlier, with a »presumptuous fantasy«: »the thought came to me, would you mind taking me in and hiding me away for a while, quickly and quietly, with the big Picasso in Widenmayerstraße?« He had facilitated his patroness's purchase of the Picasso – the painting *The Saltimbanques* –, now he had invited himself into her sphere to act as its »watchman« and he was a guest in Hertha Koenig's Munich apartment from June to October 1915. In return, he sent Koenig's sonnets to Katharina Kippenberg. Insel Verlag published the poems in 1917.

Being promoted (3)

Over and over again, Rilke sought and found mother figures who supported him financially, intellectually, and emotionally. When, in late 1915, he was mustered and deemed fit for war service, Sidonie Nádherný von Borutin sent him a telegram, offering support of any kind. Four years later, Gudi Nölke proved to be a similarly important lifeline by helping Rilke where she could during the early period of his time in Switzerland. When Nanny Wunderly-Volkart – another mother figure – entered his life, Rilke told Nölke immediately: »I have drawn many people to me – but won only one who has

been immediately truly and directly close, a woman«.

Being promoted (4)

Aghast at the result of his medical examination in November 1915, Rilke, with the Prince of Thurn and Taxis, bombarded the ministeries with appeals to be released from military service – unsuccessfully. »Pegasus under the yoke,« lamented the publisher, Katharina Kippenberg, and set about planning a support action: Public figures would write letters appealing for Rilke's release and send their petitions to the authorities. She compiled a long list of individuals, from whom she obtained many more pledges than refusals. The letters worked: Rilke was released from service in mid-1916.

Paying and Accounting (1)

The relationship between Rilke and his publisher, Kippenberg, began with his signature on the contract for Book of Hours. In 1905, Insel Verlag published the poems, which Rilke had written between 1899 and 1903, in a print run of 500 volumes. The accounts in the year 1907 were balanced: Production costs and sales are equal, and that also applied to Rilke's debit and credit account with the publisher. The *Book of Hours* brought Rilke a profit of 292.48 Mark (equivalent to approx. 2,135 Euro in 2024). Four editions of *Book of Hours* were published in Rilke's lifetime, approx. 60,000 volumes in total.

Paying and Accounting (2)

Rilke's income came from his publications, but also from readings. On 8 November 1907, he followed Hugo Heller's invitation to conduct a reading in his bookstore in Vienna – it was a great success. Nevertheless, Rilke continued to be dependent on the support of his patrons. In September 1914, he received 20,000 Krone via Ludwig von Ficker, the editor of the *Brenner* yearbook, from a »young Austrian patron« – Ludwig Wittgenstein. He also repeatedly received special payments from his publisher

Kippenberg. In late 1918, Kippenberg announced that he was to receive a »one-off honorarium of 1,000.-« Mark.

Paying and Accounting (3)

Like Kafka, Rilke was not able to live off his publications alone. According to the tax statement issued by the Munich City Revenue Offices III, Rilke's income in 1918 was 1,000 Mark, equal to approximately 2,000 Euro in 2024. From this, he had to pay 10.94 Mark in taxes: income tax, district and parish levies, as well as Protestant church taxes and levies. (Although Rilke had been baptised a Catholic, from the point of his marriage to Clara Westhoff onward, Rilke was incorrectly assigned to the Evangelical confession.) Rilke paid his outstanding tax on 21 January 1919.

Paying and accounting (4)

»You know all the insecurity of your ward; namely, money matters,« Rilke wrote to Anton Kippenberg in late 1914, asking for an increase in his monthly remittance. As the correspondence between him and his publisher shows, the request was not an isolated event. The author repeatedly asked for additional funds for himself and his wife, for the rent in Paris, or for winter clothing, while Kippenberg exhorted Rilke in »fatherly« manner to frugality, reminding him of the strained economic situation during wartime. Shortly before Rilke's death, his account recorded a deficit of over 6,000 Mark (equivalent to around 27,000 Euro in 2024).

»FULLY A WRITER«

At just 15 years old, Rilke declared himself »fully a writer«. In addition to lyrical experiments, he also wrote prose texts and dramas, and from 1892 he published – still under the name René Maria Rilke – in newspapers and journals. His early publications already displayed the breadth, quantity, and pace of his writing activity. Rilke wrote tirelessly: He tried out drafts and narrative techniques, revised published texts, excerpted and noted, translated from several languages, sketched. While writing was a solitary task for him, Rilke was nevertheless reliant on the preliminary work and cooperation of others, on exchange and stimulation. Complementary to his literary work, he also developed an epistolary œuvre, which provides a parallel commentary to his texts and demonstrates how much Rilke appreciated the response of others. His correspondence was, for him, often a path into literary writing. Rilke took a deep interest in the design concept of his publications, and even the carrier material of his manuscripts and letters could be imbued with meaning: paper, ink, seal were just as important as the content created with and on them. He recognised the value of his manuscripts and handwriting, and he often presented calligraphic transcripts to supporters and patrons as gifts. This chronological overview of Rilke's manuscripts, notebooks, letters, and books provides insights into his writing and reading, publishing and communication practices. The traces and results of writing and composition work undertaken over many years are presented through the example of *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* and the *Elegies*.

Early reading

Rilke had a deep relationship with books from early on. His mother kept several of his childhood books – for example, *Max and Moritz*. Writing exercises and drawings accompanied his first forays into reading. He attended the Catholic Piarist Monastic School

in Prague from 1882 and one of the earliest sources written in his own hand is his name »René Rilke«, penned in *kurrent* (German cursive) script into his copy of the Primer for Austrian Primary Schools. The schoolbook also contains a drawing of a soldier in uniform with a knapsack and sword – documentation of one of Rilke's childhood ideals: military discipline.

Poems written in youth (1)

Rilke was ten years old when he dedicated the poem *Lament on Grief* to his parents. With adorned characters and extensive flourishes, the verses relate the death of a general in war and the grief of his young widow. Rilke continued to write poetry in the years that followed. His first literary attempts draw together naturalist, symbolist, and impressionist elements. He noted down poem drafts in pencil on sheets of quad paper, honing his atmospheric representation of natural phenomena. In July 1891, he informed his mother that he was now »fully a writer«.

