# Esotericism and Occultism in the Works of the Austrian Poet Rainer Maria Rilke

## *A New Reading of His Texts*

Gisli Magnússon

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# Foreword

Rainer Maria Rilke remains one of the most well-known and popular of the world's writers. His appeal extends well beyond his country of origin and even his language of composition. One of the most fascinating things about this popularity is that he is a favorite among a very broad spectrum of readers—from literary scholars and contemporary theorists to New Age thinkers to couples planning their wedding ceremonies. Readers dedicated to the intellect and those who seek a spiritual realm turn to Rilke. In this volume, Gísli Magnússon helps us to understand why this is so. Building on his earlier work, *Dichtung als Erfahrungsmetaphysik: Esoterische und okkultistische Modernität bei R.M. Rilke*, this volume makes Magnússon's investigation into the esoteric and occult available to the many English-speaking readers of Rilke's work.

Magnússon's study attempts to reposition our attitudes towards Rilke's work by overcoming the dichotomy in Rilke scholarship between a cerebral, atheistic perspective and a religious-theological one by introducing a "third way". This third way participates in recent cultural research that brings together currents in European history that are often seen as outside of contemporary scholarly research. These include: hermeticism, alchemy, occultism, spiritualism, and theosophy, or what Magnússon terms "esotericism." And while these currents might appear arcane or anachronistic in our somewhat jaded technological, post-modern world, Magnússon reminds us that, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,

scientists as well as artists and philosophers conducted extensive research into these areas in hope of finding a creative potential not available in hard sciences or in organized religions. This volume locates Rilke squarely among these explorers of the spiritual realm and challenges many of us who are more comfortable seeing Rilke as a cerebral metapoet separated discretely from the world of the occult.

Magnússon begins by pointing out that early Rilke criticism was not so resistant to seeing Rilke's connections to the occult. Princess Marie Thurn and Taxis-Hohenlohe, Rilke's friend, admirer and patroness, was a key figure in this early criticism. Her memoirs and letters revealed Rilke's fascination with the world of the invisible, which early critics such as George H. Blokesch, Eberhard Kretschmar and Alfred Schütze investigate. But much of Rilke criticism has side-stepped his relationship to the occult. By providing a careful analysis of Rilke's many letters and personal experiences, Magnússon induces us to see the whole Rilke in the personal, cultural and historical context in which he was operating. We witness Rilke's readings in occult texts and his participation in spiritual or paraspychological experiments. We are shown Rilke's seances at Duino and his peripatetic response to the suggestions of the "Unknown Lady" who communicated with him during those meetings. Such occurrences cannot help but influence our readings of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* and *Malte Laurids Brigge* as well as many of his other writings. Part of the contribution of this study is to remind us all of how wide-spread occult and spiritualist experimentation was in the early twentieth century and what a vast array of artists and philosophers participated in it. Magnússon highlights Rilke's telepathic capabilities as he impresses friends with his ability to project his will onto others.

Malte's attempts to help both his neighbor and the man afflicted by the St. Vitus dance by sending them his psychic energy spring to mind as examples that underline the repercussions of Rilke's lived experiences on his written texts.

Indeed, in the later part of this volume, Magnússon feeds his biographical information back into the texts themselves to provide new insights into material that many critics had read from very different perspectives. His analysis of Rilke's requiem poems links some of the more mysterious or puzzling parts of these poems—written for and to the dead—to occult assumptions about death and the continuation of consciousness into a non-physical world. Magnússon connects the recurrent introduction of hands that are disembodied or have a will of their own to experiments in automatic writing during this period. And he returns to the first and tenth *Duino Elegies* to rethink our reading of the dead and their post-death progress. All of these analyses contribute to our understanding of Rilke and his contact with the world of the invisible.

Gísli Magnússon's reexamination of Rilke's relationship with the occult and spiritualist experiments compels us to recognize that the early twentieth-century cultural disorientation induced by Einstein, Freud, Bergson and others caused people to look in many directions for new accesses to meaning, including the direction of the invisible and occult. Magnússon's careful study reminds us that modernism too was informed by this impulse and that Rilke was among those actively seeking in the invisible realm as well as in the more earth-bound, cerebral, and metapoetic realms. By focusing on Rilke's wide ranging interest in and experiments with the occult, parapsychology, and spiritualism, this volume takes us on both an intellectual

and spiritual journey that our technological, materialistic modern age has not yet completed.

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# Preface

> Although scepticism and relativism are undoubtedly the two definitional dogmas of modern enlightened academic humanism, it is far from obvious that they are the guiding principles of modernism.[1]
>
> (Leon Surette)

Rainer Maria Rilke is perhaps *the* most widely read German poet today. Goethe's *name* may be familiar to more people, but not many have actually read the master from Weimar. Rilke reception seems to follow a different path. His beginnings were modest—to put it mildly. During his lifetime, he achieved a certain fame, but it was not until later that he was acknowledged as one of the greatest, perhaps *the* greatest, German poet after Goethe. The United States is one of the countries outside the German-speaking areas in which Rilke has enjoyed an increasing popularity. In my opinion, there is a good reason for the wide appeal of Rilke's works in America. Rilke wrote spiritual poetry that does not belong to any specific religious tradition. He opposed traditional institutionalized Christianity, but embraced mysticism from all traditions. Yes, Rilke did read Nietzsche, but he also read R.W. Emerson and William James! And Rilke—much in the same way as Hermann Hesse—anticipated many of the structural elements constituting the current of modern, postconfessional spirituality.

There has been no lack of attempts to place Rilke within the framework of specific traditions. In a philosophical context, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Heidegger have all been associated with Rilke. And, despite Rilke's polemics against Christianity, there have even been attempts to compare Rilke to Christian theology. In recent decades, mainstream Rilke scholarship claims to have situated Rilke in his rightful place amongst the Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean traditions. However, there is also a lesser-known (albeit persistent) branch of Rilke scholarship that examines different expressions of alternative spirituality in Rilke's work. Among the alternative traditions this branch considers are: nonconfessional spirituality, psychophysical monism, Jungian psychology, esotericism, spiritualism, Kabbalah, and Buddhism.

The investigations in this monograph aim to overcome the dichotomy in Rilke scholarship between a religious-theological and an atheistic (often Nietzschean) perspective by introducing a 'third way'. The third way is a relatively recent area of cultural and historical research that brings together a number of marginalized movements from European history: hermeticism, alchemy, occultism, spiritualism, and theosophy. A general term for these movements is esotericism.[2] The vast scope of occultist discourse between 1880 and 1930 may come as a surprise to some contemporary academics. Today it is not widely known that, during this period, a great number of artists, scientists, and philosophers saw a creative potential in occultist discourse that they did not find in organized religion, positivist science, or academic philosophy. But such a decline in knowledge about the esoteric cultural code (which marks contemporary academia) has not been without consequences. Although certain concepts in poetry and literature may

correspond to those recognized in traditional cultural discourses (science, academic philosophy, theology), these concepts can be *semantically* misunderstood if attributed to the wrong tradition.[3] This study intends to demonstrate the significance of this in regard to Rilke's works.

Antoine Faivre is a pioneer in the establishment of esotericism as a scientifically accepted area of research. He held a chair at the Sorbonne University (Paris) dedicated to the study of western esotericism and was the first to summarize the structural elements intrinsic to the form of esoteric thought, making it a valuable tool for diachronic investigations. According to Faivre, the central concepts of esotericism are 'gnosis', 'theosophy', 'occultism', and 'hermeticism'. Through Faivre's work, esotericism was provided with a conceptual rigorousness that was previously absent. The most influential successor of Faivre is Wouter J. Hanegraaff, professor at Amsterdam University and leader of the *Center for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents*.

An important step towards an academic inclusion of esotericism and occultism was the *Occultism and Avantgarde* art exhibition in Frankfurt.[4] The extensive exhibition catalog contains a large number of articles and images that give evidence of the many connections between occultism and modernity. This 'archeological' pioneering work has benefited German studies and inspired scholars to consider the impact of the occultist discourse on modern literature. In the beginning of the nineties, only *Sinnenwelt und Weltseele* by Monika Fick dealt with these themes in any depth. Since 1995, the number of German articles on this topic has increased rapidly.

Examining the tradition of esotericism has many advantages. Interconnections that were hitherto hidden are revealed. Texts that were previously the subject of contradictory interpretations can now be seen in a new light.

Many artists and intellectuals were attracted to the occult idea of uniting religion and science. While institutional religion was losing ground—partly due to the discrepancy between science and dogma—occultism strove to account for new scientific discoveries by assimilating them eclectically into their own thinking. The occultists—similar to the ancient Gnostics—claimed to have access to a privileged intuitive knowledge or 'gnosis', which transcended the scope of science. Indeed, certain scientific discoveries appeared to confirm occultist theories; for instance, the discovery of electromagnetic waves and x-rays supported the idea that human organs of perception can only perceive a small section of totality. People began to feel they were surrounded by a larger reality, invisible to the human eye. When invisible waves exist, why not supersensous worlds?

Occultism and esotericism are often dismissed as premodern and marginalized in academia. Yet the occultist assimilations of scientific discoveries and the importance of occultism for avant-garde painting (established by the Frankfurt exhibition *Occultism and Avantgarde*) render the thesis of premodernity untenable. Since occultist ideas influenced the development of abstract painting fundamentally, it is more correct to say that occultism has contributed substantially to artistic modernity. The occultist modernity was not restricted to art. We can exemplify a parallel between art and literature by comparing Rilke with Kandinsky. Kandinsky rejects the traditional notion of mimesis in favor of so-called abstract techniques. It is,

however, misleading to call Kandinsky's early abstract paintings non-imitative or antagonistic to mimesis. Rather, his ideal is more adequately referred to as *visionary mimesis*. The artist does not attempt to imitate the material world (naturalism); instead, he strives to depict the spiritual reality. Synaesthetically, Kandinsky speaks of *sound* (Klang), not external forms. Rilke argues in a similar way in the small prose text *Ur-Geräusch*, in which the artist—through synaesthesia—is able to discover new sections of totality. Similar to Rilke, Kandinsky perceives the universe as being a unity consisting of sensuous and supersensous waves and vibrations (duo-unity), and he believes the task of the modern visionary artist is to dissolve the dualism of the visible and invisible, matter and spirit. The artist is a seer or clairvoyant whose senses stretch farther into the previously unknown realms than those of the average person. The fact that modern artists such as Rilke and Kandinsky were not aestheticists, but had a visionary or spiritual conception of aesthetics and art, is highly relevant for the interpretation of their works.

In this investigation, it is not my intention to radically overthrow the existing image of Rilke, but rather to contribute to a deeper understanding of his worldview and thereby of his work. The benefits of adding an esoteric dimension to the interpretation of Rilke are considerable:

- Elements of Rilke's works that were hitherto enigmatic are intelligible through an understanding of the cultural code of esotericism.
- Rilke's modernity can be analyzed as a parallel phenomenon to the process of abstraction in art.

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The following investigation is divided into four parts that address different aspects of Rilke's reception of occultism and spiritualism. The first part consists of philological studies of the young Rilke's reception of occultism. Among others, Rilke read the occultists Camille Flammarion and Carl du Prel. The main purpose is not to make them into monocausal influences but to demonstrate that they participated in the same occultist discourse and shared certain occultist ideas. The occultist epistemology already mirrored by the young Rilke is demonstrated to be a recurrent theme in Rilke's worldview.

The young Rilke wrote a poem of praise to Carl du Prel depicting him as a Nietzschean eagle. Through an analysis of the *Book of Hours*—Rilke's breakthrough as a poet—we see that many occultist themes reoccur and thereby reveal the continuity from Rilke's early work.

The second section deals with Rilke's reception of spiritualism. The scope of this reception is substantiated on the basis of an extensive source material—primarily Rilke's letters. Rilke's strategy of reception is modern in the sense that he is simultaneously open-minded and critical. I describe in detail the seances at Duino Castle, since these spiritual gatherings left a lasting impression on Rilke. The cycle of poems *Aus dem Nachlaß des Grafen C. W.* [From the Remains of Count C. W.] exemplifies how Rilke used spiritualistic ideas strategically to avoid taking responsibility for a work that did not live up to his high aesthetic standards.

Rilke's both affirmative and critical navigation strategy is also evident in his reception of early parapsychology, which I discuss in part three. Rilke's extremely critical accounts of Maeterlinck's *La Mort* and Schrenck-Notzing's *Phenomena of Materialization* are an example of his *aesthetic* reservations about certain aspects of occultism and parapsychology. Characteristically, Rilke does not deny the paranormal phenomena themselves, but the *attitude* that these two occultists display towards them: Maeterlinck is too 'phlegmatic' when dealing with death, and Schrenck treats the supersensous realm in a cold and instrumental way.

However, Rilke did not reject parapsychology as a whole. He was enthusiastic about the investigations into clairvoyance and telepathy by the parapsychologists Tischner and Wasielewski. In fact, Rilke even corresponded with Wasielewski.

The fourth part of this investigation focuses on those of Rilke's works that contain occult and spiritualistic motifs. These texts are the two *Requiems*, the first of the *Duino Elegies*, and *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*. The *Requiem for a Friend* is the moving account of Rilke's mourning for the loss of the painter Paula Modersohn-Becker who, in this prose poem, returns to 'haunt' the lyrical I (Rilke). This haunting leads to an attempted dialogue (which is actually more an address of the felt yet invisible presence of Paula) in which Rilke reflects on the relationship between art, life, and death.

It is well known that Scandinavian culture had a special significance for the Austrian poet. Rilke's reception of Scandinavia included authors such as J.P. Jacobsen, Herman Bang, Sigbjørn Obstfelder, Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, and Selma Lagerlöf. It is perhaps less well known why Rilke

chose a Dane for the main character of his only novel, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*. When asked by the scholar Hermann Pongs about the 'occult events' in *Malte*, Rilke writes: "[O]nly in the atmosphere of the Scandinavian countries does the ghost appear ranged among the possible experiences and admitted (which conforms with my own attitude)."[5] This investigation will present a two-fold analysis of the novel. Firstly, it will demonstrate that the narrative structure favors the above-mentioned Scandinavian mentality in the novel's spiritualistic episodes—the ability to accept the appearance of the supernatural as a normal part of reality. This will be demonstrated through a careful analysis of the reactions and inner developments of the characters in the novel. Secondly, it will reveal the ways in which modernity and spiritualism are linked in Rilke's *Malte*. A keyword in this regard is *écriture automatique*, which—to the aspiring artist Malte—becomes a spiritualistic method of creating avant-garde literary texts.

The epilogue connects esotericism at the turn of the twentieth century to the New Age movement. Relying on the research of Kathleen Komar, we will examine the contemporary spiritual reception of Rilke's letters and works. Finally, Hanegraaff's list of six points characterizing esotericism as a continuous diachronic 'mirror of secular thought' allows us to analyze the thought structure of esotericism as the *tertium comparationis* between Rilke and contemporary spiritual Rilke reception.

# Research History and Method

Rather than accepting occultism as an integral part of Rilke's worldview, most Rilke research has tended to marginalize it. Until recently, publications dealing with the occult dimension of Rilke's works were the exception. Paradoxically, the link between Rilke and occultism was discovered early. In the period between 1890 and 1930, the discourse of occultism was not as marginal as it would later become. On two occasions Rilke's friend and patron, Princess Marie Thurn and Taxis-Hohenlohe, triggered small waves of involvement with the occult side of Rilke: the first time when she published her *Erinnerungen an Rilke* [Memoirs of a Princess] in 1932, and the second time through the publication of the correspondence between Rilke and the princess in 1951.[6] Marie Taxis was Rilke's confidante in matters of the occult. And both in her *Memoirs* and in the correspondence we find elaborate discussions of occult and spiritualistic topics. On the occasion of the German translation of the *Memoirs,* Georg H. Blokesch—the author of the preface—wrote an article with the telling title *Rilke und das Übersinnliche. Aus unbekannten Papieren der Fürstin von Thurn und Taxis* [Rilke and the Supernatural. From the Unknown Documents of the Princess Thurn und Taxis].[7] Blokesch questions why literary criticism has dealt so little with a phenomenon holding the 'key to a much deeper understanding of the poet'. According to Blokesch, the paranormal and occult are important elements in Rilke's work and should therefore be included in Rilke research.[8]

The scholarly investigation of Rilke's occult spirituality began in the thirties through two apologetic monographs: Eberhard Kretschmar's *Die Weisheit R. M. Rilkes* (1936) and Alfred Schütze's *Rainer Maria Rilke. Ein Wissender des Herzens* (1938).[9] Both authors see Rilke as a *poeta vates*—a spiritual poet-seer. However, despite the apologetic nature of their presentations of Rilke—both attempt to distill a spiritual teaching from his works—their knowledge of the occult discourse allows them to classify certain central ideas in Rilke's worldview more adequately than large parts of modern Rilke scholarship.

An important contribution to this early phase of Rilke research is the article *Rainer Maria Rilke and the Occult*,[10] written by the Welsh scholar J. B. Morse in 1945/46. Unfortunately, this insightful article has not received its rightful place in German postwar German Studies discourse. Upon its publication, scholarly discussion had already shifted from historical influences to *New Criticism* and structuralism, i.e. branches of research that focus on the text itself. Nevertheless, Morse makes a series of observations that could have benefited Rilke scholarship. Morse is the first to link Rilke's occultism with symbolism. For Morse, Rilke was "one of the greatest spiritual teachers of his time"[11]: "No modern poet of our hemisphere, with the possible exception of Blake, Novalis and Victor Hugo, has written more significantly than Rilke of those matters which the psychic researcher has at heart, and none has succeeded to such a degree in achieving a synthesis of the visible and invisible sides of earthly and cosmic existence."[12] Morse is one of the only scholars able to correctly analyze and contextualize Rilke's synthesis of the visible and invisible. The crucial point is the possibility of an interaction between these

two spheres: “Any consideration of Rilke’s relation to the world of the Occult must take into account his conception of death, for in his view this world (Diesseits) is inextricably linked with the world hereafter (Jenseits).”[13] In regard to epistemology, Morse introduces the term ‘Duo-Unity’; a conception of the world where the sensible and the supersensible realms are not radically divided as in Christianity, but are interwoven. The correlation of the physical and material with a mesocosm belongs to both esotericism and occultism.[14] Morse acknowledges Rilke’s ‘elective affinity’ with these traditions. Having outlined Rilke’s conception of death in the first part of his article, he proceeds to describe Rilke’s paranormal experiences. He unveils the semi-autobiographical elements of *Malte Laurids Brigge* and *Erlebnis I* [Experience I]; furthermore, he refers to Rilke’s letters and the *Memoirs* of Princess Marie Thurn und Taxis. Morse also traces the complex genesis of *Aus dem Nachlaß des Grafen C. W.* [From the Remains of Count C.W.]. At the end of his article, Morse draws the following conclusion: “In his creative work, as well as in his life, Rilke had a close relationship with the occult. His experiences began in his youth, and were continued down to his death.”[15] Morse draws attention to the fact that the occult was an important part of Rilke’s life and work, and he emphasizes the unbroken continuity in Rilke’s occupation with occult matters.