Poems written in youth (2)

Between 1894 and 1899, Rilke composed eight anthologies of his own poems, many of which he also published. Although he later dismissed this phase as »the highly private end of my childish and youthful confusion«, the basic structures of his literary workings were already forming: On large sheets of paper, on which he wrote with pencil and ink at all angles, he struggled to find the right words, starting the same verse twice and giving up with the next. Only after noting down the meter could he successfully complete the poem, now with almost no revisions.

Life and Songs*, *Offerings to Lares

Rilke was introduced to Czech literature through his friend Valerie von David-Rhonfeld (Vally). David-Rhonfeld herself noted that she financed his first volume of poetry, *Life and Songs*, and she designed the cover for his second volume, *Offerings to Lares*. She also

gave Rilke a card showing the study of Kajetán Tyl: a souvenir from the 1895 Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition. Rilke dedicated several poems in *Offerings to Lares* to Jaroslav Vrchlický, lyrical poet and central figure of Czech drama. In 1899, Vrchlický sent Rilke a signed card addressed to the »poet and friend of Bohemian poetry«.

Days of Flânerie in Bohemia

In 1895, Rilke published a travel report about South and North Bohemia, which appeared in two parts in the journal *Jung-Deutschland und Jung-Elsaß*. Counting himself, ironically, among »that group of people« »whom Nietzsche calls historical«, Rilke presented his impressions of Bohemian Switzerland. While the landscape inspired him to write, he was unable to produce anything after discovering Joseph von Eichendorff's poem *In a Cool Valley* in an epigraph: »Raging, and at the same time ashamed, I put away my writing utensils. I muttered something about ›epigonal retreat‹.«

Studies and reading

In October 1895, in addition to studying art history and history of literature, Rilke heard two lectures by Anton Marty on ethics and metaphysics at the University of Prague. What impression the famous proponent of the rigidly scientific Prague School of Franz Brentano made on him is not known. However, his copy of the first edition of Friedrich Nietzsche's book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, to whom presumably Lou Andreas-Salomé introduced him after 1897, is well-thumbed. The love for life of which Nietzsche wrote was, for Rilke, exemplified above all in »desire to create [and] procreate«.

Visions of Christ

Unpublished during his lifetime, the poem cycle *Visions of Christ* presents personal encounters with Christ in unusual contexts. In the poem *The Fair* – written on paper from his journal *Wegwarten* – an initially not unironic flaneur »in Munich at the

Octoberfest« goes to see »the life of Jesu Christ and his suffering« in a booth for »ten pfennigs entry«. Yet, the Jesus figure in wax begins to hold a highly emotional monologue, which the first-person narrator experiences in »fearful fascination«, as if under »helpless hypnosis«.

The White Princess

In July 1899, Rilke sent the manuscript of his lyrical drama *The White Princess. A Scene by the Sea* to Cäsar Flaischlen, editor of the journal *Pan*. The manuscript of the first edition contains directions to the print setter: Instead of centring the text around the central axis, as was typical for the time and intended by Rilke, the text is to be arranged »in two columns from here on« and the characters' dialogue moved to the left.

The Angels, *In the Certosa*

Rilke wrote the poems *The Angels* and *In the Certosa* one after the other in July 1899, and they were included in the first edition of the *Book of Images* in 1902. While the manuscript of *In the Certosa* shows traces of Rilke's working, the transcript of *The Angels* is ready to print. In both poems, silence – the angels »all have drowsy mouths«, »they are silent in God's gardens«, the monk in his charterhouse is bound to silence – also intimate Rilke's turn to a poetics of perception.

The Last Ones, *Hothouses*

For Rilke, the book was an artistic object, a union of content and form. When, in 1901, he discussed the printing of his volume *The Last Ones* with his publisher Axel Juncker, Rilke had significant influence on the layout, typefaces, paper quality, and the book cover. To illustrate his ideas, he used his copy of Maurice Maeterlinck's *Hothouses* to design the title page with print space, including the fill characters to be used. Rilke deliberately dispensed with a title drawing in art nouveau style – typical for the time – which Juncker suggested, and he informed his publisher

that the work was not to be subjected to any »sort of fashion«.

»Last call«

Rilke and the married writer, Lou Andreas Salomé (1861–1937), were in a relationship from summer 1897. She changed his first name – René became Rainer –, his handwriting, and his writing. In 1901, she separated from Rilke with a letter captioned as a »Last call«, although she assured him: »If sometime much later you feel in poor disposition, then there is a home with us for the direst hour«. In 1903, Rilke did ask to be able to »find refuge« with her. She suggested seeing each other again »in writing first«, which for »two old scriveners [could be] nothing artificial«.

Autumn*, *Autumn Day

In late August 1902, Rilke went to Paris: »It was the time when the trees in the city are wilted without autumn,« he wrote later. In the first days there, he wrote the poems *Autumn* and *Autumn Day*, among several others. *Autumn*, in which natural life and death are subsumed in a movement of falling into divine hands, was followed by *Autumn Day*: At first half prayer, half instruction, it ends rhythmically »restless« in the perspective of loneliness. On the same sheet of paper, on the lefthand side, the poem *Soughing* asks: »Who holds the world, glimmering, in their hand? Who holds it close so infinitely softly? (Am I alone? […])«

The Panther

In the early object poems, Rilke draws on his observations and experiences from his early Paris years, including »In the Jardin des Plantes«. The subtitle of his most famous poem from this period, *The Panther*, refers to it. In Rilke's 1902 notebook is a small drawing that anticipates the central motif of the poem. It was probably inspired by the sculpture of a stalking tiger that Rilke had seen in Rodin's studio. The poem first appeared in 1903 in the journal *Deutsche Arbeit. Monatsschrift für das geistige Leben der Deutschen in Böhmen*

[German Work. Monthly journal for the intellectual life of the Germans in Bohemia].

Lectures and »Kant Classes«

In June 1905, Rilke attended a variety of lectures in Berlin, including a lecture about German lyric poetry from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. He worked meticulously on the texts of Spervogel, a Middle High German poet, looked up the meaning of words, and noted translations. In the same year, during his stay at Castle Friedelhausen, Rilke held »Kant classes« with the naturalist and philosopher Jakob Johann Baron von Uexküll (1864–1944), the son-in-law of his hostess, Luise von Schwerin.