In 1952, the French existentialist philosopher Gabriel Marcel wrote an essay[16] entitled *Rilke et l’occulte*.[17] In this essay, Marcel makes reference to Nora Wydenbruck’s *The Para-Normal. Personal Experiences and Deductions* (1939)[18] where the countess, a personal friend of Rilke, describes her experiences with paranormal phenomena, spiritualism, and

psychic research, including a chapter devoted to her correspondence with Rilke on paranormal matters. Additionally, Marcel refers to seance transcripts included in the correspondence between Rilke and Princess Marie Taxis. According to Marcel, the world conception of works such as *Malte Laurids Brigge* can only be understood on the basis of a *psychologie supra-normale*. The Rilkean concepts of a 'pyramid of consciousness' and an 'imaginary space' (Weltinnenraum) transcend rationality.

In 1975, Rudolf Eppelsheimer made what was at the time the most ambitious attempt to examine the roots of Rilke's spirituality and the poetological consequences for his work: *Rilkes larische Landschaft*.[19] This monograph contains many valuable observations, but it suffers from Eppelsheimer's own affiliation with the Rudolf Steiner tradition. Understanding Rilke's spirituality on the basis of Steiner may help the interpreter to understand some elements of his worldview, but, given Rilke's critical relationship to Steiner, the interpreter has to be very careful. Despite its defensive attitude and ideological bias, however, Eppelsheimer's monograph has the potential to make a significant contribution to Rilke scholarship and it is regrettable that this was not recognized by the research field.

From 1952 to 1990, the theme of occultism—with the exception of Eppelsheimer—seems to disappear from Rilke research. The *zeitgeist* within postwar humanities did not favor occultism and similar currents, and the achievements and insights of the (mostly apologetic) research tradition was largely forgotten. After 1990, however, a new phase begins. Monika Fick's voluminous monograph *Sinnenwelt und Weltseele*[20] (1993) is a milestone, because Fick succeeds in demonstrating the Janus face of modernity: On the one hand we

observe the arising of the disenchanted world involving the death of God, the decay of values, and a new 'biological' anthropology; but on the other hand, there is a powerful movement of re-enchantment involving currents such as occultism, spiritualism, and esotericism.

In the monograph *Avatars of the Soul: Cultures of Science, Medicine, and the Occult in Modern Germany* (1999), Corinna Treitel follows the same fruitful path as Monika Fick. Treitel concludes: "Although modern German occultism has remained largely forgotten by historians of the period, I argue that it sits at the heart of a great cultural transformation in which the self—its character, knowledge, and experience—emerged to address the supposed spiritual deficiencies of the scientific world view."[21] In a chapter entitled 'The creative unconscious: Occult states and the production of art', Treitel interprets Rilke's cycle of poems *Aus dem Nachlass des Grafen C. W.* as an example of mediumistic art.[22] By analyzing lesser known artistic mediums, such as Hanns von Gumppenberg, Clara Eysell-Kilburgers, Wilhelmine Aßmann, and Mrs. E. Sp., Treitel demonstrates the presence of a cultural code which is relevant for understanding Rilke's artistic motivation: "Rilke turned to a spirit guide because spirit guides were then an available device for artistic production and had been since the 1880s."[23]

Priska Pytlik has contributed substantially to Rilke/Occultism research through her monograph *Okkultismus und Moderne* [Occultism and Modernism] (2005) and the source edition *Spiritismus und ästhetische Moderne* [Spiritualism and Aesthetic Modernity] (2006). In this monograph, Pytlik devotes a chapter to Rilke's reception of occultism and the spiritualistic elements in *Malte Laurids Brigge*. One of the merits of Pytlik's

monograph is the 'empirical', 'etic', and unbiased way in which she presents her thesis; it is neither apologetic nor reductionist. Pytlik sums up some of the prominent occultist and spiritualistic motifs in Rilke's works: The occultist implications of the *Sehen-Lernen* motif in *Malte Laurids Brigge*, his occultist understanding of death, and the occultist basis of his idea of *Weltinnenraum* (inner world space); the poetological emphasis corresponds to the postmodernist interest in automatic writing.

The source edition, *Spiritismus und ästhetische Moderne*, is an important contribution to the philological investigation into the cultural presence of occultism and spiritualism around 1900. As indicated by the subtitle, *Berlin und München um 1900*, Berlin and Munich were veritable centers of parapsychology at this time, and as Rilke lived in Munich just before 1900, he is included in letters, excerpts from *Malte Laurids Brigge*, and the seance transcripts from Duino Castle. These two books are vital steps towards a new and more adequate representation of Rilke's participation in occultist discourse.

In this monograph, I will not discuss the complex epistemological and historical aspects of spirituality. Instead, I shall concentrate on Rilke's reception of occultism and spiritualism. This monograph is based on research I carried out while writing my doctoral thesis.[24] In this English presentation of my research, the intention is to focus primarily on Rilke's reception of occultism and spiritualism while incorporating additional textual analyses of Rilke's works.

It is my firm conviction that no literary theory can—by itself—do justice to a literary work of art. My own approach could be called 'methodological pluralism'.[25] This pluralism should, of

course, not degenerate to arbitrariness. In this monograph, I combine at least three methods: philology, hermeneutics, and discourse analysis. By combining these methods, I hope to illuminate parts of Rilke's work that were hitherto unnoticed.

On a fundamental level, I strive to avoid the ideological pitfalls that often accompany scholarship on occultism and spiritualism. The scholar of esotericism Wouter Hanegraaff distinguishes between different methodological approaches to the fields of esotericism, and there appear to be three ideological perspectives that have dominated the scholarly reception: the *reductionist,* the *theological,* and the *apologetic*.[26] The *reductionist* method makes the *a priori* assumption that esotericism and occultism are symptoms of cultural decay. Reductionist scholarship perpetuates Auguste Comte's three-stage-model, which places the natural sciences at the highest stage and claims that all religious and spiritual currents are obsolete. Since it is impossible to investigate the truth claim of occultist ontology by inductive means, the choice of the reductionist method has an ideological character: "[From an empirical perspective the] reductionist ideology must be dismissed as unscientific because it claims more that it can prove without self-contradiction: it treats the meta-empirical as if its existence has been falsified, while in fact such falsification would require the meta-empirical to be empirical."[27]

The *theological* method presupposes the truth of a specific institutionalized religion. Esoteric currents are not seen as spiritual endeavors in their own right, but as heresy. The theological interpretations of Rilke's works have remained rather marginal, primarily due to the inherent resistance posed by the works themselves against this interpretative framework.

The *apologetic* (or *religionistic*) method is based on the assumption that the esoteric or occultist model of the world is in accordance with the truth. Many of the contributions to esoteric scholarship are apologetic, and a considerable amount of the scholars dealing with Rilke's reception of esotericism and occultism can be classified as apologetic.

The *empirical* method, which will constitute the basis of this monograph, does not judge esotericism and occultism from an ideological standpoint. It does not raise the question of the ontological status of the occultist worldview, and the scholar refrains from expressing personal value judgements.[28] This *methodological agnosticism* does not prevent the scholar from developing his own terminology or making his own distinctions that differ from those used by the esotericists and occultists: "The final results of scholarly research should be expressed in etic language, and formulated in such a way as to permit criticism and falsification both by reference to the emic material and as regards their coherence and consistency in the context of the general etic discourse."[29] The conceptual dyad *emic/etic* stems from the linguistic/anthropological scholarly tradition.[30] The believer's point of view is called *emic,* and the external perspective is called *etic*. This distinction should be at the forefront of the researcher's mind when dealing with religious themes in order to avoid ideological bias. In other words, researchers should avoid the danger that they project their own beliefs onto their analysis.

The empirical method should, however, be complemented with a reflection upon the nature of the object of analysis. No empirical object exists independently, but is always mirrored in different discourses. The empirical trait of analytical practice reveals itself in the willingness to include marginalized

semantics in order give a more nuanced picture of the epoch in question. It is paradoxical that the ideology of science has contributed to the marginalizing of esoteric discourse. The reason for this marginalization is tied to the development of scientific discourse—originally having to legitimize itself as different from religious and mythological discourse. In *The Order of Things* by Michel Foucault, this characteristic of scientific discourse—its ideological trait—is critically scrutinized.[31] Discourse analysis renders possible a multifaceted presentation of the process of modernization, since it is no longer bound to a lopsided scientific ideology and rationality. It describes the frictions between the many different discourses that strive for attention and legitimacy in the modern *representation* of reality. From a discourse-analytical point of view, there are no completely non-ideological positions. In that sense, discourse analysis relativizes the aforementioned empirical method that claims to eliminate the ideological factor as such. In a discourse-analytical context, it is possible to incorporate partial truths of the so-called ideological (sociological, religious, or apologetic) positions. Hence, the main purpose of discourse analysis is to give a voice to forgotten and repressed discourses.

# Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank Eva for her love and helpfulness. And Johannes, my son, for his bright presence in my life. Søren R. Fauth, my dear friend and collegue, has supported me generously throughout the writing process. I would also like to thank Børge Kristiansen who volunteered to read my manuscript.

# PART I

## The Young Rilke's Reception of Occultism

# Chapter 1

# Occult Influences in Prague

> Prague [...] was the birthplace of the great German Symbolist Rainer Maria Rilke. But despite its large population of personalities Prague remained an occult metropolis, since it did not lie in Europe, but, as the theosophists say, in an astral plane ...[32]
>
> (Walter Mehring: *Die verlorene Bibliothek*)

Three factors are important if we are to understand the young Rilke's reception of occultism and spiritualism. Firstly, the cultural scene of Prague influenced the aspiring poet. Names such as Kafka, Meyrink, Buber, Zeyer, and Werfel all bear witness to a milieu where spiritualism, Gnosticism, and occultism were not marginal, but prominent collective ideas. Secondly, Rilke's mother adhered to a branch of Catholicism that included spiritualism. Thirdly, throughout his life, Rilke continuously referred to the significance of personal paranormal experiences he had during his childhood.

In other words, since his earliest years in Prague, Rilke included paranormal and occult phenomena into the frame of his worldview. In a letter to the scholar of literature Hermann Pongs, Rilke writes, "The 'occult occurrences' in Malte: in part accurately recounted experiences of childhood in Prague, in part things experienced and heard in Sweden."[33] It is not clear from this letter which of the 'occurrences' in *Malte Laurids*

*Brigge* Rilke alludes to, but Morse writes that Rilke always claimed that the episode with the 'ghost hand' was a personal experience.[34] Rather than being denied, such experiences would have found a breeding-ground in Rilke's childhood home. We know that Phia, Rilke's mother, "sought not only solace for an unkindly fate but also the protection of the Virgin Mary against the dangers of a spirit world in which she firmly believed."[35] Phia Rilke was, in other words, a Catholic spiritualist, and the Rilke biographer Donald Prater describes how Phia would often tell her son ghost stories.[36] Even if Rilke would later distance himself from the Christianity of his mother, which he considered to be hypocritical,[37] he nevertheless continued to believe in spirits: "Such early exposure [to the inauthentic Christianity of his mother] was enough to turn him away in adolescence from the outward forms of received religion, and, despite a profound belief in a realm beyond our perceptions, to leave him unconvinced by its alleged revelation through mediums."[38]

During his time at military school, Rilke had another 'paranormal' experience, which we can place by referring to his biography. In 1890, Rilke moved from the Militär-Unterrealschule St. Pölten in Lower Austria to the Militär-Oberrealschule Mährisch-Weißkirchen (Hraniče) in Moravia. During Rilke's fourth year in St. Pölten, his health deteriorated. Despite taking a salt water cure in Salzburg that summer, Rilke was complaining to his mother about a strong fever and pains in head and back by the start of the next school year. In November, Rilke was confined to bed for fourteen days and, even after this period, he was still so weak that he had to return home. In a commemorative writing on Rilke, Franz Werfel retells the spiritual background of these events:

> Illness was the turning point in his fortunes, the poet said.
>
> Not only because it meant he would later escape a military career! From that point on his relations with his teachers and schoolmates were transformed in the strangest way. Where he had once been scorned and despised, he was now protected and loved, even honored. After that fit of fainting, magical powers sprang forth in him, explained Rilke to me; later they were to vanish again, however. Many boys, even those from the higher years, who were suffering from some kind of pain, came to him as a rumor had spread around the school that this little boy could heal all manner of ailments by the laying on of hands.
>
> The illness was the turning point in his life. Rilke was right. And it was, moreover, the point that gave birth to the poet in him.[39]

It is hardly a coincidence that Rilke confided in the 'young poet'[40] Werfel, who, like himself, grew up in Prague and shared his interest in both mysticism and paranormal phenomena and faculties.

In his memoirs, Carl J. Burckhardt, with whom Rilke had been acquainted during his first years in Switzerland, also provides an account of Rilke's occult-aesthetic turning point at the military school:

> Then began one of those school martyrdoms that are characteristic of the second half of the last century: terrible baiting from the older schoolmates, which could descend into sadistic scenes, terrible abuses, especially from a German teacher, whom Rilke never could talk about without disgust, Rilke's breakdown, fits of visions, approaching the condition of periodic paralysis, situations where schoolmates used these conditions in their harsh teasing, and then a total paralysis of the body over several months, the long days at the school's hospital and the early lyrical inspiration he found there.[41]

Just as in Werfel's account, Rilke's 'early lyrical inspiration' was associated with occult faculties (clairvoyant states). Rilke relayed another incident to Burckhardt in which an older pupil—one of those who used to torment him the most—kicked his bag off a chair:

> 'As I lay there crying, not for the first time,' said Rilke. 'I simply said: 'You are not going to travel,' and I perceived a force emanating from within me.' The schoolmate took a single step as he shrugged his shoulders, then he fell and broke his femur.
>
> 'From that point on I became aware of what was in me,' Rilke said to me.[42]

What Rilke describes here is a case of ‘suggestion from a distance’ (Fernsuggestion), i.e. the ability to influence the will of another telepathically with one’s own will. In Rilke’s account, this incident processes an almost magical character. ‘Suggestion from a distance’ was even a social game in this period, and Rilke was known for his skills in this discipline.

# Chapter 2

## Flammarion's *Urania*: Clairvoyance, Telepathy, and the Continuity of the Occult Epistemology in Rilke's Work

According to Rilke's letter to Carl du Prel dated February 18, 1897, the first phase of Rilke's reception of occultism peaked in 1895 when the nineteen-year-old sent an article to the occult magazine *Die Sphinx. Übersinnliche Weltanschauung auf monistischer Grundlage* [The Sphinx. A Supersensual World View on the Basis of Monism].[43] Unfortunately, the article can no longer be located, but we know from Rilke's letter to du Prel that he attempted to express a worldview similar to du Prel's.[44] Shortly before his twentieth birthday, Rilke wrote a letter to the astronomer Dr. Bauschinger in order to exchange ideas regarding a popular book, *Urania,* written by another astronomer, Camille Flammarion. Flammarion could be regarded as the Rupert Sheldrake of his day. He enjoyed a successful career as a natural scientist and popularized scientific discoveries; at the same time, however, he was keen to expand the narrow boundaries of the so-called materialistic natural science by including parapsychological phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance, mediumism, and spiritualism. He thought, as did Carl du Prel, that the findings of science and parapsychology supplemented, rather than excluded, one another. Flammarion's *Urania* combines various genres: novel, proto-science fiction, popular science, and parapsychology. The young Rilke writes:

> However scientific the work might occasionally appear, it nevertheless also contains places where the author appears more like a novelist for whom the only concern is to feed his readers' imagination with the most adventurous and colorful images. - Side by side with the deepest wisdom, commonly known fundamental truths are highlighted in the most naive fashion.[45]

The literary quality of Flammarion's book is rather limited. So what does Rilke mean by 'deepest wisdom'? With this phrase, Rilke can only be referring to the occult ideas put forward by Flammarion and endorsed by Rilke until his death: the idea of reality as a sensual *and* supersensual unity (duo-unity), the organizing force of an immaterial soul substance, an occult epistemology, and the acceptance of parapsychological faculties such as clairvoyance, telepathy, and mediumship.

In his letter, Rilke explicitly refers to Flammarion's account of clairvoyance and telepathy: "In the central part of the work there are some chapters concerning visions and the special language of the soul (telepathy), which can create silent echoes from a distance of several kilometers."[46] One of Flammarion's authorities is the *Society for Psychical Research* (S.P.R.), which was founded in 1882 by the famous scientists H. Sidgwick, Balfour Stewart, William Crookes, and Frederic W. H. Myers. Their common goal was the scientific exploration of paranormal phenomena (telepathy, clairvoyance, mediumism): "During the last few years a special scientific society has been organized in England for the study of these phenomena, – the Society for Psychical Research. It has at its head some of the

most illustrious savants on the other side of the Channel, and has already sent out important publications."[47] In regard to telepathy, Flammarion draws upon *Phantasms of the Living* (1886) by the S.P.R.-members E. Gurney, Fr. Myers, and Frank Podmore. Whilst referring to this text, Rilke affirms Flammarion's conception of spiritualism:

> I am in agreement with the author when he talks of these appearances of loved ones just before their death, and cites credible examples of such phenomena. I, similarly, consider a spiritual communication between the living and the dead a possibility; I also agree with Flammarion with regard to the character of the emerging 'spirits', because I have, as my diary gives evidence, long understood these appearances in much the same way.[48]

This passage clearly indicates that Rilke was particularly interested in the parapsychological part of the book. Flammarion creates a link to the paranormal by letting the quasi-autobiographical narrator experience a 'hypnotic seance' in the French city of Nancy.[49] The apparition phenomenon to which Rilke refers is a common motif in parapsychological phenomenology and, of course, in popular belief, where it is known as 'precognition'.[50]

The 'case stories' referred to by Rilke originate from very diverse sources: Cicero, Brierre de Boismont[51] (1797-1881), Adolphe d'Assier, Gougenot des Mousseaux[52] (1805-1876), Baron Dupotet,[53] and accounts collected by Flammarion

himself. His most famous cases are the three Swedenborg-episodes, which Kant retells in *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. Rilke would have been familiar with this type of anecdotal authentication from the magazine *Sphinx*.[54]

It is not only the apparition of a deceased person in a precognitive dream that Rilke readily accepts, but also the apparition phenomenon as such. Rilke believes in the possibility of a 'contact between the living and the dead'. In other words, he adheres to the spiritualistic rather than the animistic hypothesis.[55] Since Rilke (in his diaries) explains the 'apparition' in the same way as Flammarion, let us take a closer look at the relevant passage from Flammarion's *Urania*:

> Are we to admit in the cases of apparitions noted above that the mind of the dead has really assumed a corporeal form when near the observer? […] Certain apparitions may be objective, exterior, and substantial; others may be subjective, – in that case the being who manifests himself would act from a distance on the being who sees, and this influence on his brain would determine the interior vision which appears exterior, as in dreams, but may be purely subjective and interior. Just as a thought, a memory, may arouse an image in our minds which may be very distinct and very vivid, just so one intelligence acting upon another may make an image appear in him which will for a moment give him the illusion of reality. It is not the retina which is affected by a positive reality,

> it is the optic thalami of the brain which are excited.[56]

Flammarion does not perceive the 'apparition' as a necessarily physical manifestation, but assumes the existence of another mode of perception; an idea which Rilke would later explore in the works of Carl du Prel and Schopenhauer.[57] All three of these authors differentiated between ghosts, apparitions, and visions as either subjective or objective perceptions, and this is most likely what Rilke refers to when he claims to have reached the same conclusion as Camille Flammarion. The unit idea of occult epistemology is a recurrent theme in Rilke's works and letters. In his lecture *Moderne Lyrik* [Modern Poetry], held on March 5, 1898 in Prague, Rilke expresses a belief in the imminent scientific discovery of the vibrational nature of synaesthesia. He argues that synaesthesia is not simply a stylistic devise (Stilmittel), but an experience.[58] It is our limited human organs, which only perceive parts of a larger reality, that determine the way in which synaesthetic phenomena appear to the individual consciousness.[59] Like many other occultist symbolists, Rilke believes that the artist has the potential to perceive new areas in the totality. In both his prose texts and lyrical works, Rilke would remain true to this occultist epistemology. In 1918, Rilke attended a lecture on art by Rudolf Steiner. The following day, Rilke met the author and anthroposophist Albert Steffen, who was keen to hear his opinion about Steiner's ideas. Instead of discussing Steiner, Rilke used the opportunity to inform Steffen about his own (occultist) epistemology. He explained to Steffen that, although we receive impressions through the senses (vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch), between the senses, there are 'empty

spaces' (Leerräume). These empty spaces remain filled among indigenous peoples, but have disappeared in modern civilization.[60] He drew a circle on a paper serviette, which he partly shaded, and proclaimed: "It is necessary to cultivate these [dark] areas".[61] Only one year later, in the small prose text *Ur-Geräusch* from 1919, Rilke again used the metaphor of the circle of perception, where the unperceivable 'black sectors' dominate the 'bright' segments of our senses. This text is more elaborate than Steffen's anecdote, but the wording is almost identical.[62] *Ur-Geräusch* is a strange thought experiment. In it, Rilke imagines a gramophone, which, instead of a record, transmedially plays the *coronal suture* (Kronen-Naht) of the skull, producing a 'primal sound' (Ur-Geräusch). This primal sound is a metaphor for the achievement of the clairvoyant artist, who, by means of a synaesthetic intensification involving all five senses, discovers new sectors in the (previously) supersensous reality.

The point of presenting Rilke's reading of Flammarion is not to establish *Urania* as an influence. It is simply to demonstrate that both Rilke and Flammarion participated in occultist discourse and shared certain occultist assumptions, such as telepathy and clairvoyance. It is worth noting that the unit ideas formed in Rilke's youth had such a lasting effect on his work.

# Chapter 3

## The Occultist Carl du Prel as Nietzschean Eagle: Thematic Echoes in Rilke's *Book of Hours*

In the years 1896-97, Rilke studied the works of Carl du Prel (1839-1899). This philosopher and occultist, who is scarcely known today, was widely read around 1900 and reached a large audience through his Reclam publications.[63] Richard Dehmel, whom the young Rilke admired, maintained an active correspondence with du Prel, and Rilke's friend and fellow poet Wilhelm von Scholz also wrote letters to him. Among the readers of du Prel were Hanns von Gumppenberg, Wilhelm Bölsche, Arno Holz, Hermann Bahr, Franz Werfel, Thomas Mann, and Sigmund Freud (who called him a "brilliant mystic").[64] The 'enlightened spiritualism' and 'transcendental Darwinism' of du Prel was in accordance with the zeitgeist, and we should therefore not be surprised that Rilke took such an interest in his work.

Rilke had lived in Munich since September 1896; the very city where Carl du Prel had made his reputation as a philosopher, mystic, occultist, and spiritualist. One year after his arrival in the city, Rilke writes that Baron du Prel, the 'leader of the German spirits seers', still lives in Munich, where he finds access to people's 'most uncanny dreams' ('unheimlichsten Träume') through his strange 'spellbinding gaze' ('bannenden Blick').[65] In his first letter to du Prel, Rilke asks him for book recommendations. In the beginning of the second letter, written two days later, Rilke thanks du Prel for sending him a postcard. Seemingly, he has already read two works by du Prel: *Das Rätsel des Menschen* [The Riddle of Man] (1892) and

*Der Spiritismus* [Spiritualism] (1893): "Through these two works, [I] was led immediately *in medias res*."[66] He ends his first letter to the baron by asking if he may visit him. In his answer, Du Prel grants Rilke a visit on the coming Sunday.[67]

Rilke approaches du Prel in the manner of the humble apprentice addressing a master: "Venerable Baron, let it be a modest expression of my high esteem that I give you my latest collection of poems [*Traumgekrönt,* published in December 1896]."[68] Rilke refers to himself as a layman who wishes to learn from one of the "most important researchers in the field of hypnotism". He viewed du Prel as "a worthy initiate" who could separate the wheat from the chaff: "There is a surfeit of publications which with blatant hypocrisy deceive and seduce the inexperienced, and the untrained eye is unable to distinguish them from those genuine pioneers, who, through their understanding, can guide the reader into clarity and the future's shadowy realms."[69] Around 1900 there was a large market for literature on occult and spiritualistic matters (comparable to the even larger market we refer to today as 'new age' literature). The young Rilke observed a great variation in the quality of these publications, which offered an insight into the mysteries of world, and he questioned his own ability to discern between them. It is for this reason that he sought the guidance of Carl du Prel, whom he viewed as one of the 'genuine pioneers'. He was keen to emphasize that it was not simply the 'attraction of the secretive' ('Reiz des Geheimnisvollen') that interested him about spiritualism; rather, he saw an intimate link between spiritualism and artistic creativity. According to Rilke, every artist has to make his way through the 'foggy smoke of materialism' ('Nebelqualm des

kargen Materialismus') in order to create art by means of the intuition of his soul ('Seelenahnen') or clairvoyance.

When Rilke writes a letter to du Prel calling him the 'most significant researcher within the field of hypnotism'[70], whereupon he asks how to become a 'worthy initiate', he is clearly invoking a mixture of experimental and religious terms. The following passage makes it even more evident that Rilke considers the occultism of du Prel to be a worldview competing with traditional religion: "If I might be allowed to intrude into the very essence of your science, it may one day be vouchsafed me, by word and pen, to become a member of the new faith that rises high above the church steeples."[71] In other words, the young Rilke regards 'occult science' as the legitimate heir of Christianity. Interestingly, Rilke thought that his own *Visions of Christ* [Christus-Visionen], which he was writing at the time, corresponded with du Prel's intentions. Evidently, the criticism of Christianity in the *Visions of Christ* can be seen as an expression of both du Prel's occultism and Nietzsche's philosophy. Contrary to common opinion, these elements of reception do not exclude each other. The Nietzschean component of Rilke's idolization of du Prel is evident in the poem of homage *Für Karl du Prel* [To Carl du Prel], written one month prior to the reverent letters to the baron. The first two verses were enclosed in the second letter to du Prel. The letters stem from mid-January 1897, and the poem *Für Karl du Prel* was written January 17, 1897. With this poem, Rilke seeks to demonstrate his faithfulness to du Prel's ideas: "how long I have been, and to what extent I am still, one of yours":[72]

<FÜR KARL DU PREL>

Ich kam aus blassen Fernen
ins dämmernde Geheg,
und zu den blassen Sternen
führt Sehnsucht mich den Weg.

Ob keiner von den Andern
mein weites Ziel begreift,
ich singe still im Wandern,
und—meine Seele reift.

Es ist in mir und tief in unsrer Zeit
ein Neues, das ich selbst noch nicht begreife,
uns soviel Kraft, daß ich vom Flügelkleid
der weißen Seele alles Frieren streife
und aufwärts schwebe und im Schweben reife
zu einer schmerzversöhnten Seligkeit.

So hebt der Adler sich aus Qual und Qualm
und holt auf seinen Flügeln sich den Morgen.
Tief unter ihm versinken Hag und Halm,
die kleinen Hütten und die kleinen Sorgen.
Er aber ist so groß—und glanzgeborgen
erbraust sein Schwingenbreiten wie ein Psalm.[73]

[<FOR KARL DU PREL>

I come from that distant, pale land
to a place of twilight
and the faint stars
guide my yearnings.

Although none of the others
understand my lofty aims
I sing softly while I wander
and my soul matures.

There is in me, and imbued in our time
something new, which I still do not understand,
and so strong a force that it strips that cold fear
from the poor attire of the white soul
and I float upward, and in my floating—mature
a bliss that reconciles any pain.

Thus ascends the eagle out of trouble and strife
and takes the morning on his wings.
Far below fall field and forest,
the small dwellings and small sorrows.
But he is so great – and in the fullness of his glory
he splays his broad wings like a psalm.][74]

This immature poem is typical of the young Rilke. At this point, Rilke had moved from the provincial Prague to the artistic metropolis Munich, but he was yet to meet Lou Andreas-Salomé, who was an important catalyst in Rilke's early development as an artist. The poem is characterized by a lack of originality and stereotypical language. Nevertheless, it is an important document in the assessment of Rilke's reception of du Prel. The poem revolves around the idea of spiritual-evolutionary emergence. The 'distant, pale land' (blasse Fernen), from which the 'I' originates, indicates a time at which the 'I' had still not found its direction. Now, led by vague

yearnings, the 'I' initiates a phase of individuation: 'twilight' is the metaphorical expression of this transition of consciousness. The prerequisite of the process of individuation is the emancipation from repressive collective norms and social bounds (the others 'misunderstand his lofty aims').

It is no coincidence that Rilke speaks of the soul from a developmental perspective in a poem dedicated to Carl du Prel. The third stanza refers to the relation between evolutionary emergence and the individual. The very nature of the principle of evolutionary emergence renders its impulse impossible to predict. Rilke calls it the 'new' which the 'I' does not understand. However, the new and the evolutionary impulse manifest in the individual as a 'strong force' ('Kraft') supporting the process of individuation. Here, Rilke uses an eagle as a metaphor for the soul's ascent; a metaphor which is recognizable from spiritual literature. In the fourth and final stanza, du Prel appears in the guise of this very eagle. The bird of prey metaphor reveals the kinship between Nietzsche's theory of the 'Übermensch' and the idea of spiritual development. The 'eagle' conquers the future. He is superior to the masses and their petty worries. His wings sound like a psalm (not in the sense of traditional religion, but rather as the new spirituality of a postconfessional age).

Despite the limited lyrical quality of the poem, there is no doubt that, in the works of du Prel, Rilke found confirmation of themes he had already encountered in *Sphinx*: the existence of a metaphysical soul principle, the evolution of consciousness, and spiritual development. It is important to emphasize that Rilke did not discover these themes for the first time in du Prel's works, and Rilke did not simply adopt du Prel's ideas.[75] Instead, we should view Rilke's reception of du Prel's work as

a poetical transformation of occultist unit ideas which were part of the zeitgeist.

The interesting question is how these unit ideas manifested themselves in Rilke's later work. Rilke's breakthrough as a poet came in 1899, two years after his correspondence with du Prel. In the spring of 1899, the 23-year-old Rilke traveled around Russia with Lou Andreas-Salomé and her husband—a journey that provided Rilke with the existential urgency and striking poetic topoi that were absent in the immature works of his early youth.[76] In the fall of 1899, Rilke's Russian revelation manifested in *Gebete* [Prayers], the prototype of *Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben* [The Book of Monkish Life] from *Das Stunden-Buch* [Book of Hours].[77] Rilke stylized Russian orthodox religion into an authentic premodern spiritual community superior to western Christianity. Tellingly, the protagonist—an icon painter—is both a monk *and* an artist. For Rilke, Russia was a projection screen that allowed him to express his vision of spiritual art. However, it is important to recognize the multilayered nature of this ambitious poetic and existential endeavor which, in many ways, prefigures Rilke's opus magnum, the *Duino Elegies*.[78] In Rilke reception, the tendency has either been to take Rilke's religiousness (Frömmigkeit) too literally, or to see it as atheism in disguise. In reality, Rilke uses Russian images to form a spiritual ideal which, in essence, is modern. This spiritual ideal is influenced by a contemporary philosophy of life (Lebensphilosophie) and monism, but also incorporates esoteric and occultist ideas. In the second poem of the cycle, the connection to the poem *For Karl du Prel* is evident:

Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen,
die sich über die Dinge ziehn.
Ich werde den letzten vielleicht nicht vollbringen,
aber versuchen will ich ihn.

Ich kreise um Gott, um den uralten Turm,
und ich kreise jahrtausendelang;
und ich weiß noch nicht: bin ich ein Falke, ein Sturm
oder ein großer Gesang.

[I live my life in widening rings.
The last ring, in spite of my trying, I doubt –
as it wanders across and over things –
if I shall ever complete.

For in this ring I encircle God,
the aged tower—millennia long;
and I need not know: am I falcon, or storm,
or song, an immense song?][79]

One important *leitmotif* in Rilke's *Book of Hours* is the notion of growth; both the individual development of consciousness and the collective evolutionary growth that Rilke calls 'God'. The famous opening line, "Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen", presents a metaphor of consciousness that can easily be related to the 'maturing of his soul' from his homage poem to du Prel. The 'widening rings' spatially symbolize the growing field of consciousness. The completion of the 'last ring' would be the achievement of god-consciousness or enlightenment. In his *Geschichten vom lieben Gott* [Stories of

God], also written in the fall of 1899, Rilke uses humor and creativity in order to subversively remove God and the religious sphere from the earnestness of dogma. Similarly, Rilke transforms the God of the *Book of Hours* into an old monolith in need of artistic imagination. The artist encircles the tower of God, seeking his spiritual and artistic role in this numinous I-Thou relation. The storm signifies inspiration, the song artistic expression, and the falcon evokes the bird-of-prey metaphor introduced in the poem of homage to du Prel. Only two years earlier, Rilke had depicted du Prel as the Nietzschean eagle, but, at this point, his newly-won artistic autonomy allows him to self-assuredly assume the role of a falcon himself. The perspective of self-realization and self-development is rooted in the occultist/theosophical discourse. In *The Book of Hours*, Rilke merges these occultist notions with developmental ideas from the philosophy of life (Lebensphilosophie).[80] God and the artist are continuously compared to phenomena from nature: trees, woods, roots, leaves, etc. The important *tertium comparationis* between God and the artist is the notions of growth (Reifen) and becoming (Werden) that are ubiquitous throughout the cycle. Since God is conceived as an evolutionary process that transcends and includes the natural realm, the main symbol of the growing, maturing, and becoming God is the tree:

> Mit einem Ast, der jenem niemals glich,
> wird Gott, der Baum, auch einmal sommerlich
> verkündend werden und aus Reife rauschen;
> in einem Lande, wo die Menschen lauschen,
> wo jeder ähnlich einsam ist wie ich."

[Through just one branch which hardly looks like him
is God, the tree, proclaimed at last like spring,
and rustles with maturity amidst a land
where people listen rather carefully—
each one alone like me.][81]

The branch growing from God as a tree is the radically new emergence, unlike any other 'branch' of the past. This new level of numinous consciousness—having reached maturity (Reife)—inspires the lonely artists. Similarly, God is the "the gentlest law, / through which we ripen as we fight with it".[82] ["du sanftestes Gesetz, / an dem wir reiften, da wir mit ihm rangen".[83]]

The God of the *Book of Hours* constitutes the sensuous and supersensuous simultaneously. In an earlier essay, *Über Kunst* (1898), the young Rilke had written that the believers say: 'He is', the sorrowful feel: 'He was' and the artist smiles: 'He will be'.[84] Rilke's God is neither dead, as the atheists say, nor bound to a written revelation, as the believers say, but is a becoming God; an evolutionary process dependent on the artist as co-creator. This interconnectedness between God and the artist is reciprocal, evident in the poem *Alle welche dich suchen, versuchen dich* [All who seek you put you to the test]: "Ich aber will dich begreifen, wie dich die Erde begreift; mit meinem Reifen reift dein Reich." ["But I wish to understand you like the earth does and bring with my maturing into being you as king"].[85] The maturing of the individual leads to a widening of God's consciousness; man is the co-creator of the God process. The maturing of man ("wir sind so gereift in deinen Sonnen";

"we are so matured in your suns") eventually leads to an evolutionary completion of God.