The Love and Death of Cornet Christopher Rilke

The first draft of *The Love and Death of Cornet Christopher Rilke* was written in autumn 1899. The second draft was revised in summer 1904 in Borgeby in southern Sweden and published as a short text in the Prague journal *Deutsche Arbeit*. Rilke was not satisfied, worked on it again and finished the book edition in 1906, which was then published by Axel Juncker Verlag. The opening passage with the engraving by an unknown artist pasted into the manuscript was not part of the book production in the end.

The Carousel

Brightly coloured horses, carriages, a lion, a stag, ridden by a boy and a number of girls – »and now and then a white elephant«. The language of Rilke's *Carousel* reproduces the rotational movement of a carousel. The coming and going of the figurines and their passengers is observed from a fixed standpoint. Rilke experimented with the reciprocal viewpoint – from the turning carousel into its surroundings – in 1906/07 in an idea jotted in his notebook, which he augmented with a drawing: »As the turret of the hotel de ville begins to turn around the gyrating carousel.«

Sonnets from Portuguese

At the invitation of Alice Faehndrich, née Baroness von Nordeck zur Rabenau, Rilke travelled to Capri in late 1906. Together with his anglophone hostess, he translated 44 sonnets by the English Romantic, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, into German. Although the translation was undertaken in dialogue, the printed version named Rilke as the only translator. Faehndrich received only gratitude in the dedication, which has been removed in the editions published since the 1950s. The volume gives the impression that Rilke wrote the *Sonnets from Portuguese* himself.

New Poems

Clara Rilke-Westhoff did not just read Rilke's texts, she also edited them. They worked together to prepare the *New Poems* for publication, they discussed and decided on the order of the poems. In July 1907, Rilke sent his wife precise instructions using a dichromatic system: »Your work is on the enclosed – and only intended for you – index and enumerated on individual sheets.« Following Rilke's »placement allocation«, Rilke-Westhoff positioned some poems as she judged best, meaning she is responsible for the fact that the *Gazelle* is placed after the *Panther*.

Requiem for a friend

»Only you, you return; you brush past me, you linger,« so writes Rilke in *Requiem for a Friend*, directly addressing Paula Modersohn-Becker, the painter who died in childbirth in 1907. The *Requiem* is not simply a final conversation between the two about the relationship of art, life, and death, but also an indictment of those who had forced the female artist into traditional roles: »but in him I accuse all of them: the man.« Rilke wrote the *Requiem* in three days over the Feast of All Souls 1908, one year after Modersohn's death, and sent it immediately to his publisher Anton Kippenberg to go into print.

Rilke and Rudolf Kassner

After an initial meeting in Vienna in 1907, Rilke and the writer and cultural philosopher Rudolf Kassner encountered each other again in Paris in 1910, went on trips together, evidently also to the Jardin des Plantes. Rilke wrote to Lou Andreas-Salomé in 1912 that Kassner was »actually the only man I really know what to do with«, he admired »the serene presence of his being, which shines, which is a direct light, a brightness in the room. He has something that others, viewed next to him, do not have.« In 1910, Kassner sent Rilke a postcard from the Jardin des Plantes with the picture of a female panther.

Zeno Fragments

In Venice in 1910, Rilke began an historical text on the Venetian Admiral Carlo Zeno. He researched Italian history, noted dates, copied excerpts from historiographical works. A sketched family tree gave him an overview of the rulers of Naples. The planned biography remained a fragment: two manuscripts and a few notebook sheets survive. The 45-page, bound manuscript begins with the events of 1340. On the plague epidemic of 1348 is noted: »This year of horror one outdoes all others in violence.«

Translation: Augustine

On 28 June 1911, Rilke wrote to Kippenberg, »Among my evening preoccupations are the magnificent *Confessions* of St Augustine, I am reading them in Latin,« and he asked for a dictionary. The translated fragment in his literary estate, which he never published, extends to Chapter 12 of Book I. As he wrote in his notebook, he was especially enthralled by »this wonderful, rapidly vaulting game of hide-and-seek with God«. In the second part, Augustine illustrates the paradox of prayer through a question, which Rilke translates as: »Whence to call you, when I am in you?«

Rilke and Lou Andreas-Salomé

Rilke's love affair with Lou Andreas-Salomé became a friendship maintained via letters, with Rilke as their central theme. In 1913,

Andreas-Salomé commented on Rilke's handwriting, especially on his execution of the letter s: »How has your ›ſ‹ become so frivolous all of a sudden? […] it has something flagtwirling or heavenward ascent about it.« He responded: »Yes, my ›ſ‹ are inimitable, I'm sure I don't know what it is about them.« In 1919, he copied out three poems for her that he had written in Duino in 1911. The folded sheet is cut off at the top, the verses »and you, beloved, had some sort/ of wildest childhood over my heart« are missing.

Rilke and Magda von Hattingberg

Rilke's *Stories of God* motivated the pianist Magda von Hattingberg to write a letter to the author in January 1914. It initiated an intensive correspondence, which, for Rilke's part, was simultaneously confession, self-exploration, and emotional convergence – and in among all of this, it was also an attempt to overcome a writing crisis. At first, he did not write to »Benvenuta« on letter paper, but rather using the paper »on which I usually work«. In reaction to her remarks on a silent communication through glances, Rilke noted on the envelope of one of her letters: »Through such things as your look towards the old lady the world ought gently to come right.«

Rilke and Lou Albert-Lasard
Rilke and Marianne Goldtschmidt-Rothschild

During the First World War, the painter Lou Albert-Lasard and the art collector Marianne von Goldschmidt-Rothschild were conversation partners and emotional supports for Rilke. They also inspired his writing. In the early days of his relationship with Albert-Lasard, Rilke wrote twelve poems for »Lulu« in a writing book, two of which he concluded with silence, indicated with dashes. Goldschmidt-Rothschild pasted Rilke's letters into a tastefully decorated book with a leather binding and published them in French translation in 1956.