The scholar Erich Heller thought that Rilke's evolutionary God originated in Hegel's philosophical idealism (although he was aware that Rilke had not read one sentence of Hegel!).[86] In reality, the idea of God as a process goes back to the panentheistic godhead of Jakob Böhme at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Panentheism (Greek: 'pan'= all, 'en'= in, 'theos' = God) differs from pantheism in a fundamental way: God is not identical with nature (*deus sive natura*), but includes both the manifested and the unmanifested. This idea was highly influential during the time of romanticism and German idealism. Arthur Lovejoy describes this development by studying the *Great Chain of Being*. The Great Chain of Being is based on the idea that the cosmos is structured hierarchically and consists of different levels of complexity. Before romanticism, the hierarchy of spheres (physiosphere—biosphere—noosphere—theosphere) and beings (stone—animal—human—angel—God) was conceived as a static structure; yet, during the Renaissance, scientists of hermeticism were already trying to fill in the missing links of the Great Chain of Being. The idea of gradual development from the less complex to the increasingly complex was still not conceived. Long before Darwin's theory of biological evolution, the theory of an evolution of consciousness was developed.[87] During the era of romanticism, the Great Chain of Being was temporalized.[88] The development of species was now thought to take place over long periods of time.[89] The romantic pre-Darwinian 'theory of evolution', the temporalized 'great chain of being', was adopted by Hegel, Schelling, Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Bergson. It was not only philosophers who

embraced the idea of an evolution of consciousness, but also occultists and theosophists (Blavatsky, Steiner). Around 1900, the romantic model of evolution was a culturally accepted alternative to biological Darwinism. The combination of metaphysical monism and metaphysical individualism found in this movement was shared by Rilke, du Prel, and Maeterlinck, and it was widespread within the discourse of occultism. One possible explanation for this consensus might stem from the religious ideas imported from the Far East in the works of H. P. Blavatsky and R. W. Emerson. In Hinduism, Brahman is the *Urgrund* of the collective, but every soul (*atman)* performs an individual cosmic journey. Emerson expresses this relation in the concepts of the individual soul and the over-soul.[90] And Blavatsky 'translates' *atman* into Western philosophical terms—referring to it as *monad* (from Leibnizian thought)—and perceives the collective as an evolution of consciousness.

In Rilke's case, the most important representatives of the occultist discourse are Carl du Prel and Maurice Maeterlinck. Both used the beehive as an analogy of human evolution; an analogy employed by Rilke throughout his life. Du Prel had depicted evolution as follows: "The collective of transcendental subjects does not necessarily contradict the notion of monism. It is indisputable that a colony of ants or bees is held together monastically by a collective spirit (Gesamtgeist) without abolishing the individuality of the ants or bees. Metaphysical monism does not necessarily preclude metaphysical individualism."[91] Maurice Maeterlinck, the Belgian symbolist and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, used these ideas to build a bridge between occultism and art. Maeterlinck was widely read around 1900, and Rilke wrote three articles on his aesthetics and spiritual essays; he even compared these essays

to the Bible. Rilke echoes Maeterlinck's analogy between the *Esprit de la ruche* and the *Esprit de la Terre*[92], in which the beehive serves as an ideal for human evolution. In a letter to Kappus, Rilke reuses both the tree metaphor and the bee metaphor to differentiate the evolutionary 'god' from the transcendent God above nature:

> Why don't you think of him as a coming god, who since eternity has lain ahead of us, the future one, the eventual fruit of a tree of which we are the leaves? […] As the bees collect honey, so we fetch the sweetness out of everything and build *Him*. We begin with the very slightest things, with what is barely noticeable (as long as it comes about through love), with our work and the repose that comes after, with a moment of silence or with a small solitary joy, with everything that we do on our own without helpers and accomplices, we begin him whom we shall never know, just as our ancestors could not live to know us.[93]

Most importantly, Rilke and Maeterlinck were able to justify the asocial role of the poet from a larger evolutionary perspective: the avant-garde of human creativity, the artists, are the builders of God:

Werkleute sind wir: Knappen, Jünger, Meister,
und bauen dich, du hohes Mittelschiff.
Und manchmal kommt ein ernster Hergereister,
geht wie ein Glanz durch unsre hundert Geister
und zeigt uns zitternd einen neuen Griff.

Wir steigen in die wiegenden Gerüste,
in unsern Händen hängt der Hammer schwer,
bis eine Stunde uns die Stirnen küßte,
die strahlend und als ob sie Alles wüßte
von dir kommt, wie der Wind vom Meer.

Dann ist ein Hallen von dem vielen Hämmern
und durch die Berge geht es Stoß um Stoß.
Erst wenn es dunkelt lassen wir dich los:
Und deine kommenden Konturen dämmern.
Gott, du bist groß.

[Workers we are: apprentice, journeyman, master,
constructing you, you loftiest center-nave.
And sometimes a stranger happens on us: grave,
lightening quick, alerting a hundred minds
to a new hold he trembles to divine.

We climb the swaying scaffolding, our hammers
weighing heavy in the hand, and wait
for the moment that the forehead takes the kiss
of radiance, when an hour that holds the key
comes from you, like the wind from sea.

Then from our many hammers echoing fling
blows across the mountains, ring on ring.
Not before nightfall shall we let you be,
watching your coming contours dawning late.

God, you are great.[94]]

Rilke evokes the times of medieval Europe when the great gothic churches were built. The architecture of the church symbolizes God as a work of art. Here, the artists are craftsmen with hammers. The 'stranger' is the messianic artist who inspires the many artist workers, enthusiastically carried by the 'wind from sea' and 'kissed' by the privileged moment. This symbolic church can never be completed; God as the product of artists will always be in-the-making, and the 'coming contours' will always dawn on the horizon as an omega point, an attractor: paradoxically, God is both the process *and* the product of a process that reciprocally affects the artists. Another paradox concerns the relation between the individual artist and the collective of artists (and ultimately all humans). In the poem *Mit einem Ast*, we find a praise of loneliness: "Denn nur dem Einsamen wird offenbart, / und vielen Einsamen der gleichen Art / wird mehr gegeben als dem schmalen Einen." ("For only to the lonely revelation comes / and many lonely of a similar type / will fathom more than one.[95]") Despite the notion of physical separation, this is clearly an anti-Darwinian notion of metaphysical unity. Moreover, the 'lonely' individuals of the metaphysical community of artists are—due to synergy—more creative than the metaphysically isolated individual. One can perhaps say that an individual

bee—not in accordance with the superior intelligence of the beehive—will lack purpose and direction.[96]

Rilke's reception of du Prel warns us to be cautious of influences. It was not in a monocausal manner that Rilke was influenced by du Prel; rather, du Prel represents a larger cultural context or discourse: the esoteric and occultist. It is for this reason that we find thematic echoes from the immature du Prel poem in Rilke's lyrical breakthrough: *The Book of Hours;* Rilke and du Prel are bound together by occultist discourse. Moreover, the *Book of Hours* exemplifies Rilke's heterodox strategy when incorporating elements from traditional religions into both spiritual and occultist contexts; a modern trait ensuring this cycle of poems a lasting popularity among spiritual existentialists.[97]

# PART II

# Rilke and Parapsychology

# Chapter 1

## Maeterlinck's 'False Curiosity': *La Mort*

Maeterlinck's early essays (*The Treasure of the Humble; Wisdom and Destiny; The Life of the Bees)* were of outmost importance to the young Rilke. Up until *The Intelligence of Flowers* (1907), Maeterlinck's essays were characterized by esoteric and occult ideas. In *La Mort*, Maeterlinck focuses on parapsychology (scientific occultism), spiritualism, and Anglo-Indian Theosophy (Blavatsky). Three chapters of the book were published in *Neue Rundschau* in 1913 under the title *Life after Death,*[98] and in a letter to Marie Taxis on February 6 that year, Rilke refers to this article: "I will send, Princess, (as I suppose you do not have it) the February issue of [*Neue*] *Rundschau:* Here you can find Maeterlinck's article on the experiences of the *Society for Psychical Research*. He is actually quite pathetic, but perhaps he does reveal some clues which you could pursue, in connection to William James for example."[99]

On February 27, Rilke writes a further letter to the princess. Since their last correspondence, Maeterlinck's book has been published, and Rilke has read the entire work:

> In the meantime, Maeterlinck's book *La Mort* has appeared, parts of which were translated in the *Rundschau* I sent to you. I read the book during my journey, it seems to me to contain a spurious calm, an induced apathy—and the one does not harmonize with the other. Did you know anything about those experiments of Colonel Rochas to induce the soul of someone in

> a hypnotic state to return to its former lives and the intervals of its existence? But how much idle curiosity there is in all that, and, like curiosity, it is answered by ambiguous chatter. Don't you agree?[100]

Rilke has ambivalent feelings about Maeterlinck's *La Mort*. In his first letter to the princess, he calls the essay pathetic (armsälig). However, despite this negative judgment, he takes the trouble to send the essay all the way from Spain, and he specifically mentions the passage on William James. On the trip from Ronda to Paris, Rilke reads the whole book.[101] According to the Maeterlinck biographer W. D. Halls, the Belgian author's essays are marked by a gradual decline in quality; in fact, as early as following *The Life of the Bees* in 1901, Halls claims that "the best period of Maeterlinckian prose already lay behind".[102] Many of the objections that Rilke would later raise to the novels of Gustav Meyrink and J. Anker Larsen could be directed toward Maeterlinck's *La Mort*. The characteristic mixture of poetic expressions and philosophical reflections so typical of Maeterlinck's early essays is replaced by a dry, technical prose. Rilke's criticism of Meyrink's 'journalistic style'[103] also applies to Maeterlinck. The style of the chapter published in *Neue Rundschau* is, indeed, journalistic, since Maeterlinck simply summarizes the experiences from *Society for Psychical Research* (S.P.R.). Although he demonstrates his ability to reflect independently on the material, the book lacks the poetic charm of his early essays.

Two things concern Rilke about the book. According to Rilke, Maeterlinck discusses death with inauthentic indifference ('spurious calm' and 'induced apathy'). The contrast to Rilke's own view of death could hardly have been greater. Only three years earlier, Rilke had finished his novel *Malte*, whose atmosphere—despite the many references to spiritualism—is essentially marked by *fear of death*.

> Denn so ganz unbegreiflich ist sie, so völlig gegen uns, daß unser Gehirn sich zersetzt an der Stelle, wo wir uns anstrengen, sie zu denken. Und dennoch, seit einer Weile glaube ich, daß es *unsere* Kraft ist, alle unsere Kraft […].[104]
>
> [For it is so utterly inconceivable, so entirely opposed to us, that our brain fails us precisely when we strain to think upon it. Nonetheless, for some time now I have believed that that force is *ours,* it is all our own …][105]

As noted by German scholar Monika Fick, Malte avoids hasty solutions. The fear of death is not a sign of powerlessness; on the contrary, it is a powerful *other* manifestation of life. In order to experience death as power, they way we reason about death has to break down. According to Rilke, every spiritualistic, occultist, Christian, and equivalent embellishment of death ignores the potential of death as a spiritual praxis. In a letter to Countess Sizzo (Epiphany 1923), Rilke clarifies his view of traditional monotheistic religions in this regard:

> I reproach all modern religions for having handed to their believers consolations and glossings over of death, instead of administering to them the means of reconciling themselves to it and coming to an understanding with it. With it, with its full, unmasked cruelty: this cruelty is so tremendous that *it* is just with it that the circle closes: it leads right back again into the extreme of a mildness that is great, pure and perfectly clear (all consolation is turbid) as we have never surmised mildness to be, not even on the sweetest spring day. But toward the experiencing of this most profound mildness which, were only a few of us to feel it with conviction, could perhaps little by little penetrate and make *transparent* all the relations of life: toward the experiencing of *this* richest and soundest mildness, mankind has never taken even the first steps, unless in its oldest, most innocent times, whose secret has been all but lost to us. The content of "initiations" was, I am sure, nothing but the imparting of a "key" that permitted the reading of the word "death" *without* negation; like the moon, life surely has a side permanently turned away from us which is not its counter-part but its complement toward perfection, toward consummation, toward the really sound and full sphere and orb of being.[106]

In this letter, Rilke commits himself to an experience-based spirituality. No religious teaching that conveys a comforting

message can cause an inner transformation from cruelty (Grausamkeit) to mildness (Milde*)*. This spiritual praxis implies a psychological process. Nothing is more natural than the conscious or unconscious resistance towards the inevitable death of the physical organism, and this instinctual fear of death can surely be sedated with a teaching of consolation. However, in a psychological sense, this state of sedation is the repression of death. The inner alchemical transformation can only occur when the inner 'no' to death yields to an unconditional 'yes'. This process of 'letting go' is the mystery to which Rilke refers and which leads to an authentic 'mildness'. Mildness is Rilke's (poetic) description of the phenomenological dimension of the experience. After letting go of the heavy emotional ballast, the contraction of the instinctual resistance transforms into a positive contrasting state, which is perceived as 'mild' and 'light'. Rilke estimates that very few people engage in this spiritual praxis: collectively, "mankind has never taken even the first steps".[107] Rilke echoes a common esoteric figure of thought according to which the secret knowledge of humanity belongs to the oldest days of humanity. Surette summarizes this basic idea of esotericism as follows: "The central occult claim, then, is that all of the world's religions are partial, popularized, or even corrupt versions of a revelation, gnosis, or wisdom that is fully possessed only by a few extraordinary mortals—if, indeed, mortals they be."[108] Rilke's second point of criticism concerns Colonel Rochas's hypnotic experiments, which Maeterlinck refers to in *La Mort*. The chapter on hypnotic past life regressions, *La Réincarnation*, is included in Maeterlinck's book, but not in the article in *Neue Rundschau.*[109] In this chapter, Maeterlinck echoes the empirical findings on reincarnation obtained through the method of hypnotism.[110] He writes about Rochas's hypnotic

regressions of an eighteen year-old-girl. Firstly, we hear how Joséphine, whilst in a hypnotic trance, regresses to earlier stages of life. Rochas continues the regression to the life-between-lives (Daseins-Zwischenraum) and to two past lives. Apparently, in a previous life, Joséphine was the soldier Jean-Claude Bourdon (born 1812) and, in a life before that, she was Philomène Charpigny (born 1702). We don't learn much about her life-between-lives; only that, at first, the soul is attached to the physical body, but then the 'fluidic' body consolidates: "His fluidic body, which is at first diffused, takes a more concentrated form. He lives in darkness, which he finds disagreeable; but he does not suffer. At last, the night in which he is plunged is streaked with a few flashes of light. The idea comes to him to reincarnate himself and he draws near to her who is to be his mother (that is to say, the mother of Joséphine). He encircles her until the child is born, whereupon he gradually enters the child's body."[111] In light of such a lack of artistic imagination and narrative technique, we should not be surprised by Rilke's skeptical attitude. In the case of Maeterlinck and Colonel Rochas, curiosity is indeed answered by "ambiguous chatter".

# Chapter 2

## Schrenck-Notzing, Tischner, and Wasielewski

In a letter to Princess Marie Taxis dated December 1913, Rilke mentions a new book by a famous parapsychologist which has aroused public concern: "Have you seen Schrenck-Notzing's book, the German papers and even those here are very agitated about it: it is called *Materialisations Phänomene* (with 150 illustrations and 30 plates)?"[112] The princess had, in accordance with general interest in such matters, already discovered the work:

> Of course I have read Schrenck-Notzing's book—I actually finished it yesterday. It is the strangest, most frightening, most disgusting, most incredible thing I have ever read. One moment it seems too silly for words and obviously trickery, and then again *cela vous casse brasse bras et jambes*. [113]—We, Alex and I, thought about going to Munich to interview S<chrenck-> N<otzing>—Did you read the book? *C'est dégoûtant à vous donner des nausées—mais si c'était vrai??* [*It is so disgusting that it makes one nauseous, but just think if it were true??*][114]

What kind of experiments, shortly before the First World War, could create such a public outcry—both within and outside Germany? And who was this controversial parapsychologist?