Rilke and Sidonie Nádherný

»And why must you dissipate yourself in letters? Write none.« Sidonie Nádherný (1885-1950), who had been exchanging letters with Rilke since their first encounter in Rodin's studio in Paris in 1907, advised him not to neglect his literary work. She wrote plainly to him, for example, in a letter in 1916: »I do not think that you have any need for people«. She took an intense interest in Rilke's life, such as when he lost his Paris apartment in 1915. In the same year, Rodin and Rilke appeared to her in a dream, the latter clothed »in a pilgrim's robe with a long staff«.

Rilke and Alfred Schuler

From 1915 to 1918, Rilke heard three of the seven talks that Alfred Schuler held in Munich in Elsa Bruckmann's salon events »War Aid for Intellectual Professions«. In February 1915, Bruckmann sent him a »complimentary ticket!« in order »to bring him into contact with this almost mystic-mythological subject«. Schuler, a self-appointed auratic, anti-science seer and member of the Munich Cosmic Circle, left a lasting impression on Rilke. In 1923, shortly after Schuler's death, he wrote to Rilke-Westhoff that much of the *Sonnets to Orpheus* »stated so openly and mysteriously at the same time, stems from my contact with him«.

Here Stands Death*, *The Poor Man's Death

In 1915, the second year of war, Rilke was interested in death. He was especially impressed by two texts that depicted death starkly in its merciless brutality: Tolstoy's story *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* and Kierkegaard's fictional sermon *On Death*. As Rilke intimated in a letter to Ilse Erdmann, precisely the refusal to give any cheap comfort was the mark of modern »Christianity«. While his enigmatic poem *Here stands death, a bluish decoction* … allows little hope, the *Poor Man's Death* in Baudelaire's poem, which Rilke also translated in 1915, appears as a final refuge.

Transcripts for Hertha Koenig

Rilke spent summer and autumn 1917 on Hertha Koenig's estate Böckel in Westphalia. He wrote during the day, after dinner he read his own texts and those by others to his hostess and other guests. He was particularly taken with the Scandinavian folksong *Little Kerstin*, which he presented to Koenig, together with five other poem transcripts, on small-format, quad paper. Just like the *Sea Song* and the extended opening verses from an Ancient Egyptian papyrus, the folksong is evidence of the unceasing travel undertaken by its author.

Translations: Cassiani and Michelangelo

In November 1918, during the revolutionary unrest in in Munich, Rilke attempted to write. His pathway into it, as frequently in the past, succeeded via translation, including from Italian. He transposed – as »a little translation test for Michelangelo,« as he told Claire Goll – Giuliano Cassiani's sonnet on the Rape of Persephone into German, only to then continue working on his Michelangelo translations. He had returned to them repeatedly since 1912. In 1918, he completed one draft and one clean copy. Clara Rilke-Westhoff received a transcription in December.

Reading life philosophy

In early 1919, amid the unrest after the war, Rilke read two books that quickly became bestsellers because they met a need for re-orientation. Both lifted their gaze to the global horizon and relativised the catastrophic present. In *The Decline of the West*, Oswald Spengler traced the life cycle of cultures over many millennia. In his *Travel Journal of a Philosopher*, Hermann von Keyserling presented insights that he had made over the course of his encounters with the cultures of India, East Asia, and America. Rilke was fascinated by both life philosophical books.

Rilke and Lisa Heise

Inspired by the *Book of Images*, Lisa Heise, multitalented and in difficult circumstances as a single mother, wrote a letter to Rilke in July 1919. A correspondence over several years developed between them, in which Rilke tried to encourage the young woman during crises and to support her with artistic advice. He promised in his letters – which often began directly, omitting any salutation – that he would »always be there, knowing, empathising«, and tried to encourage Heise »to affirm yourself in a gradual self-forgiveness that yields to life«.

***Letter from a Young Worker*, drawing of an angel**

For Rilke the traveller, the notebook became a mobile writing desk on which he gave his literary ideas temporary form. The company kept by these notes often shows the extent to which Rilke struggled with contradictory positions. Notebook 37 from 1922 contains the first draft of *Letter from a Young Worker*, which rejects metaphysical thought, but it also holds notes on the Königsfeld Diptych, a religious artwork from the fourteenth century. The figure of an angel sketched from the diptych references a central poetic image of the *Duino Elegies*, which Rilke also completed in 1922.

***Sonnets to Orpheus* (1)**

After completing the *Elegies*, Rilke wrote *Sonnets to Orpheus* in February 1922. The poetics of these 55 sonnets in two parts, which take up the Orpheus myth, change and reinterpret it, inform his late work. He drafted the sonnets for the first part, in addition to others, in a notebook. »And almost a girl it was« – the second sonnet begins in ink before the writing flow was evidently interrupted. One of three small notebooks bound in cardboard contain the clean copy of the first part. Only the first quartet from the seventh sonnet is used – the other parts are struck out.

Sonnets to Orpheus (2)

»Pour replacer VII (première partie)«, Rilke's instruction is written under the new clean copy of the seventh sonnet of the first part, which was then also used for the book edition. In addition to this amendment, the manuscript – which comprises individual, loose sheets placed in an envelope – contains further traces that reveal how Rilke altered the overall composition of the first part in places. »Will to transform«, the twelfth sonnet of the second part, begins on page 15 in another notebook. There are several attempts at drafting the final tercet. This is followed by a reference marked as a small cross Rilke continued his working on page 14.

Translations: Paul Valéry (1)

In 1921, Rilke encountered Paul Valéry in Paris, whose poems deeply impressed him. »One day, I read Valéry. I knew that my waiting was over,« Rilke wrote the same year. He transposed several of Valéry's texts into German, including *Cantique des Colonnes* from the collection *Charmes*. Crossings out, marginal notes, and corrections are testament to his struggle to achieve a harmonious translation. The resulting Song of the Columns is a hymn to architecture, language, and musicality.