Albert Schrenck-Notzing (1862-1929) was an earlier apprentice of Carl du Prel. He founded the *Münchener Psychologische Gesellschaft* in 1886. In 1889, his collaboration with de Prel came to an end, since Schrenck-Notzing considered du Prel's theories on the transcendental subject and spiritualism to be scientifically unsound. Schrenck-Notzing anticipated the parapsychology of the twentieth century and, in order to subject paranormal experiments to more rigorous means of control, he brought them in from the bourgeois living room to the laboratory. Schrenck-Notzing's work *Phenomena of Materialisation*, in which he distances himself from du Prel's position[115], was the result of four years of experiments with the French medium Marthe Béraud (1887-?), who appears in the book as 'Eva C.'.[116] Schrenck-Notzing refers to the substance emanating from the medium's orifices (mouth, nose, abdomen, etc.) as 'teleplasm' (Charles Richet calls it 'ectoplasm'). He describes the substance as "liquid material, and also as amorphous material, or filmy net-like and veil-like material, in the form of shreds, wisps, threads and cords, in large or small packets, is an organized tissue which easily decomposes".[117] In order to prove the existence of this substance, Schrenck-Notzing takes 225 photos of the materializations using both normal and stereoscopic cameras. Schrenck-Notzing sees the trance medium as the source of these teleplastic occurrences, and strictly rejects spiritualistic explanations. Since he interprets the materializations as manifestations of the medium's unconscious mind, he calls them 'ideoplastic' (formed by ideas).[118]

Princess Marie Taxis, just like the general public, reacted in an ambivalent manner to Schrenck-Notzing's experiments. As member of the *Society for Psychical Research*, she did not reject the possibility of paranormal phenomena, and she did not rule out the possibility of ectoplasm. Although she found the photos and the atmosphere around the phenomena aesthetically repelling, the princess was willing to meet Schrenck-Notzing personally. Rilke's (partly aesthetic) rejection was more deep-rooted. In a letter to the princess from the December 27, 1913, Rilke gives an elaborate account of his view on the matter:

> Dear Princess, here is a newspaper-cutting with a revolting illustration—it is the only one I have seen about Schrenck-Notzing, and it is indeed sufficiently disgusting. I have not sent for the book, the bookseller informed me of it when it was published, I thought it over—but all that is not the right thing for me. (You can imagine what would be the right thing.) I will gladly converse with any spirit, if he has an expansive urge and a need to break though into my life, for then he is sure to have something sensible to say of which neither of us need be ashamed; but to scatter this spirit-bait in order to attract Heaven knows what rabble, cast-off in the spirit-world and in ill repute over there, who, like the poor savages we drag away from Africa, tell us of usages and mysteries that belong to—that is in the worst of taste and sullies the Here and the Hereafter with its murky dregs. You must be aware that this is not directed against the

> ‘Unknown Lady’, *she* has the expansive urge, and though I should never hear from her again, for she is still soaring. Yet I would not like to undertake the slightest thing designed to attract even her—is not an indescribable amount of what has been dissolved always flooding into our mind? So what is to prevent her from being drawn into my innermost emotions, or under the pretext of some sound or other to step into this high-ceilinged room at night? […]
>
> No, despite the assurances of the crystal-gazer, I dislike this *métier* [of mediumship], and I shall take good care not to direct my little stream into these ambiguous channels, where it might stagnate until it became a real bog, throwing up bubbles and will-o’-the-wisps in the vitiated air. […] I can imagine that it might be interesting for you if you and the Prince were to visit Schrenck, who, at least in earlier days, must have been a rather remarkable character. But the slightest personal experience, if one insists on experimenting, would be infinitely more helpful, it seems to me, than all this hotch-potch of sensational manifestations on a spot subjected to such irritation.[119]

It is worth noting that Rilke applies spiritualism as a theoretical basis when trying to explain the ectoplastic phenomena. In other words, Rilke adheres to the ‘spirit hypothesis’, whereas Schrenck-Notzing, in the name of science, speaks of the

phenomena as ‘unknown forces’. In order to interpret this letter adequately, it is necessary to be well versed in occult and spiritualistic ideas. Rilke describes how Schrenck-Notzing ‘scatters spirit bait’ in order to attract the rabble of the spirit world’.[120] In other words, Rilke does not doubt the reality of Schrenck-Notzing’s phenomena, but criticizes an instrumental way of dealing with the ‘astral’ beings. Rilke clearly differentiates between higher and lower spirits; through his experiments, Schrenck-Notzing is only able to attract lower beings. Rilke sees the experiments as an exploitation of the spirits who consider it worse to be “rejected than summoned”.[121] Instead of this ‘dressage’ of the spirits practiced by Schrenck-Notzing, he considers a loving openness the ideal attitude towards the spirits. In his so-called ‘letter of spiritualism’ to Nora Purtscher-Wydenbruck, he sharply criticizes this tendency towards instrumentality:

> Moreover, it is one of the original inclinations of my disposition to accept the mysterious *as such*, not as something to be unmasked, but rather as the mystery that, to its innermost being, and everywhere, is *thus* mysterious, as a lump of sugar is sugar throughout.[122]

In Rilke’s view, a total disenchantment of the paranormal would inevitably lead to its extinction. Furthermore, Rilke is repelled by the sensationalism of Schrenck-Notzing’s experiments. It is symptomatic of Rilke to emphasize the ‘personal experience’ (both within the fields of spiritualism and art) over Schrenck-Notzing’s calculated experiments, which

consist of ‘sensational manifestations’. Schrenck-Notzing’s paranormal empiricism offends Rilke’s aesthetic sensitivity and, therefore, belongs to the same category as magical practices imported from Africa, which Rilke considers prerational (primitive) rather than transrational (spiritual). As an example of a metaphysical being with “expansive urge” (Expansion), Rilke mentions the ‘Unknown Lady’ who, at Duino Castle, answered his concealed questions in a poetic way. Still, Rilke considers both seances and ectoplastic experiments problematic. Perhaps not entirely truthfully, he claims that he does not wish to approach the spirit world in any way.[123] Even if we do not consciously seek contact with the beyond, it floods “into our mind”, is “drawn into” our “innermost emotions” and can appear “under the pretext of some sound”.[124] Rilke implies that we are continually in contact with invisible forces, such as spirits, be it consciously or unconsciously.

Schrenck-Notzing is mentioned again in a letter from 1918: “Schrenck-Notzing, who is now writing a book on clairvoyance, is also in the vicinity and has very kindly invited me. But I hesitate, mindful of his materialization phenomena.”[125] Whereas telepathy and clairvoyance are among the metaphysical themes that continuously occupy Rilke, the phenomenon of ectoplasm is subject to different viewpoints at different times. Despite his skepticism towards Schrenck-Notzing’s ectoplastic experiments, in a letter to Nanny Wunderly-Volkart from 1921, he nevertheless gives an exhaustive account of his reading of *Telepathie und Hellsehen* [Telepathy and Clairvoyance] by the occultist and parapsychologist Rudolf Tischner:

T.[ischner]'s *new* book [*Über Telepathie und Hellsehen*][126] interests me so much more than the former,[127] il faut que vous le lisez [sic] aussi [*you should also read it*]; but sadly; it really seems as if all these strange manifestations (tables moving or levitating, etc.,) are caused by a *mass* separate from the medium; a substance that feels moist, cool and sticky (even that!), so that the ominous Baron Schrenck-Notzing in Munich with his materialization phenomena actually gets it right: he already has the upper-hand again!—Where one thought one was dealing with spirits, there is instead, sweated out by the medium, a strange kind of (sorry) *dough*; c'est bien dommage [*it is a shame*], but now I understand more fully the bad conscience about all things spiritual that one always has on leaving a seance. Here, we may even be dealing with the very antithesis of the spirit; on the one hand, some energy is transferred into the spirit, while on the other, some turns into a mysterious, dense substance with which we know not what to do. But it seems to be firmly established, by three observers who have experimented independently of each other, that the table is set in motion by a substance that is exuded from the medium's body, about the shape of a candelabra's arm, which then becomes stiffened by means of an inflow of energy and in this way, exactly like an arm built for this very purpose, physically lifts the table? It may even occur that one can feel this substance, which the medium then

> reabsorbs—and thus is it witnessed in horror, and the alleged materialization is simply a new step in this medium-induced compression; c'est terrible c'est dégoûtant, mais c'est un grand pas dans la science, car ici on arrive vers ce carrefour énigmatique où l'énergie se transforme en matière… [*It is terrible. It is disgusting. But it is a big step for science, because here we arrive at the mysterious intersection where energy transforms into matter ...*][128]

Up until this point, Rilke had explained ectoplastic phenomena by assuming ghostly agents behind them. Having more faith in the authority of Tischner than Schrenck-Notzing, he now—albeit reluctantly—accepts the more prosaic explanation that the physical impact (knocking, levitations, etc.) is caused by a substance (ectoplasm) emanating from the medium itself.[129] He regrets that the 'ominous' ('unselige') Baron Schrenck was right about the repulsive 'phenomena of materialization'. From an aesthetic point of view, Rilke would have preferred spirits to be the invisible causes of telekinetic and paranormal phenomena. On the parapsychological explanatory model, ectoplastic substance assumes a repulsive and disgusting nature: moist, cool, and sticky. However, despite these aesthetic reservations, Rilke does not hesitate to identify the discovery of this link between spirit/energy and matter as a breakthrough for science ("un grand pas dans la science"). The fact that Rilke writes so extensively about Tischner's results testifies to the degree of his involvement in occult and parapsychological matters, and his ambivalent involvement with parapsychology should not be misunderstood as a general skepticism towards

the duo-unity worldview, in which the supersensous realm is an integrated part. Having said this, Rilke questions whether the spiritualistic seance is the best way to contact the spirit world. The parapsychological explanation allows Rilke to clarify his critical stand on non-artistic spiritualism. Artistic mediumship and clairvoyance would, however, remain at the core of Rilke's interests.

In an indirect way, Rilke's correspondence with the parapsychologist Waldemar von Wasielewski leads to a similar conclusion. In 1922, Wasielewski published a book on telepathy and clairvoyance; a book which enthused Rilke to such an extent that he wrote two letters to the author. The book is based on experimental studies on the telepathic and clairvoyant abilities of the Medium Frl. v. B. In the first letter, Rilke writes: "For two decades have I hoped that these phenomena, which you describe with such care and accuracy, might be finally seen as something deserving respect, or at least—among those engaged only superficially—earn a silent and solemn apprehension. Only now, through your recently published book, does it seem to me that these matters have been accorded this status. Only now can we begin to understand these phenomena in the right way—after they have been moved out of the sphere of ambiguity and into the (almost) inexplicable; out of this poor state of disbelief and into the more fruitful state of pure wonder." As we saw earlier, Schrenck-Notzing's phenomena of materialization belonged to this 'sphere of ambiguity' ('zweideutige Sphäre'). In Wasielewski's experimental results, Rilke finds confirmation of his own hope that science will account for these extraordinary human abilities and that this will lead to their general cultural

acceptance. In his second letter, Rilke even links these phenomena to a spiritual revolution:

> In relation to the phenomena with which you are concerned, one could be almost impatient, as this particular area can—in a sense—often be about making discoveries at a late stage; discoveries which would have been possible much earlier had it not been for the attitudes which exclude or prejudice so many forms of influence. What a transformation it would be of life itself if all this that has been so roundly rejected, questioned and ridiculed now re-emerged as a force! I must confess—I expect all of us to experience more and more invaluable changes as a result of this emergence of unappreciated and [very] hidden forces; and when I consider what it is that has bound me to artistic work; one of the strongest inducements amongst many (partly nameless) is the presumption that I have had since childhood—as a corrective of major errors –, that according to tradition something fundamentally comfortable [*Heimliches*] and homely can be found in the un-comfortable [*das Unheimliche*].[130]

From a poetological point of view, it is worth noting the transformation of the 'uncanny' ('das Unheimliche') into the 'fundamentally comfortable' ('das Heimliche'). The so-called 'uncanny' includes the sphere of the paranormal and ghostly,

and the transformation from this to the 'fundamentally comfortable' would be a "corrective of major errors"; in other words, the denial of paranormal phenomena as belonging to the realms of the supersensous. Here, too, Rilke locates the change of perspective in his childhood, and this corresponds perfectly with the semi-autobiographical background of the paranormal episodes in *Malte Laurids Brigge*.

## Excursus: The Ideal of 'The Whole' in a Letter to Countess Nora and in *The Life of Mary*

The most famous document regarding Rilke's view of the metaphysical sphere is his so-called 'letter on spiritualism', which he wrote to Nora Purtscher-Wydenbruck in August 1924.[131] This letter is justifiably regarded as a summa of Rilke's experiences within the field of the metaphysical, spiritualistic, and paranormal. It is often quoted *in extenso* as if it were self-explanatory, but this is by no means the case. The letter's ambiguous content demands an extensive knowledge of the cultural codes of occultism, spiritualism, esotericism, and parapsychology. Moreover, very few commentators seem to draw upon the particular context in which the letter was written. Rilke's letter was a response to a letter from Nora Purtscher-Wydenbruck, who approached Rilke for advice concerning her mediumistic and spiritualistic experiences. In her youth, Nora Wydenbruck's worldview was influenced by the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Vedanta. Although she embraced modernity and rejected institutionalized religion, Wydenbruck emphasized the importance of Schopenhauer's theories on the invalidity of the 'Space-Time convention' for her later (spiritualistic) development.[132] Similar to Thomas Mann, she wrote from a Schopenhauerian standpoint (*On Spirit Seeing*) and came to believe in an 'expanded reality' through 'metaphysical empirical evidence'. Just as Gumppenberg, who went from skepticism to conviction after having attended his first seance,[133] Countess Nora experienced a series of spiritualistic phenomena, for which she found no rational explanation.[134] After this episode, she joined the spiritualistic

circle, which communicated with the spirit 'Nell'.[135] 'Nell' had the role of a spiritual teacher for the circle. 'He' gave them personal advice, but also taught them about the great questions of life and the universe.[136]

From the end of June until the beginning of August 1924, Rilke stayed at the health spa Bad Ragaz in Switzerland, where the Prince and Princess Thurn und Taxis joined him. Nora Wydenbruck wrote to Rilke in June, and her letter reached him in Ragaz, where Rilke was staying together with Nora's aunt, Princess Marie Taxis. In her letter, Nora Wydenbruck only tentatively mentions 'Nell' and her mediumistic experiments, since she would first like to gage Rilke's attitude toward paranormal matters in general. Little did she know that her letter could not have found a better readership:

> ... If your whole letter, my dear Countess, was a subject of interest to the Princess, her quite special attention went to those strange lines in which you allude to your experiences with mediumistic writing. You remember that at the Taxis', whenever a reliable medium was there, they held very serious and often continuous seances, in Ragaz we were just in the process of reviewing former and more recent results of these sessions, a part of which was still unknown to me, and so what you kindly wished to tell me landed in an atmosphere that allowed each of your words to work and to take effect with all its surmise, in all its seriousness. Only we would have liked to know so much more!

> The Princess bade me tell you to go ahead quietly and carefully; perhaps those communicating powers may finally permit us to write down and preserve their manifestations (whereas it is certainly important to enter into no relations with metaphysical societies! ) if one undertakes to keep these confidential and not use them in a way displeasing to them. It is indeed of the greatest value to be able to reread those communications the sense or validity of which comes out only gradually.[137]

The "very serious and often continuous seances" with a "reliable medium" that Rilke mentions are, of course, those held at Duino Castle in the fall of 1912 on Rilke's request. Already in 1918, Marie Taxis suggested they take a closer look at the seance transcripts from 1912 onwards: "[…] I believe the peace and quiet here would have been good for you too, and we might both have escaped into other worlds. I could have shown you some interesting things from our [automatic] 'writings', as well as something about present conditions in Russia, written in November 1916. Now and then there are strange flashes—but one ought to read and discuss it together."[138] It was not until 1924, in Ragaz, that Rilke and the princess finally studied the transcripts of all the seances held in the meantime. Rilke tells Nora Wydenbruck about his own spiritualistic experiences, making it clear to her that he is no stranger to the field of metaphysical experiments.

In the following letter, Rilke gives Nora Wydenbruck advice regarding contact with the supersensuous sphere. The

‘communicating powers’ Rilke writes about refer to ‘Nell’, whose permission is a prerequisite for the notation of the spiritualistic communication. Rilke recommends to Nora Wydenbruck that she preserve the seance records, since, at some point in the future, they could prove to be of great depth and value. Rilke himself had experienced this in connection with the Duino transcripts, which he had copied in order to read continuously as delphic words of wisdom. In the following, Rilke refers to his own spiritualistic experiences at Duino:

> As for myself, my own impressions in this mysterious domain stem, with very few exceptions, from those experiments in the Taxis circle at which I was often present as an observer until about ten years ago. Later it was unfortunately never possible for me to connect with a reliable medium, otherwise I would certainly have been eager to increase on suitable occasions the very singular experiences that had fallen to my lot. I am convinced that these phenomena, if one accepts them, without taking refuge in them, and remains willing again and again to fit them into the whole of our existence, which is indeed full of no less wonderful mysteries in all its happenings, I am, I say, convinced that these manifestations do not correspond to a false curiosity in us, but in fact indescribably concern us and (if one were to exclude them) would still be capable of making themselves repeatedly felt at some place. Why shouldn’t they, like everything not yet

> recognized or indeed recognizable, be an object of our effort, our amazement, our perturbation and reverence?[139]
>
> […]
>
> But regarding precisely these [mediumistic happenings], while accepting them obediently, seriously and reverently, it is my strange instinct, when they pass over and into me, at once to waken counterweights to them in my consciousness: nothing would be more foreign to me than a world in which such powers and interferences had the upper hand. And strangely: the more I act thus (at pains after every nocturnal session, for example, immediately to hold the sight of the starry, still night just as grandiose and valid . . .), the more I believe myself in agreement with what is essential in those happenings.[140]

In this passage, Rilke summarizes a lifetime of spiritual insights. His mediumistic contact with the Unknown Lady occupies a special position, whereas his spiritualistic experiments undertaken in Munich and Basel are regarded as less valid, since he was never again able to find a medium as skilled as 'Pascha' Thurn und Taxis. Rilke regrets that he was never able to recreate results comparable to the Duino seances, even though the 'suitable occasions' (i.e. seances) were alas unsuccessful.

In order to understand Rilke's stance on spiritualism, we have to examine the larger context of his spiritual worldview.