Translations: Paul Valéry (2)

Paul Valéry asked Rilke for translations of his poems, to which he – as Paul Morisse (1866–1946), manager of the bookshop Crès in Zurich, wrote to Rilke on 8 February 1923 attributed »le plus grand prix«, the greatest value. *Ébauche d'un serpent* was also among the translated texts. Rilke drafted the trans lation on a notepad, *Sketch of a Snake*. Valéry (1871–1945) then adorned his handwritten invitation to Rilke to a luncheon with the Franco-Polish musician Wanda Landowska with an ink drawing alluding to the poem. He addresses him intimately as »mon cher ami« and signs off with »Tout votre, P. V.«.

Vergers

In February 1924, Rilke composed his French poetry cycle *Vergers (Fruit Orchards)* in, as he wrote, a »langue prêtée«, a borrowed language. On 20 March 1924, shortly before their first meeting in person, Valéry wrote to Rilke and called the poems »délicieux«, describing their poetry as »pure et profonde«. At the same time, he mentioned a translation of his poem *Le Cimetière marin* by Ernst Robert Curtius, a scholar of Romance literature, and asked for permission to publish, as Rilke had already translated the poem. Valéry believed the double translation to be »fait intéressant« and looked forward with interest to its impact.

Rilke and Erika Mitterer

There was nobody »in the world who should not have my address,« wrote Rilke to Claire Goll on 24 July 1923. In May 1924, the Viennese student Erika Mitterer turned directly to the author, but via the address of Insel Verlag, and sent him two poems. The resulting correspondence in poetry is simultaneously a lyrical dialogue, a poetological game, and an erotic exploration. Initially drafted in a notebook, Rilke designed the clean copy of the first poem for the cycle *The Lovers (Erika and Melitta)* as a calligraphic art work.

Rilke and Baladine Klossowska
Rilke and Lali Horstmann

After her departure from Muzot, Rilke's final partner, Baladine Klossowska (1886–1969), addressed, but never sent, a postcard to him. The picture on the card shows the spire of Notre-Dame in Paris and the Angel of the Resurrection from the Last Judgment. Lali Horstmann, who met Rilke in the sanatorium in Val-Mont, received a written greeting at Easter 1926, sent from room to room: Rilke had »written a few frivolous ›Easter eggs‹ « and sent her the poem *Tout bouge, tout se soulève* (›Everything moves, everything rises‹) »as proof of the harmlessness of my French productivity«.

Malte Laurids Brigge

1903/1904 (1)
Rilke worked more or less deliberately – on *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* for over eight years. He completed it in 1910. The first text to be considered a genuinely modern novel of city life in German, it is drawn in large part from Rilke's own notes. He excerpted sections from a portrait book about the Danish nobility, *Danske malede Portrætter*, into his own notebook. The descriptions of the estate in Borgeby, which Rilke sent to his wife, read like preparatory studies for the grandfather's castle in the novel.

1903/1904 (2)
Rilke wrote and rejected the opening passage of the novel several times, always trying different narrative techniques. In February 1904, he drafted the first opening, in which a first-person narrator relates Malte's story. That autumn, in Castle Furuborg in Sweden, Rilke began again. The draft, a clean copy on twenty quarto pages faintly embossed with »Furuborg. Jonsered« begins: »On an autumn evening one of these recent years, Malte Laurids Brigge visited, rather unexpectedly, one of the few acquaintances he had in Paris.« The »Fragment of the Lonely Ones«, likely written over the winter 1903/04, tests ideas that appear again later.

1904, 1909
Scattered across eight pages are various notes containing Rilke's preparatory work from 1909. The »unforlignelige« Eleonore is included in Rilke's prose work as the ›incomparable‹ Eleonore, as do other members of the nobility, such as Hans Ulrik from the Gyldenlöve family. Malte sees them all in portraits at Castle Ulsgaard, which only exists in the novel. The notes show how Rilke came to be familiar with the portraits from his sources. The drafts from spring 1904 do not make it into the printed edition.

1909
The *Notebooks* was published in 1910 in two volumes by Insel Verlag. Two excerpts were released beforehand as preprints. In the

dedication of a copy for Katharina Kippenberg, Rilke attributed a quotation by Goethe to »Malte-Laurids«: »for we sense the terrible conditions under which even the most determined nature can rise to the ultimate possibility of success …«

Duino Elegies

1912, 1913, 1914, 1922, 1923
In January 1912, Rilke began work on the *Duino Elegies* at Castle Duino. »Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the hierarchy of angels«, so the *First Elegy* opens, the line written in ink on page 33 of the notebook and set off with a long line. The notebook documents the creation of the Elegies: from their beginnings in Duino to the other locations in which Rilke wrote – Ronda in January and February 1913, Paris in late autumn 1913, and Munich in November 1914. The *Duino Elegies*, finally published in 1923, are the result of many years of writing and composition, which Rilke only completed in February 1922 in Muzot.

1912, 1913
When the first two *Duino Elegies* had been put to paper, Rilke copied his texts for everyone whom he had to thank for their creation. After completing the *First Elegy* on 21 January 1912, he sent Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis, whose guest he was in Duino, a manuscript secured with a small turquoise-blue ribbon. He sent his wife a »Transcript for Clara« from Paris in November 1913.

1922 (1)
In early February 1922, Rilke wrote the yet missing elegies five, seven, eight, and nine in the cycle, and completed the *Elegies* in Muzot almost in a state of ecstasy. In the »evening (late) of the Ninth of February«, Rilke was able to report the conclusion of his work to his publisher, Anton Kippenberg: »Finally! The ›Elegies‹ are here.« The task had been »larger than life«, he had »groaned over these days and nights« and »had not known that such a tempest of spirit and heart could come over one!« A tenth elegy is unexpectedly added and, on 23 February,

Rilke was ready to send his publisher a transcript for printing.

1922 (2)
The proofs not only contain the final corrections. Rilke also included instructions in the letter to his publisher. He dedicated the seventh elegy to Hertha Koenig, for whom he had facilitated the purchase of Picasso's painting *Les Saltimbanques* and in whose Munich home he had lived for several months in 1915. He dedicated the eighth elegy to Rudolf Kassner. Finally, he dedicated the entire work to Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe.

»RESTLESS LIFE«

Rilke led a »restless life«, which he remarked he would »in an instant, dearly leave to providence«. Throughout his life, he travelled all over Europe, lived in hotels, in castles, in rented accommodation in Italy, France, Scandinavia, and Spain, visited Russia twice, toured North Africa. Without fail, he approached these ever new sites and locations with a seeing eye – sometimes with a tourist's gaze –, a reading eye, and via the language, which he considered to be part of other cultures and countries. He learned French, Russian, Italian, Danish, even a little Arabic, in order to discover foreign-language literatures, to translate them. Only in the rarest instances did he carry out his journeys for the purposes of relaxation, an escape from everyday life. They were invariably part of his search for the perfect writing location, for inspiration. A peripatetic existence was the writer's way of life, imperative for his writing – to quote *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*: »For the sake of a single verse, you have to see many cities, people, and things«. Only from 1921 did Rilke slow and come to rest. In Valais – which he liked for its country-side, reminiscent of Provence – he moved into Château de Muzot, a thirteenth-century tower house with a garden. It remained his home until his death in December 1926. Here, in 1922, he completed the *Duino Elegies*, wrote *Sonnets to Orpheus*, and, finally, his French poem cycles.

The Traveller

»Going into Valais over the Lötschberg recently, I wrote the enclosed improvisation in my pocketbook,« Rilke wrote to Katharina Kippenberg on 17 July 1923. He offered her *The Traveller* as his contribution to the festschrift *Navigare necesse est*, planned for the occasion of her husband's fiftieth birthday. »Although wishes and feting do not seem to be expressed in it« – the passing of the trains becomes a symbol of transience –, the two of them included the poem in the gift. Rilke dedicated the verses to his »collaborative friend and his inexhaustible

confidence over many years, paths, and transformations«.

Russia (1)

At the very beginning of his first journey to Russia, on 28 April 1899, Rilke visited Leo Tolstoy in Moscow together with Lou Andreas-Salomé and her husband. Shortly later, he was deeply impressed by the Easter celebrations in the Cathedral of the Dormition (Uspenski Sobór), which he describes in the poem *Seldom is there Sun in Sobór* in his *Book of Hours*. It is unlikely that Tolstoy himself gave Rilke the icon that he brought back with him from his travels, as Claire Goll later maintained. Tolstoy disparaged the cult of the icon – which Rilke admired for its aesthetics – as »superstitious folk beliefs«.

Russia (2)

In February 1915 Rilke took comfort in Gustave Flaubert's letters to his niece, Caroline. The First World War was raging and Rilke felt himself »à l'exile« in Munich. He read Flaubert's angry storm of words on the Franco-German war of 1870/71 (»Quelle haine!«, What hatred!). Outraged by the actions of France, Flaubert had relinquished the award of the Légion d'honneur and planned to ask the writer Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev »ce qu'il faut faire pour devenir russe«. Russia remained, as Rilke wrote to Boris Pasternak on 14 March 1926, »embedded in the foundational walls« of his life.

Russia (3)

In October 1920, Rilke received a letter from his former teacher, Cäsar von Sedlakowitz, in which the major general expressed his delight at having encountered the now famous former pupil of the St Pölten Military School in his youth. In his extensive reply of 9 December 1920, Rilke leaves no doubt about how tortuous his time at school had been. He compares it with life in a Siberian prison camp, as Dostoevsky, based on his own experiences, had described in *The House of the Dead*.

Paris (1)

From 28 August 1902 to the end of June 1903, Rilke spent his first extended period in Paris to write a monograph about Rodin. He recorded his first impressions of the city in French in letters and on picture postcards to Clara Rilke-Westhoff – the pictures include the Musée de Cluny, the Rose of the Apocalypse in Sainte Chapelle, and Rue Claude-Bernard. He looked for a studio for his wife, who followed him to Paris in early October so that she could work in close proximity to Rodin. In early July 1903, the couple left the city. Just before their departure, Rilke described, in detail, how the luggage was to be packed.

Meudon

Auguste Rodin first met Rilke through Clara Rilke-Westhoff. In 1902, Rilke inscribed a poem on their mutual »master« for his wife on her birthday in Gustave Geffroy's Rodin book, *La vie artistique*. From mid-September 1905, Rilke was Rodin's private secretary, living »chez Rodin« in a »little house« in Meudon, fascinated with »looking at his things«. In late 1905, the Buddha figurine in Rodin's garden inspired him to write the first of three Buddha poems.

Paris (2)

»And then he shows you everything: a distance, a movement, a flower,« Rilke wrote to his wife, describing excursions to Versailles with Rodin. The parks and gardens in Paris and its environs impressed him, as did Rodin's respect for nature. Under Rodin, he learnt to observe things and creatures precisely and received creative impulses for his work on a new type of poem. He wrote numerous poems about objects and animals, and the *New Poems*, in particular, ultimately emerged from direct observation. Rilke worked his impressions from the Jardin des Plantes into the sonnet form in *Parrot Park* and *The Flamingos*.

Paris (3)

Even during his first period in Paris in 1902/03, as well as in his later years, Rilke was an avid user of the Bibliothèque Nationale. Access to a library was indispensable for his writing. One of the most bitter experiences of his life occurred in April 1915, when he was forcibly evicted from his Paris apartment and his possessions – including his books – were auctioned in order to cover his unpaid rent. »Everything is gone, books, papers, comments, all correspondence,« he wrote to Anton Kippenberg on 5 October 1915. Even the intervention of his Paris friends, among them André Gide, could not rescue his library.

Arco

Rilke travelled to Italy for the first time in spring 1897, and visited his mother in Arco, then still Austrian. On 24 March 1897, in the small village lying below a medieval castle ruin in Trento, he wrote the visual poem *The Red Evening Drifts Down from the Tower* … The touristic view of the reddening evening sun turns to an empathetic fantasy about the people abandoned by the king: » Now in the village every worm must / hold out brown, begging hands, / And the old stand at the doors «. The ruin is also pictured on a postcard that mother and son wrote from Arco in 1901.