According to Rilke, reality consists of a 'duo-unity'. This means that reality is a whole with two parts: the visible and the invisible. Rilke considers it a reductionism if we only recognize one of these spheres, and this reductionism leads to two different mentalities that Lovejoy calls *this-worldliness* and *otherworldliness*. Otherworldliness signifies the belief that the 'real' is not found in man's earthly existence (*contemptus mundi*). This-worldliness, on the other hand, signifies a focus on the value of earthly existence.[141] From a non-dual perspective, both of these mentalities are detrimental in themselves: only seeking this world leads to materialism, and only seeking the invisible leads to a flight from reality. Devoting oneself to the supersensuous realms involves the risk of dualism, and Rilke's balancing strategy is to 'waken counterweights' in his consciousness. A world where supersensuous beings and powers have the 'upper hand' leads to a devaluation of the earthly realms. For Rilke, one example of an earthly 'counterweight' to the supersensuous is 'the sight of the starry, still night'; in other words, an earthly aesthetic phenomenon that is 'just as grandiose and valid' as the more-than-earthly manifestations. In order to overcome the dualism between the sensuous and supersensuous realms, Rilke uses the category *Das Ganze* (the totality). For Rilke, it is legitimate to explore the supersensuous realm on the basis of a holistic conception of the world: the supersensuous and mediumistic phenomena '*indescribably concern us'* and are not the result of 'false curiosity'. A materialistic denial of the supersensuous sphere would, according to Rilke, not make the invisible forces disappear; they 'would still be capable of making themselves repeatedly felt at some place'. This is also the meaning of Rilke's statement that these forces 'have more share in us than we in them'. The contact would, then, move from the conscious

to the unconscious level. It is remarkable that Rilke uses a religious tone in his description of the psychological effect of the unseen forces: "Why shouldn't they, like everything not yet recognized or indeed recognizable, be an object of our effort, our amazement, our perturbation and reverence?"[142] Twenty years earlier, Rilke had expressed a very similar observation in a letter to the 'young poet' Franz Xaver Kappus: "We must accept our existence in as *wide* a sense as can be; everything, even the unheard of, must be possible within it. That, when you come down to it, is the only kind of courage that is demanded of us: the courage for the oddest, the most unexpected, the most inexplicable things that we may encounter."[143]

Rilke's seances in Munich and Basel have made him an open-minded skeptic, as documented in the letters written between 1912 and 1920:

> Now those seances, with all their disturbing or confusing attendant manifestations, with their fatal clumsinesses, halfnesses and (there can be no doubt about it) their countless misunderstandings . . . , lie on the road to such insights, and could not pass me by as, intuitively, these insights were already prefigured in me; they have not, since I always inclined to assume a totality of the possible, in any way altered my conception of the world: it is just that I would simply have missed things of that sort not occurring. But just because, in a sense, the naturalness of this tremendous thing was already included in my inner assents and

> concessions, I also declined to side with such disclosures more than with any other mysteries of existence; they are to me one mystery among countless mysteries, all of which have more share in us than we in them.[144]

This combination of skepticism and open-mindedness, which can also be found in Thomas Mann's *Occult Experiences*, is paradigmatic for modern spirituality. Thomas Mann is convinced of the genuine nature of the occult phenomena at Schrenck-Notzing's seances, but he finds the atmosphere surrounding their production repulsive. In a similar way, Rilke views contact to the spirit world via a medium as anything but unproblematic. This can be illustrated by an analogy. In many ways, Rilke's description of mediumistic communication can be compared to a poor telephone connection; the repeated line disturbances we face are analogous to the 'fatal clumsinesses', 'halfnesses' and 'countless misunderstandings' that Rilke associates with receiving messages from the spirits.

Since Rilke was already well versed in occultist and spiritualistic literature before his active 'spiritualistic phase'—which began with the seances at Duino—, the spiritualistic experiences with the Unknown Lady (and other mediumistic activities) did not *change* Rilke's worldview in any significant way. Unlike Nora Wydenbruck, Gumppenberg, and Thomas Mann, who had to be confronted with 'metaphysical empirical evidence' from spiritualism and parapsychology in order to be convinced of the reality of the more-than-physical, Rilke had been instinctively open-minded towards the paranormal since his youth. His intention had been to incorporate the

‘paranormal’ into the sphere of the ‘normal’ and thus achieve a holistic conception of the world. To Rilke, spiritualistic experiences were just one mystery among ‘countless’ other mysteries. This is why he never felt the least inclined to defend a spiritualistic worldview in an ideological manner.

The correspondence between Rilke and Countess Nora did not end with the ‘letter of spiritualism’. Once Nora Wydenbruck appreciated the depth of Rilke’s understanding of supersensuous reality, she wrote him a letter in which she provided a detailed account of the seances with ‘Nell’.[145]

Nora Wydenbruck’s book *The Para-Normal* is unknown in Rilke scholarship. For this reason, it is worthwhile citing the letter that Rilke wrote to her on September 5, 1924 in its entirety:[146]

> My dear and honoured Friend,
>
> I am surrounded by letters and weary with answering others, but I do not want to postpone sending you a word or two, words that seem to me urgent, and as though I were uttering them and my weary pen had no part in it. What you wrote me was so much more than a letter, otherwise I would say that I have rarely received one that has moved me more profoundly. It was not alone what you had written, what *could* be written, but the indescribable vibration and movement that it stirred in me; if I simply lay the sheets of your letter down in the room, they send out something into the air for which even the fragrance of a plant is too coarse and

> obvious a simile, a presence infinitely subtle and infinitely penetrating. And as soon as it begins to fade in the room, the fine photograph you sent me of yourself seems to bring it back again. You were privileged to have memorable experiences, and that they should have taken place with such completeness, so calmly and confidently, proves that your entire and obedient acceptance was absolutely right. I will return again to the subject of your letter, and some day I will send it on to Princess Marie, but I do not want to part with these astonishing records yet. Have patience and trust, and always a new innocence towards that which is trying to reach you. And continue, steadfastly and unflaggingly, to love the visible, simple, good things of everyday—animals, and objects, and flowers—so that the balance may be maintained.[147]

Nora's elaborate account of the mediumistic communication with 'Nell' made a deep impression on Rilke. Doubtlessly, Rilke considers 'Nell' a supersensuous being with an 'expansive urge'[148] comparable to that of the Unknown Lady. Yet Rilke's experiences with 'her' are limited to four seances at Duino and isolated messages from the seances held in his absence. By contrast, Nora's communication with 'Nell' stretches over a longer period of time. The 'indescribable vibration and movement' which the letter emanates proves to Rilke that the 'metaphysical being' 'Nell' is transmitting spiritual messages from the beyond. Although Rilke has a positive attitude towards Nora's spiritualistic endeavors

(he encourages her to meet them with patience, trust, and innocence), he nevertheless reiterates the warning from his previous letter: that Nora's fascination with the unseen world must not cause her to forget the beauty of the visible world. Perhaps Rilke observed a tendency towards *other-worldliness* and escapism in Nora's personality. Rilke's last words emphasize the value of the visible world as the necessary counterweight of the invisible realms; together they hold the balance of the scales of totality.

The motif of a balance between the visible and invisible spheres (*the whole*) was not just an abstract ideal expressed by Rilke in his letters. Most of Rilke's works mirror this basic occultist idea; most notably perhaps the *Sonnets to Orpheus*. However, at this point, it is perhaps more worthwhile to focus our attention on a lesser-known cycle of poems, *Das Marien-Leben* [Life of Mary]. As mentioned earlier, *the whole* refers to an idea of reality as consisting of two equal halves of being: the sensuous part (visible) and the transcendental part (invisible). According to Rilke, to attach exclusive importance to the sensuous is materialism. Conversely, to attach exclusive importance to the transcendental is to escape from the world; a mentality which, in Rilke's view, has led Christianity to throw suspicion upon our earthly lives. Sensuality is an essential part of our earthly existence, and Rilke believes that this idea has been demonized by religion. However, in contrast with this, Rilke considers sensuality a field which may be cultivated spiritually. In his shaping of Mary, Rilke corrects the one-sided focus on Mary's divine nature found in the hagiography. It was important to Rilke that Mary's double nature as both an earthly and a transcendental being found expression. This is already indicated in the formulation of the title, *Das Marien-Leben*,

in which Rilke deviates from conventional orthography and separates the words with a hyphen, thus emphasizing the (earthly) life of Mary. This duality may also be observed in the first poem, *Geburt Mariae* [*The Birth of Mary*], in which the sphere of the angels is opposed to the bickering of ordinary people. In the third poem, *Mariae Verkündigung* [*The Annunciation of Mary*], Rilke challenges the Christian idea of the chaste Mary by describing her meeting with the angel as an entranced fascination between a beautiful young man and a beautiful young woman. Later on, it is her role as a mother that is psychologically elaborated. In the poem *Von der Hochzeit zu Kana* [*About the Marriage at Cana*], an accusation is leveled against Mary, since her vanity leads her to view Jesus as a miracle-worker and, unknown to her, this contributes to his bloody fate. In *Vor der Passion* [*Before the Passion*], Mary rebukes her son, because his messianic destruction puts an end to her motherly connection with him. These examples show that Rilke had a clear intention of making Mary human. Rilke also used the metaphor "inner room" to express his spirituality. The Greek motto introducing *Das Marien-Leben*—"with an inner room…"—derives from Dionysius's *Painter's Manual.* The inner room, which Rilke also called "inner space" (Weltinnenraum), denotes the mental depths that, according to Rilke, make up a world of their own. In the first Mary poem, the birth of Mary brings about a "pure condensation" which occurs "in space". In the second poem, *Die Darstellung Mariae im Tempel* [*The Presentation of Mary in the Temple*], this inner space is described as "inner architecture" and, in accordance with this, Mary's fate becomes "heavier than the house". Her being extends far beyond its material form. Here, Rilke shows the transcendental half of human life as it is represented in the life of Mary as the archetype of an ideal human being. *Stillung*

*Maria mit dem Auferstandenen* [*The Consolation of Mary with the Resurrected Christ*] was considered by Rilke to be the most successful poem in the cycle. In this poem, the suffering of both the son and the mother is healed. The light touch removes the sense of time and symbolizes a harmonious connection between earthly and transcendental dimensions, male and female. In this image, Rilke's *Das Marien-Leben* finds its most subtle expression and at the same time provides the key to an understanding of his poetic view of the world.

# PART III

# Rilke's Reception of Spiritualism

# Chapter 1

## The Aesthetic Fascination of the Occult: Rilke and Princess Marie Thurn und Taxis

In an investigation into Rilke's reception of occultism and spiritualism, his friendship with the Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe is of outmost importance. The correspondence between them and the *Memoirs of a Princess* by Marie Taxis belong to the most insightful sources regarding Rilke's view of occult and spiritualistic matters. Marie Taxis was the ideal conversation partner for Rilke: She was educated, mastered several languages, translated into French and Italian, and was a competent pianist; furthermore, she was a member of the *Society for Psychical Research* and well-versed in occult and spiritualistic matters. However, her knowledge within the fields of the paranormal was not only theoretical: at Duino Castle, she arranged spiritualistic seances where her son Alexander ('Pascha') assumed the role of medium. Both Rilke and Kassner admired and praised his mediumistic abilities. There was, in other words, nothing unusual about Rilke's taking part in the seances at Duino. The Princess spoke of Rilke's "magical personality": "The precious hours of his first visit to Duino were spent in perfect harmony. I felt as though we had always known each other, no strangeness came between us—except for that extraordinary magical element which I have never found so intensively in anyone else."[149] And: "That was the occasion when I first experienced one of those strange incidents which made me intensely aware of the magic, mysterious atmosphere that surrounded the poet. Had he opened the door to a "fourth dimension"? I find it difficult to

describe that quite peculiar feeling."[150] The princess gives several examples of the 'occult quality' of Rilke's way of experiencing the world. Common to these examples is the unmistakably aesthetic character of occult occurrences. In the autobiography of C. G. Jung, we find relevant reflections on the aesthetics and psychology of the occult. Similar to Rilke, Jung had a keen interest in occult, spiritualistic, and psychic phenomena. Jung was astonished that his fellow students at university "reacted with derision and disbelief or with anxious defensiveness". He writes, "I wondered at the sureness with which they could assert that things like ghosts and table-turning were impossible and therefore fraudulent, and at the other hand at the evidently anxious nature of their defensiveness. I, too, was not certain of the absolute reliability of the reports, but why, after all, should there not be ghosts? How did we know that something was "impossible"? And, above all, what did the anxiousness signify? For myself I found such possibilities extremely interesting and attractive. They added another dimension to my life; the world gained depth and background."[151] Two elements in this passage seem to correspond to Rilke's view. Firstly, Rilke was always careful about committing to any worldview—be it occult, religious or scientific—as *the* truth. Like Jung, he could not claim to be 'certain' of the reliability of occult phenomena. Secondly, the objective truth or untruth of the occult was not the crucial question for Rilke. Jung pitied his comrades for their *a priori* rejection of the 'fourth dimension' and considered this rejection an aesthetic loss.[152] In Rilke's case, the occult seemed to play a similar role, and this relativizes the question of truth. In a letter to Princess Marie Taxis concerning her sister Gegina Schlick[153], we find an interesting example of Rilke's tolerance towards what he calls the 'superficially occult'. In April 1912, Rilke

writes: “It meant a great deal to me to see Countess Gegina often. I was touched and moved and thoughtful. It seems to me that she is not bad at her magic, though she is not a witch at all: I should rather say she herself has been bewitched and transformed.”[154] In the private language that Rilke and the princess share, to perform ‘magic’ is to engage in spiritualistic practices. To say that the Countess Gegina is not “bad at her magic”,[155] is to say that her experiments yielded a certain amount of success. The Princess Taxis, whose relationship with Gegina was strained, is less tolerant towards her, and Rilke feels compelled to defend Countess Gegina in the face of her sister’s criticism:

> I do not believe that all that, hopeless as it was, could have been overcome in a normal fashion. Now she is overcoming it in a manner which is half ridiculous and half grandiose. And the grandiose part tips the scales. […] The frustration of one life is compensated by former incarnations of a very interesting, grand kind, future ones not excluded, and all the oracles foretell that the present one will continue for a long time. For the time being, this gives her a genuine zest for life, the zest that her nature retained for so long and only surrendered when faced with the most undeniable counter-arguments. Now it is breaking through again, and one who takes up inherent aptitudes again and succeeds in bringing them to maturity in spite of everything. True, the way to this leads through self-deception, through obvious

credulity and fraud, but what does it matter? After all, she only accepts the most incredible former incarnations because the courage and the eagerness they demand is inherent in her, a tremendous courage and an unbounded eagerness for existence here—preferably ten times in a tragic way rather than once indifferently. Who has no need of self-deception, when all is said and done? Yes, I have often asked myself whether the power of growing even under worthless pretexts is not to be found even in vice, whether, under certain circumstances, it might not be necessary to condone a vice, to use it up, so to say, in order to attain the virtue attendant on it? In any case, her preoccupation with the superficially occult is rendering Countess G[egina] an important service. It allows her—which would be quite impossible otherwise—to go into herself without fear, with interest and attention. It transports her into a condition of inner concentration, out of which may develop even a kind of state of prayer; it gives her a stimulating, never failing conversation with herself, in which she gains a firmness that does not depend on any outside influence. On the other hand, she is in the first place too much of a *grande dame* to borrow (as is usually the case) a spurious importance from these things: on the contrary, it is she who deigns to award it to them by taking an interest in them. The dangers are comparatively trifling

> and fugitive, the advantages, if I am not mistaken, will be very great one day.[156]

It was necessary to quote this passage from Rilke's letter in its entirety, since here we are presented with Rilke's general attitude towards his belief in the occult. The letter suggests that Countess Gegina was part of a childless marriage, which, according to Rilke, could 'not have been overcome in a normal fashion'. The interesting question is: what exactly is the 'superficially occult', and how is it related to the 'grandiose'? The 'superficial occult' is associated with 'self-deception', 'credulity', 'fraud', and wishful thinking. From clairvoyants (oracles), Countess Gegina has learned that she would live a long life.[157] Furthermore, she believes in reincarnation[158] and imagines having been several great personalities in earlier lives ('the most incredible former incarnations'). Instead of condemning the superficiality of her occult ideas, Rilke interprets it developmentally as a phase that has the potential to reach the level of the 'deep occult'. According to Rilke, the superficial level has great advantages compared to its nihilistic alternative. The clairvoyant's 'prophecy' of longevity gives her 'a genuine zest for life'. And the belief in the 'incredible former incarnations' compensates for all that she missed out on in this incarnation. For Rilke, it is not the objective truth of her occult-spiritualistic belief that is of central importance, but its *psychological effect*.[159] Not only is Countess Gegina able to approach her psyche and inner life 'without fear', but also with 'interest and attention'. Her occult belief puts her in a state of 'inner concentration' and a 'firmness that does not depend on any outside influence'. In Rilke's view, the dangers associated with the superficial occult are less significant than the 'great

advantages' resulting from this process of spiritual maturation. Rilke's plea for the belief in the 'superficial occult' may be surprising to those who know Rilke as a rigorous critic of blind religious dogma. Yet Rilke seems to have identified a greater potential for inner growth within occultism than within traditional institutionalized religion. Evidently, Rilke assumed an authentic knowledge behind the naive and gullible surface of her spiritualistic and clairvoyant activities.

In the *Memoirs of a Princess*, Marie Taxis provides another example of the intersection between the discourses of aesthetics and occultism (in this case, spiritualism):

> It really seems to me that Rilke lived among the shades at Duino. Not only did he feel the presence of Therese, he was also aware of two other phantoms that seemed as real to him as though time had stood still. These were two of mother's sisters whom I had never known: Raymondine who had died as a bride at the age of twenty, and Polyxene, who had only reached the age of fifteen. We possessed portraits of both these girls. […] One day my brother asked Rilke whether he would like to spend another winter in Duino. After reflecting for a while, the poet said hesitatingly that he would, if it were not so disturbing. There was so much to consider, especially because of Raymondine and Polyxene [sic], who demanded his attention all the time. At first my brother, who had no relation whatsoever with the "fourth dimension", was

> completely at a loss to know what he meant. Raymondine and Polyxene had died long before we were born; they were complete strangers to us, though we sometimes thought about them when we looked at their charming portraits. Yet Rilke often told me that, in spite of the deep silence and the undisturbed calm, he had never really felt that he was alone.[160]

This anecdote confirms the idea that Rilke owes his 'mysterious aura'—at least partly—to a strategy of self-stylization. The princess's brother asks Rilke an entirely common question, to which Rilke—after a long period of thought—gives a spiritualistic answer. We have to assume that Rilke knew the princess's brother to be spiritually 'tone-deaf'. The sheer amount of similar references and comments indicate that Rilke did not mean it ironically. That he not only 'sensed the presence of Theresina', but also—as in the case of Raymondine and Polyxène—conversed with her, is confirmed by another source, according to which Rilke conveyed the content of his 'spirit conversations' to the princess's mediumistically gifted son, Pascha.

# Chapter 2

## The Duino Seances and the 'Unknown Lady'

On Rilke's initiative, four seances were held at Duino in the fall of 1912.[161] Rilke learnt that an English friend ("an extremely knowledgeable and intelligent man" and former governor), whilst staying at the Thurn und Taxis family's castle in Lautschin (Bohemia), wished to experiment with a *planchette*; a device with which one can foster communication with spirits through automatic writing and "get into touch with the unseen world".[162] The princess had explained to Rilke that she had "no ability as a medium"—a comment that filled Rilke with indignation, since Marie Taxis was a longstanding member of the *Society for Psychical Research*. However, since the princess's son certainly had mediumistic abilities, Rilke was determined to attempt to use the *planchette*. The princess describes the scene at the seances: "One evening I brought the planchette to the Red Drawing-room and we had a seance: my son held the pencil, I sat beside him, and Rilke sat at the other end of the room and silently wrote down questions, which he did not read out to us until they had been answered".[163] In other words, Pascha answered carefully concealed questions using the *planchette*. From a parapsychological perspective, there are two possible models which could explain this silent conversation in written form. The first could be called spiritualistic. According to this explanatory model, Pascha functioned as a medium for the spirits, whose messages were transcribed by him in a trance. The spirits read Rilke's questions and answered them through the medium Pascha. The second explanatory model could be called *metapsychic*. On this

model, Rilke's subconscious transmitted its questions telepathically to the trance medium. The Princess explains the mediumistic occurrences as an expression of metapsychism: "I was convinced that it was Rilke's subconscious mind which manifested itself, and told him so, but in spite of my skeptical attitude I was very interested. Serafico did not share my opinion, and the unexpected answers to his unspoken questions impressed him profoundly: sometimes these answers were beautifully formulated, and invariably they betrayed his characteristic style—they might have been dictated by him."[164] As the princess writes, Rilke interpreted this mediumistic conversation in a spiritualistic way.

Different spirit voices appear during the seances, but the main dialogue develops between Rilke and a spirit calling itself 'the Unknown Lady' ('die Unbekannte').[165] It seems it was far from easy to communicate with the Unknown Lady. One is reminded of Kafka's short story *Unhappiness*: "Obviously you have never spoken to a ghost. One never gets a straight answer from them."[166] Sometimes the answers make sense, but mostly they are poetical, unclear and incoherent. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern three main topics. Firstly, the Unknown Lady was a 'great lover' [eine große Liebende] of the same type that Rilke praised in the First Duino Elegy (she was purportedly killed by a jealous husband or lover).[167] The second topic concerns the significance of Rilke's trip to Toledo in Spain, and the third subject refers to Rilke's creative crisis. The second and third topics seem to be closely connected in this spiritualistic dialogue. The Unknown Lady tells Rilke: "You must travel … up the mountain, down into the valley, only toward the stars. … You too will sound like the waves, where steel softly clings to angels. …"[168] Rilke understands the Unknown Lady's message

as an incitement to travel to Toledo in order to regain his inspiration: “In Toledo, will you be close to me?”[169] At the second session, the Unknown Lady mentions “the chains that were worn by the prisoners of the Saracens” and the “red earth” and confirms Rilke’s geographical assumption.[170] A little later, the Unknown Lady prompts him to keep writing: “Everything sounds, but you must sing it with your heart”.[171] Rilke answers: “But my heart has no voice left now, why? Why?”[172] Rilke receives no clear answer to this question.[173] At the end of the seance, a meeting in Toledo is arranged:

> The Unknown Lady: “Go there first, I
> shall follow
> Steel Bridge.
> Rilke: “Please tell me, *which* bridge?”
> The Unknown Lady: “Easier there.”[174]

The medium (Pascha) draws the arch of bridge and adds: “The bridge, the bridge with the towers at each end”.[175]

The third seance pursued the same subjects as the previous ones: the meeting place and a new flourishing of creativity are once more confirmed.

> The Unknown Lady: “When you get there, go under the bridge where the great rocks are, and sing, sing.”
>
> Rilke: “Please help; you will help me?”
> The Unknown Lady: “Yes, towards the Church (?) where bloody steel hangs.”[176]

Rilke, at this point, arranges a rendezvous with a spirit! And that is not all: based on this spiritualistic episode, Rilke immediately begins to organize a trip to Toledo.[177] Even Wolfgang Leppmann, who wrote a book about Rilke that scarcely mentioned his interest in the paranormal, emphasizes the spiritualistic background of his departure to Spain: "His curiosity was further stimulated by spiritualist gatherings held at Duino in the fall of 1912; again the spirits seem to impel him toward Toledo and Roda."[178] Even Rilke's travel itinerary was influenced by the Unknown Lady. During a seance with another medium,[179] a spirit had given her supposed name and location: Rosamonde Trarieu, Bayonne.

On October 31, 1912, Rilke arrives in Bayonne. Here, he seeks the name of the Unknown Lady in a graveyard: "Owing to some well-meant legacy, the cathedral is being rebuilt far too tidily, the cloisters still contain a few ancient strophic arches that are wonderfully harmonious, but no ancient tombstones—as you can imagine, I searched for a certain name [Rosamonde Trarieu], but it is certainly not to be found here any longer. I went to the cemetery, which was being put in order for All Souls Day, with all the railings being hastily lacquered in the rain for the worthy relatives—yet the name is not to be seen anywhere there either, though there are several with the same ending."[180]

Rilke arrives in Toledo at the beginning of November. Already on November 2 (All Souls' Day), Rilke sends a letter to the princess with his first impressions. He seems to have been able to follow the signs of the Unknown Lady leading to the location of the rendezvous. He finds the bridge and describes a feeling of being 'magically' lead by invisible forces:

> And the joy of your first walks, this feeling of being taken and led with indescribable sureness, —imagine it, I took the street of Santo Tomé, then the street of the Angel (Calle del Angel), and it brought me face to face with the church of San Juan de los Reyes, on the walls of which the chains of liberated prisoners hang in rows and rest in peace on the cornices. P.[ascha] had told me in Munich that he had once seen in Baedeker that there was such a church with chains, — without remembering having seen it himself. Now I find it first thing. And from then on nothing accidental, almost you have the desire to look round when making such discoveries in order to find out exactly who is watching, whom you are giving pleasure to, just as children look round when they are learning something.[181]

In addition to the bridge, Rilke also finds the chains mentioned by the Unknown Lady. Leppmann explains the historical background: "During one of these meetings, the anonymous voice seemed to be directing him to Toledo, specifically to a bridge or parapet from which hung the bloody chains of Christians released from Moorish captivity. Hardly had Rilke arrived in Toledo when, without knowing why, he headed for the church of San Juan de los Reyes, where these chains, just as had been suggested to him during the seance, are preserved as votive offerings."[182] It is remarkable that Rilke takes the confirming signs for granted without mentioning a direct

meeting with the Unknown Lady with one word. We may assume that three things were more important to Rilke than such a direct meeting with a spirit. The most important thing to Rilke was, of course, a promised resurgence of creativity. But also the sense of being magically led and achieving a state of heightened perceptiveness were sufficient confirmation and manifestations. Rilke's 'intuitive walks' were a topos among his (mostly female) friends. The princess and Benvenuta write enthusiastically about magical walks with Rilke, during which they seemingly entered other (temporal and spatial) dimensions.[183] On one occasion, Rilke told the princess that there is "no such thing as chance".[184]

The questions posed by Rilke during the Duino seances give important clues to the nature of his spiritualistic interests. In 1908, Rilke wrote a requiem for the young poet Wolf Kalckreuth, who had committed suicide. Four years later, he asked the Unknown Lady twice if she knew anything about him. The Unknown Lady tells him that her 'beingness is as deep as the ocean', but limited by the writing medium, Pascha. Apart from this, he learns nothing about the deceased count. During the next seance, Rilke asks the same question: "I asked about *Wolf*, but you wouldn't listen."[185] The urgency of Rilke's inquiries demonstrates how important it was to him to discover more about Kalckreuth fate. However, once again, the Unknown Lady evades the issue and provides him with a vague poetic answer.[186]

Kalckreuth is not the only supersensous being that rouses his curiosity. He also asks the Unknown Lady about other inhabitants of the spirit world: "Do you feel the angels?" The word 'feel' indicates that Rilke assumes a hierarchy whereby the 'normal spirits' only sense the existence of the superior

angels. Rather than offering a Swedenborgian lecture, the Unknown Land responds once more with poetry: "The t(?)imes rustle like forests".[187]

At the same seance, Rilke is told: "Sensing is different from knowing", and this surprises Rilke: "But do you not know everything?"[188] By expecting the spirit to be omniscient, Rilke is in accordance with Carl du Prel. On the basis of the extraordinary feats of the somnambulists (trance mediums), he had drawn the conclusion that the transcendental subject (the trance self) was superior to the normal consciousness of the earthly person. Being dead, the Unknown Lady ought to be identical with its transcendental self and therefore possess its knowledge.

The fact that Rilke immediately embarked on a journey to Toledo following the seances is one sign of the significance of his contact with the Unknown Lady. Another sign is the mythological status which the Unknown Lady had in the correspondence between Rilke and the Princess Thurn und Taxis. In these letters, the spirit appears as a real person whose 'messages' at the Duino seances were faithfully conveyed to him. In his letters to the princess, Rilke was often keen to hear new messages from the Unknown Lady. The last reference to the Unknown Lady appears in a letter from August 18, 1922, ten years after the primordial four seances at Duino castle with Rilke in the fall of 1912. Soon after the Duino seances, Rilke either conducted his own mediumistic experiments or frequented local seances. Shortly after arriving in Munich from Duino, Rilke visits a medium in order to hear more from the Unknown Lady. All these attempts to make mediumistic contact fail.

Over the next decade, the princess and Pascha (and various participants) conducted a series of seances. Prior to the Rilke seances, the princess had virtually no practical experience within the field of spiritualism. She was, however, very impressed with the results achieved by Pascha and Rilke. She even shows the seance transcripts to visitors: "Recently I read Erich your *compte rendu* [transcripts] from the planchette seances in Duino. He was quite shocked—and the more you read, the more the whole thing astounds you."[189]

Even the philosopher Rudolf Kassner is carried away by the mediumistic activities and ascribes Pascha magical abilities: "Once—in a state of trance—he [Pascha] answered my questions in the most stunning way."[190] The Kassner seances are mentioned in one of Princess Marie's letters: "I wanted to tell you that Pascha tried to write [automatically] again on two successive evenings. Kassner put inaudible questions to him [Pascha] and the answers were remarkably to the point, ironical, almost humiliating—they impressed him very much".[191]

Much to Rilke's disappointment, an entire year passes without the Unknown Lady appearing at the Duino seances held by Pascha and the princess. This silence of the spirit world could be the reason why Rilke decides to perform his own *planchette* experiment in July 1913. He asks the princess where he can acquire the spiritualistic device, since he longs for new messages from the Unknown Lady.[192] The Princess answers him: "I just read through your letter again and find that you would like to have a planchette—I will see whether I can order one for you from England. My little one was given to me—so I don't know where one can find them".[193]

In October 1913, Rilke finds a clairvoyant in Munich who explains to him that he possesses a certain subtle matter or 'fluid', and that he would, indeed, be able to write automatically himself:

> I saw much of Annette Kolb in Munich, very little came of my plan to stir up the 'spirits' in my favour; evidently the spirits will have none of me. In the end I visited a clairvoyant who gazed into a crystal ball, a worthy woman who assured me I possessed twice as much 'fluid' as she herself. She promised me I should succeed in making use of it (Heaven preserve me!) and that I could write automatically at any time without needing anyone else. Thereupon Annette, whom I had told about these results, obtained a very nice planchette from London— we made one single attempt together, but I was quite disgusted, I feel I am transgressing I know not what law in lending my hand to this manoeuvre, so I did not want to do it again. And yet I would so much like the 'Unknown Lady' to speak to me…[194]

As we can see from this letter, it was not Princess Marie who finally acquired a *planchette* for Rilke, but rather Annette Kolb, who located one in London. Rilke is so dissatisfied with his own mediumistic results that he provisionally gives up any further attempts to be a medium himself. In her reply, the princess confirms Rilke's reluctance to act as a medium

himself: “I am not surprised that the ‘Unknown Lady’ no longer comes—but do not go in for it *yourself*, D.S. [Dottor Serafico[195]], I believe that would be the worst and most dangerous thing for you.”[196]

In December 1913, the correspondence is dominated by the sensational release of Schrenck-Notzing’s book *The Phenomena of Materialisation.*[197] Rilke’s critical attitude towards the photographic and theoretical investigation of *ectoplasm* leads to an assessment of the Unknown Lady:

> You must be aware that this is not directed against the ‘Unknown Lady’, *she* has the expansive urge, and though I should never hear from her again, for me she is still soaring somewhere, and in communication with everything in us that can remain soaring. Yet I would not like to undertake the slightest thing designed to attract even her […] No, despite the assurances of the crystal-gazer, I dislike this *métier*, and I shall take good care not to direct my little stream into these ambiguous channels, where it might stagnate until it became a real bog, throwing up bubbles and will-o’-the-wisps in the vitiated air.
>
> You, however, Princess, are protected, for you have *knowledge* of these thing, you need not rely on emotions and you cannot be taken in by any spirit, because you know the spirits, too, by intuition, and can judge to what extent a spirit

> trying to contact us from outside might be more clumsy and more limited.[198]

It is clear that Rilke's disapproval of Schrenck-Notzing's ectoplastic experiments does not affect his positive view of the Unknown Lady. When he writes that he "would not like to undertake the slightest thing designed to attract even her", it is not entirely true: right until the beginning of the twenties, he continues to take part in spiritualistic seances. In 1916, for example, he asks if a certain Miss Hofmeister would possibly be interested in experimenting with the *planchette*.[199]

The 'assurances of the crystal-gazer' is an allusion to the clairvoyant's assessment in Munich—that he would himself be capable of writing automatically. But, at this point, Rilke's doubts about the mediumistic *métier* carry more weight than his fascination. In his opinion, the princess possesses better capacities for discernment than he does.

In January 1915, Rilke again asks the princess if there are any messages from the Unknown Lady, hoping she 'has not given up on him'.[200] Indeed, she had not. In April 1915, the Unknown Lady appears during a seance with Pascha:

> Yesterday evening we 'worked magic' [held a seance with automatic writing]. You know how it goes with Pascha—quite remarkable, and so fast that we could hardly follow—a few things came for you too, D. S.—After many interesting statements the following, which I am copying out for you, quite suddenly:

> ‘Why does he not sing?’
>
> Question: ‘Who is to sing?’
>
> Answer: ‘The *poeta*—write to him that he must, he should. His duty. His destiny. He must. Once he was touched by—No—Write to him I will have it.—He must not forget, for that is the only reason why he lives. Otherwise he will lose the part he has won. Yes.—I have spoken.’
>
> ‘I, who see almost the entire string.’
>
> Then it was over—The string (the string of pearls) has been used symbolically for our lives and the continuity of our existence—that time *it* had said:
>
> ‘Often you are at the beginning. Often, yes often, in the middle—sometimes, but only the elect, at the great end—and then you will know the whole string.’
>
> Strange—and hardly less strange if it is only one’s own subconscious mind speaking.[201]

Rilke received this seance transcript at a time when he was himself taking part in seances in Munich:

> Pascha is surely one of those ‘initiates’ who are quite unaware of their knowledge—the [automatic] ‘writing’ is a secondary function of this predisposition; here [in Munich] it is practiced very frequently, both rightly and

> wrongly, people 'work magic' as hard as they can, but not so well; I took part in three seances, at the last one I was told all sorts of things, ridiculous things which had only the vaguest connection with me—it is quite a different kind of voice from that which dictates at Duino—I could not read it without that great shock of surprise, which not only gives a jolt to one's consciousness, but penetrates it through and through. Yes, if it is the subconscious speaking, it is no less overwhelming and wonderful.[202]

In all other places than Duino, Rilke's mediumistic experiments seem to fail. On three occasions, he was disappointed by seances in Munich.[203] The transcript sent to him by the princess has a deeper effect: a 'shock' affecting his conscience. The content of this mediumistic message is hardly more than a repetition of the artistic imperative transmitted during the 1912-seances. No wonder Rilke is conscience-stricken: after publishing his novel Malte, he had suffered a creative crisis, which—ever since the 1912 seances in Duino—was linked to the completion of the Duino Elegies.[204] The 'string of pearls' and the 'continuity of our existence' are descriptions related to the phenomenon of reincarnation. It appears as though the Unknown Lady would like to enhance the significance of her message by emphasizing her high level of spiritual development. The 'string of pearls' metaphorically denotes the entire succession of incarnations experienced by the individual soul. The underlying idea is the concept of progressive development towards higher levels of consciousness. Knowing the 'whole string' means to know one's earlier lives. A soul

that can view the whole string is—according to this paradigm—a very wise soul who is no longer in need of incarnating.[205]

Which role did the Unknown Lady play in the correspondence between Rilke and Princess Marie Thurn and Taxis? On the one hand, the Unknown Lady appeals to Rilke's artistic conscience in a phase of unproductiveness. On the other hand, she promises a blossoming of creativity, a *promesse de créativité*. Apart from isolated poetic outbursts, the decade following the completion of *Malte Laurids Brigge* was characterized by a creative drought.

In 1914, at a time when only the first two *Elegies* (and some sketches) were committed to paper, Rilke writes to Princess Marie: "O God, Princess, if it were not for you, and Duino and (possibly) the 'Unknown Lady'—and if the *Elegies* were not in your hand… these are the *Ifs* to which I cling."[206] The *Duino Elegies* were—as the title of the cycle indicates—bound to Duino Castle and the princess's possession from the outset. After the Duino seances, the Unknown Lady becomes a symbol of the possible completion of Rilke's *opus magnum*, the *Duino Elegies*.