Viareggio

In spring 1898, at Lou Andreas-Salomé's suggestion, Rilke travelled to Florence, which he did not like. In early May, he fled to Viareggio, near the sea. Here, he wrote poems for his book *Celebration of Me*, but also for the – unpublished – collection *Celebration of You*. In March 1903, Rilke was convalescing in Viareggio again, found it »ALLES VVUNEER SEHOEN « – all wonderful – and completed his *Book of Hours* in a small volume of novellas by an author he held in high regard, Jens Peter Jacobsen.

Rome (1)

In September 1903, Rilke accompanied his wife to Rome for a few months. He initially lived close to the Forum Romanum, later in the Studio al Ponte in the park of the Villa Strohl-Fern, west of the park of the Villa Borghese. »My windows are large; I see the park expand and a lot of sky, so also a lot of night.« Rilke generally avoided tourist guidebooks, such as Baedeker, but for his mother's visit he prepared the »Roman Baedeker« with red marks, sketching their routes: Their tours lead from the Stazione Termini using »the electric tram« to the Piazza del Popolo, the Villa Strohl-Fern, and on to the Vatican.

Rome (2)

In 1903, Rilke sought and found in Rome more than just a place to write; the city seems to have interested him as a tourist a great deal. He carefully noted the opening hours and entrance prices of Roman places of interest in alphabetical order, from the »Academia di San Luca« to the »Trajan (Titus) Baths«. In his notebook are recorded the separate daily expenditures of the married couple for their life in Rome, not just the costs for breakfast or coffee, but also those for pencils, books, and flowers.

Capri

At the invitation of Alice Faehndrich, Baroness von Nordeck zur Rabenau and sister of Countess Luise von Schwerin, Rilke travelled to Capri in late 1906. On 4 December 1906, his thirty-first birthday, he moved into the Rosenhäusel, his »little house in the garden« of the Villa Discopoli, which he described *en détail* to his wife, alongside a sketch, two days later. »Secluded, close to the edge of the garden«, Rilke hoped to find an ideal place to work. His local knowledge also flowed into a travel itinerary that he put together for his mother. The highly recommended Hotel Pagano is also marked on the city map of Capri.

Venice

Rilke's first journey to Italy in 1897 took him to the lagoon city for three days. He worked his tourist impressions into atmospheric images: »Before a marble building with dusty ornament, / a gondola butts against the posts«, so runs the draft of the longer poem, later entitled Venice, of the eleven *Visions of Christ*. A different image of the city emerged during his third Venice stay in autumn 1907, one free of tourists. The 1908 sonnet *Late Autumn in Venice* outlines a decaying city, but ends with hope for the rebirth of its old potency.

Duino

From October 1911 to May 1912, Rilke was the guest of Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis in Duino. He aimed to find some rest in her »immense castle piled up against the sea« – he sent a picture postcard to his mother. In January, the first of the *Duino Elegies* were written here, as was *The Life of Mary*, a cycle of 13 poems about the biblical figure of Mary. In early 1913, Rilke wrote the prose text *Experience*, a reflection on a mysterious encounter with nature in the castle's park.

Copenhagen

Between June and December 1904, Rilke undertook his first journey to Scandinavia, organised by Ellen Key. He wanted »to learn Danish« ahead of his trip and asked his publisher, Axel Juncker, to help him in the »acquisition of a good Danish grammar book«, »a Danish=German dictionary«, and of »Danish editions« of the books of Jens Peter Jacobsen. He first travelled to Copenhagen and from there wrote his wife an enthusiastic »postcard in stuttering French«. He tried his hand at the pronunciation of Copenhagen, felt and experienced the city »like the language«.

Borgeby

From Copenhagen, Rilke travelled on to Borgeby in southern Sweden, to the estate of the painter Ernst Norlind. He recorded his surroundings in photographs – highly atmospheric, but blurry. *The Apple Orchard*, written in 1907 for Norlind's guestbook, seems almost to have been composed out of the heart of the estate. Clara Rilke-Westhoff complied with her husband's itinerary, joining him in »mid-August«.

Jonsered

In autumn 1904, the Rilkes spent an extended period in Jonsered near Goteborg. On two occasions they visited the progressive reform school in Goteborg, founded in 1901 – Högre Samskola. The school's pedagogical principles were heavily influenced by Ellen Key's *The Century of the Child*. Enthused, Rilke wrote an article about the school, published in the Berlin journal *Die Zukunft* in 1905. On 17 November 1904, he held his very first public reading: at the Samskola, where, among other texts, he read the poems *The Panther* and *Evening in Skåne*. He wrote to his wife: »The atmosphere was lovely, simple, warm: full of willingness and joy.«

Egypt (1)

In mid-January 1907, Clara Rilke-Westhoff set off on an extensive tour of Egypt, and Rilke was an intensively engaged participant – through his reading. He pieced his view of Egypt together through stories, cartographic and historical works, and, in his thoughts, he travelled ahead of Rilke-Westhoff – or at least alongside her: »I think, at the very important places, you will have my eyes in yours,« he wrote to his wife on 28 January 1907. He even planned to put together a book with her about an »Egyptian journey«.

North Africa (1)

In November 1910, Rilke travelled via Algiers and Tunis to Egypt, to the sphinx, the pyramids, to Philae Island in the Nile – an itinerary that Rilke's friend, André Gide (1869–1951), who was familiar with North Africa, had arranged. Gide sent recommendations by letter to Algiers: Once there, Rilke should look up Aloui Athmann. Although the poet's health was not good, it could be worth Rilke's while to speak with him. Included with the letter is a poem that Athmann had sent Gide.

North Africa (2)

During her father's North Africa tour, Rilke's daughter, Ruth, received postcards from Algeria and Tunisia on which an Arabian school and playing children are depicted. In January 1911, Rilke undertook a cruise down the Nile, visited Egyptian antiquities, and drew the traditional Nile felucca. He filled several pages of his notebooks with impressions from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo: For example, he describes in great detail the funerary goods from the sarcophagus of Pharaoh Ramses II, including the different plants.

Egypt (2)

Retrospectively, Rilke felt his North Africa tour, which he had – in his view – had to undertake under »conditions so little adapted « to himself, to have been » not the right thing «. However, the journey proved to be fruitful for his work even years later, especially for the *Duino Elegies*. In the tenth elegy, Rilke describes the nocturnal experience of the sphinx: »As night draws, their steps die away, and soon, / risen up like the moon, stands sentinel over everything, / the sepulchral monument.« And later, written in Muzot in October 1924, the poem *Mausoleum* presents »things from far away«, »significant things from [my] Egyptian experience«.

Toledo

»In Toledo, you will be close to me there.« Rilke received this message during a séance in Duino in autumn 1912. In late October, the author set off for that city, for which he had had »some yearning« for a while. He was overcome, foresaw himself – as he wrote to Lou Andreas-Salomé – »breathlessly subject to that which will infinitely exceed all expectations«. In a letter to his cousin, Oswald von Kutschera-Woborsky, he describes the city of El Greco as a »revelation […] that came over me.«

Ronda

From Toledo, Rilke travelled via Seville on to Ronda, where, between 6 January and 14 January 1913, he wrote *The Spanish Trilogy* while his Toledo experiences were fresh in his mind. Verses of the second poem, drafted quickly in pencil on the envelope of a letter from Lou Andreas-Salomé, preceded the clean copy on red quad paper. In 1916, Rilke entered the three poems along with 19 others, under the title *Poems to the Night*, into a writing book for Rudolf Kassner.

Switzerland (1)

The cultural association, Lesezirkel Hottingen, in Zurich included Rilke in its programme in 1918 and announced an evening event with him. However, Rilke only followed the invitation after the end of the war and of the revolutionary upheavals in Munich. In June 1919, he left Munich and travelled to Switzerland and from 27 October to 28 November 1919, he went on a Hottingen reading tour in six cities. He met his future Swiss patron, Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, at one of the first readings in Zurich.

Soglio

From late July to late September 1919, Rilke stayed in Soglio in south Val Bregaglia, where he found a »quiet place« with the Salis family. After »five years' enforced immobility«, it was difficult for him to find »a way of ›being outside‹ «, as he wrote to Dorothea von Ledebur in August. In September, he

reported that Switzerland »only seems to show itself in exaggerations«. He read Albrecht von Haller and Johann Gaudenz von Salis-Seewis, recording his impressions of the texts in his notebook.

Switzerland (2)

In August 1919, Rilke was still convinced that Switzerland was not the country for him, but he gradually changed his mind. In September, he remarked in a letter to Gertrud Ouckama Knoop that Switzerland was beginning »to be comprehensible, in its curious saturation and traditional unity«. In 1922, he wrote in a notepad – he was then living in Château de Muzot and had just completed the *Duino Elegies* – beside letter drafts and other impressions: »Switzerland has done its duty, Switzerland can ..... stay!«

Berg am Irchel, Château de Muzot, Val-Mont

Rilke spent winter 1920/21 on Castle Berg am Irchel. On picture postcards to his mother and grandmother, he proudly presented his »current peaceful and beautiful residence« and the expansive parkland. From summer 1921, Château de Muzot near Sierre in Valais became his long-term domicile. There, in 1922, Rilke completed the *Duino Elegies* and the *Sonnets to Orpheus*. The famous portrait on the balcony of the medieval tower house was taken in autumn 1923. Rilke marked the location of the windows of his room in Sanatorium Val-Mont sur Territet on a postcard to his mother in February 1926.

Château de Muzot

At the turn of the year 1923/24, after a collapse, Rilke stayed at Sanatorium Val-Mont sur Territet looking out over Lake Geneva for the first time. When he returned to Muzot in late January 1924, he began an intensive period of producing French poems. French became his second poetic language, French poetry a whole section of his late work. Rilke included these four poems, written between mid-June and mid-August 1924, in his 1926 collection Vergers. The sound of the word

»verger« fascinated Rilke just as much as the type of garden it denotes.

Gardener (1)

Experiencing and observing nature were, for Rilke, a guaranteed formula for literary productivity and went hand-in-hand with his fascination with botany. He was interested in particular plants, determining their species with his Botanical Pocket Atlas, but he was also aware of their symbolic potential. In March 1901, he placed an olive twig – which he had »held in my left hand all the way« – in a letter to his future wife, Clara Westhoff, likely in the aftermath of a disagreement.

Gardener (2)

While still at school, Rilke self-published his first periodical. Named after the blue-flowered herbaceous plants found along field borders, he produced three issues of *Wegwarten* (Chicories). Here, the symbolic plants of his early poems become naturalistic ones that stand for new socio-political and aesthetic matters. In a lyrical scene that he entitled *Birkenspiel* (›Birch Play‹), Rilke allows the plants themselves to speak, in a question-and-answer dialogue between two sisters. In his later poems, he held up flowers – especially the rose and the anemone – as an ideal to which humans can only strive.

Gardener (3)

Rilke's Swiss patron, Werner Reinhart, rented Château de Muzot for him in 1921, thereby presenting the poet not only with his final residence, but also – for the first time – his own garden. Given generous support, including by his housekeeper, Rilke planted it out. He was interested in plant nurseries and flower orders, and in particular in planting his own rose garden. Up to this point a gardener in spirit only, Rilke now became a real gardener, buying and cultivating flowers, bushes, and trees, which would become literature in turn.

Illness and death (1)

Rilke's final notebook entry salutes the pain of death. The poem begins with the words »Come, you, you the last whom I acknowledge, / hopeless agony in fleshly garb«. The speaker relinquishes the body, no longer resisting, but instead paying tribute to the pain. Just a year before, Rilke, ever the rose lover, had written the verses in a notebook that he would specify for his epitaph in his final testament on 27 October 1925: »Rose, oh, pure contradiction, desire to be nobody's sleep beneath so many lids.«

Illness and death (2)

A rose myth twines around Rilke's death: In late September 1926, he was visited by Nimet Eloui, a young Egyptian woman he had met in Lausanne a few weeks before. As he was cutting roses for her, a thorn pricked him deeply on his left hand. The wound became inflamed; his weakened body was no longer capable of fighting this or any other infections. A blood test, carried out astonishingly late, showed that his myeloblast levels were very high. His doctor, Theodor Haemmerli (1883–1944), diagnosed leukaemia. Rilke died in the Val-Mont Clinic on 29 December 1926.

IMPRINT

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