# Chapter 3

## The Tension between Spiritualism and Psychology

Rilke could not rightfully be called a proponent of modern spiritualism had his view of spiritualism been ideological. Generally, Rilke had leanings towards the spirit hypothesis, but he did not rule out metapsychic, parapsychological and psychological explanations.[207] Earlier, we saw that the Princess Thurn und Taxis interpreted the Unknown Lady as Rilke's own subconscious mind communicating telepathically with his conscious self through a medium. Princess Taxis added to the seance transcript from April 1915: "Strange—and hardly less strange if it is only one's own subconscious mind speaking."[208] Rilke sides with the princess regarding this fluctuation between telepathic metapsychism and the spirit hypothesis: "Yes, if it is the subconscious speaking, it is no less overwhelming and wonderful."[209] Rilke's oscillation between spiritualistic and (para-)psychological theories constitutes a lasting strategy when dealing with paranormal phenomena and is well documented in several works and letters. One example can be found in a letter to the Princess Thurn und Taxis. In the period between Rilke's departure from Munich in mid-June 1919 until the turn of the year 1920, there was a lacuna in the otherwise regular correspondence between Rilke and the princess. Despite this gap, when Rilke eventually wrote in January 1920, he could not resist hinting at a spiritualistic occurrence which took place in Munich: "Have I told you about the 'apparition' I saw in Munich shortly before I left?"[210] The princess answers instantly and impatiently: "You did not tell me anything about your apparition??"[211] On May 3, Rilke has still neglected to

relay his ‘ghost story’ to the princess: “[T]he second was my ghost-story, which I would not be so impatient to communicate to you if I were only sure that I can expect to see you again in the not too remote future.”[212] Even though this episode may appear trivial at first sight, on closer inspection, it reveals the importance and aesthetic zest that Rilke attached to his personal spiritualistic experiences. He is even willing to wait a long time before he relays them. In other words, his spiritualistic experiences become part of a repertoire of attractive anecdotes.

In April 1918, Rilke attends a lecture on spiritualism and parapsychology:

> A man from Graz has been here and gave three lectures about spiritualism. He went right back to Reichenbach, who had already shown everything and had no need of spirits. According to him *la table tournante* is nothing but a divining-rod in another form. Certain ‘waves’ create their ‘field of force’ which is psychically used and determined by the subconscious. The audience contradicted, being confirmed adherents of the ‘spirits’. Examples were cited, but they were all so vague that one took the part of the lecturer.[213]

At this point, one could assume that Rilke was skeptical about spiritualism as such, while, in fact, he was only opposed to the poor quality of the pro-spiritualistic arguments presented. However, Rilke clearly demonstrates how well versed he is in the terminology of parapsychology (*la table tournante,*

divining-rod, supersensuous ‘waves’, and ‘field of force’). As we will see in the following chapters, Rilke’s criticism does not mean that the ‘oscillation’ between metapsychism and spiritualism is abolished.

# Chapter 4

## Rilke Acting as a Medium for the Spirit of Count C. W.

The formative circumstances of Rilke's *From the Remains of Count C.W.* constitute a prime example of the peaceful coexistence of the spiritualistic and psychological explanatory models. From the middle of November until May 1921, Rilke lived at the Berg am Irchel Castle in Switzerland. The cycle of poems consists of two parts. Rilke finished the transcript of the first part at the beginning of his sojourn in the middle of November 1920. The second part was written in spring (March-April) 1921. In the first of Rilke's letters after the completion of his poems, there is a rational-psychological explanation of the origins of the poems. In a letter to Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, Rilke describes that he was seeking the trace of an earlier inhabitant of the castle ("die Spur eines bergischen Vorwohners"):

> It was strange, by the way. I was too much alone, didn't know enough about the house, about its past, about those who lived here (I'm a bit frightened of the little Escher girl, she's not very communicative and has an understanding with her little dog in which I am not allowed to participate—in short: I wanted to find something like a footprint of one of Berg's previous occupants, i.e. a notebook discovered one evening in a bookcase, just look: who could it

> have been? I imagined, quite superficially, a figure—the situation helped—but in spite of all my imagining the said notebook failed to turn up, what remained for me to do but to invent it? And there it lay, closed, in front of me … *Poems*, just think—on the first page you will read: 'From the Remains of Count C.W.' Strange things, for which I, most agreeably, have no responsibility whatsoever. No but, joking apart, I didn't know what it meant, this game—it was charming and so it charmed me on—(by the way, the whole was the work of three days and done as one knits—presume).
>
> Only now do I understand how it kept turning up day after day: as I was not quite in the mood or quite fit for my own work I had, it seems, to invent a 'pretext' figure, someone to take responsibility for whatever could be formed at this highly insufficient level of concentration: this was Count C. W.[214]

In Rilke scholarship, this psychological explanation of (his) artistic origins is regarded as Rilke's final word on this cycle of poems. Boventer—author of the only book on the cycle—seems happy to emphasize that all occult explanations lose their 'brilliance' ('Farbkraft') on the basis of this letter. The interpretation of Count C. W. as a pretext for production (Produktionsvorwand) resolves the matter. However, even though this unambiguity is prevalent in contemporary Rilke scholarship, the Rilke documents themselves tell a different

story. What speaks against the (solely) psychological explanation is the fact that the letter to 'Nike' was not a late retraction of earlier mystifications.[215] On the contrary; after having first tried to explain the phenomenon in a rational-psychological way, he then shifts to the spiritualistic/ mediumistic model of explanation. Fourteen days after his letter to Wunderly-Volkart, he writes to Princess Thurn und Taxis:

> I have perpetrated something very queer, which comes to my mind in using this 'high-falutin' style. As I found no books (except a set of Goethe's works) here, nor any chronicles or similar things connected with this little château which has belonged to the Escher von Luchs family for centuries—I undertook, in a kind of quasi productivity, to fill a notebook with verses, pretending I had found them in a cupboard. It was very strange—my pen was literally 'directed', poem for poem, except for a few passages where one might recognize me, although it was neither my style nor my thought which was expressed here, complete from the beginning. (I wrote them *sans brouillon* straight into the note-book.) It contains *one* very fine (Egyptian) poem, which I would have liked to be mine, but which never could have taken shape in me like that. This took place in a flash on three successive evenings—on the second I wrote, very rapidly, without reflecting for a moment, on the title-page: *From the Papers of*

> *Count C.W.* (as I also did when taking down the dictation)—without thinking of any name these initials might suggest—but absolutely certain that they were the right ones. What ever can it have been?[216]

After half a month, Rilke changes his mind about the genesis of the poems. He no longer argues in psychological terms, but instead only employs the spiritualistic explanatory model. It was pure *écriture automatique*: his pen was "literally 'directed', poem for poem". He regards the 'dictated' poems as below his usual standards, but he nevertheless regrets *not* having written one of them: *In Karnak wars* [It was in Karnak]. He describes himself as a medium without a will of his own having to obey the dictate without reflection. Accordingly, he writes the title of the cycle with somnambulic certainty, including the initials of the dictating spirit C. W., "absolutely certain that they were the right ones".

On March 6 1921, Rilke sends the first part to Princess Marie[217], who was eagerly awaiting its arrival.[218] Once more Rilke denies any responsibility for the authorship:

> If most of it disappoints you (amateurishness, banalities, etc.) then please take into account: *it is not I,* it is something that has been completely 'dictated' to me, including the initials C.W., which I am unable even to complete, and that not 'Palermo 1862'—that was dictated *malgré moi,* as the poems themselves were, in a flash …[219]

Three and a half months later, Rilke still insists on the spiritualistic explanation. By examining the princess's responses, we can identify an interesting dialectic concerning the ownership of the poems:

> "Serafico carissimo—only today can I write to you properly—first and foremost of the remarkable 'Nachlaß'—the day before yesterday, I read it out loud once again to Alex, Pascha and the professor. Actually, I cannot get over my astonishment—there is so much that is so unlike you—just as if it were dictated—and then again there are certainly some things which only you could have written "... and bore Egypt's night" – this sends a chill down the spine—a very strange, very deep and eerie current—and the delightfully beautiful Aglaja—This was yet another great pleasure that I must thank you for, Serafico[.][220]

Princess Marie Taxis is more paradigmatic of the modern approach than Rilke, since she recognizes both the role of spiritualistic *and* artistic mediumship.

Originally, in his letter to Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, Rilke had explained the *Remains of Count C.W.* in a rational-psychological manner, but now he also changes his explanation. In December 1921, at which point Rilke had been living at Muzot Castle (near Sierre in Valais) for four months,

he reads an article in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, which mentions the castle's famous occupant—Rilke himself:

> But now something very, very strange emerges. There must have been poets in Berg during the 18th century, and the beginning of the 19th—she cites some of the 24 stanzas of the poem (see attached), about the young Escher's death; he who plummeted down from Mont Blanc and killed himself —. Admit it: is there not something about the tone of these stanzas which reminds one of …… Count C. W.? At least that tone he used when he first appeared??—And that Nanny von Escher uses the expression 'jugendlichen Toten' [the young dead] which appears in much the same way as it is used in one of his elegies ('jugendlich Toten' is how it is expressed there), exactly *the same* expression! *Qu'est-ce que vous en dites* [*What do you have to say about that*]? Does *she* still not know anything about Count C. W.? Or have you told her something at some point?[221]

The article by Nanny v. Escher seems to indicate a possible model for Rilke's ghostly Count C. W. Rilke even thinks that the poet, who died more than one hundred years earlier, wrote in a similar style to the first poem 'dictated' by Rilke. Why does Rilke replace his first rational-psychological explanation with a spiritualistic one? Paradoxically, there is a psychological reason behind it. In his first interpretation of the episode, Rilke

wrote that he was not "quite in the mood or quite fit" for his own work. We know that, since 1912, Rilke had waited for the inspiration which would allow him to complete the cycle of the *Duino Elegies*, and the purpose of his isolation at Berg am Irchel was the completion of his *opus magnum*. With this in mind, it is not without irony that Rilke, after having created the optimal external circumstances, only 'dictates' mediocre poems by a deceased count. [222]

For some modern interpreters, such as Boventer, it is irritating when Rilke oscillates between naiveté (spiritualism) and critical reflection (skeptical psychology). Within the contemporary milieu, it is extremely unlikely that an author would account for his or her lack of artistic creativity with spiritualistic arguments. So why did Rilke rely on a spiritualistic explanatory model? The answer lies in the specific cultural climate of the period 1880-1930. Treitel summarizes the situation: "Rilke turned to a spirit guide because spirit guides were then an available device for artistic production and had been since the 1880s."[223]

# Chapter 5

## Spiritualistic Seances in the Early Years in Switzerland

After the war, Rilke continues his spiritualistic experiments, which are documented in several letters and other accounts. In November 1919, Rilke gives a reading in Basel, and a small celebration is held in his honor: "Moreover, the circle of people around the painter Nikolaus Stöcklin [sic], which include his sister Francisca and a few young artists, are very attentive and friendly: they held a little party for me in Stöcklin's studio, which I will tell you about …"[224] After the celebration, a seance is held in Stoecklin's atelier. His fiancé, Elisabeth Schnetzler, gives the following account: "Late in the evening we began to talk about all kinds of mysterious observations and sounds, and it was suggested that we might try it with a table that moves. The elation was, however, somewhat disturbed by a few sober, realistic remarks from my husband, until the disturber of the peace took himself away. After his departure, there was a wonderful understanding and movement, of which he was told later."[225]

On February 28, 1920, Rilke came to the Ritterhof (Basel), which belonged to the family of Carl J. Burckhardt. Burckhardt was friends with Hofmannsthal and shared Rilke's interest in spiritualistic and paranormal phenomena. Already on the first night of his stay, Rilke relayed the story of the seances in Duino and the Unknown Lady:

> I saw Rilke for the first time in 1919, when I was in Switzerland for fourteen days, we met each other amongst a larger company where Rilke told of his strange spiritualist experience at the Castle Duino, he came back to it again later. […] During his most recent stay at Duino some spiritualistic experiments were conducted; such things always hold a strong attraction for him. There occurred all manner of strange manifestations, as always happens in his presence, and finally, amid a terrifying and Lemurian rabble, there appeared, over and over again, the figure of a girl [the Unknown Lady] who enchanted Rilke with the lustre and wonderfully deep character of her answers.[226]

Burckhardt recounts the entire course of events with which we are already familiar; his journey to Bayonne and Toledo, locating the church with the chains, and so on. As one might expect, the story takes on legendary features through oral transmission. Rilke writes in the letter to the princess that he did *not* find the grave of the Unknown Lady. However, in Burckhardt's legend, he does find it: "There was something or other—of this he felt quite sure—that led him to a cloister in the old city, and there in the cloister, on to a grave, and it was the 18-year-old girl's grave, the very one who had spoken to him."[227] Furthermore, in Burckhardt's version, the Unknown Lady promised to appear to Rilke in Toledo if he touched the right chain. This is not supported by the seance transcripts. It can be concluded from Burckhardt's report that the spiritualistic story about the Unknown Lady belonged not only

to the internal correspondence between Rilke and the princess, but also to Rilke's collection of interesting anecdotes.

As well as Duino, Switzerland also provided fertile soil for Rilke's interests in the paranormal. As early as March 1920, Rilke organizes spiritualistic seances at the Wenkenhof Manor. Fanny Clavel gives the following account:

> Another time Rilke was staying with Burckhardt and my brother Gilbert Clavel at the Wenkenhof. This time he wanted to play 'table-turning' with us; he believed in manifestations form the spiritual world; he wanted to see the Wenken ghost, or at least feel its presence. The table moved and told us some strange and absurd things, amongst others, that my husband would be murdered by his servant before the year was out. This made Rilke very concerned; a year later he phoned me from Sierre, where he lived in the little Castle Muzot [prior to this he was at the Castle Berg am Irchel], and asked about my husband.[228]

The 'spirit of Wenkenhof' was allegedly the founder of the estate, Zaeslin, who—according to local rumors—still haunted Wenkenhof. His ominous prophecy indicates that, at this seance, they only attracted what Rilke once referred to as the 'cast off in the spirit world'.[229] However, Rilke apparently took the prophecy so seriously that, one year later, he enquired to see whether it had come true.

In June 1920, Rilke writes to Wunderly-Volkart from Basel:

> There is, however, another special reason for my staying at Ritterhof today: a spiritualistic seance with the writing of letters by means of a glass that the younger Stöcklin, Betz, Francisca, a young man, Angela, and I attended. It grew late, as you can probably imagine, half past one, and it was dangerous for A., as the voices from her subconscious (it was clear that this was what they were) caused high flames to flare out from her.[230]

Rilke describes the modern oscillation between spiritualism and psychology as a subtle tightrope walk. According to Rilke, the personal subconscious may suddenly break through in an otherwise spiritualistic setting. The voices from Angela's subconscious are likely to stem from her repressed sexuality (Rilke uses the metaphor 'flames'). Later, Rilke wrote to Francisca Stoecklin:

> I doubted, moreover, even back then, that our strange seance led to this diversion and violent effect –, it was no less terrifying for that, but with one stroke we were a long way from what one might call an exact and proper experiment! I wonder, do you still get together for similar experiments in the little side room at the old courthouse?[231]

It is worth observing that Rilke regards the spiritualistic (i.e. non-psychological) part of the session as an exact and 'obedient' experiment. Usually the word 'exact' is used in connection with scientific experiments. Rilke's use of the word in a spiritualistic context indicates a certain affinity with parapsychology.

Rilke's experiments with suggestion, which were performed within Fanny Clavel's social circle in October 1920, also belong to the sphere of parapsychology:

> We trained ourselves in 'suggestion'; one of us had to wait outside in the corridor until the others had decided what he should do. It came to Rilke's turn; I brought him back into the room and touched his wrist, without any pressure. At the same time, we all concentrated on his task. And lo and behold: he was an excellent medium; without hesitation he went over to the clock that stood on the mantelpiece, and moved the hands forward one hour. The experiment was also successful the other way round; Rilke led me—an incredibly strong will emanated from him—and I felt clearly what it was they wanted me to do.[232]

These experiments with telepathic suggestion exemplify how easily the discourse of hypnosis can develop into parapsychology. Mental suggestion at a distance (*distance*

*hypnosis*) differs from verbal suggestion and can be traced back to the somnambulistic movement around 1800. However, the phenomenon of telepathic distance hypnosis resurfaced in the 1890s, when several scientists and psychologists once again adopted it as an object of research. In 1886, Pierre Janet's research into telepathically induced distance hypnosis (published in the *Bulletin de la Société de Psychologie Physiologique*) caused a sensation.[233] In the city of Nancy in France, Bernheim and Liébault had conducted investigations into suggestion and hypnotherapy since the 1880s. And in Germany, Max Dessoir, Albert Moll, and Schrenck-Notzing[234] performed their own experiments. It is also clear from Fanny Clavel's report that the method of distance hypnosis had become a (popular) parlor game among the upper classes in Switzerland. Nevertheless, this parlor game was obviously inspired by the resurgence in telepathic distance hypnosis research. Although Rilke considered himself a poor spiritualistic medium, he was seemingly successful as a hypnotic medium; it appears as though Rilke functioned perfectly as both as a receiver and transmitter of telepathic distance suggestion.[235]

# PART IV

# Spiritualistic and Occult Motives in Rilke's Works

# Chapter 1

## The Spiritualistic Requiems

Rilke's *Requiem for a Friend* introduces a theme that is obviously spiritualistic. Rilke's close friend, the painter Paula Modersohn-Becker, had recently died from an embolism shortly after giving birth to her daughter. Rilke could have written a traditional monologic elegy. Instead, he forms the *Requiem* as a spiritualistic interaction between the spirit of Paula Modersohn-Becker and himself. The initial situation is in itself spiritualistic: the poetic persona (Rilke)[236] laments the fact that the 'you' (Paula)—instead of staying in the spirit world—returns to the physical world as a revenant. Rilke addresses a traditional spiritualistic topos: that haunting—generally speaking—is the result of a cosmic error:

> Nur du, du kehrst
> zurück; du streifst mich, du gehst um, du willst
> an etwas stoßen, dass es klingt von dir
> und dich verrät. [...] du irrst
> wenn du gerührt zu irgend einem Ding
> ein Heimweh hast.[237]

> [Only you
> return; brush past me, loiter, try to knock
> against something, so that the sound reveals
> your presence. […]
> I'm sure you have gone astray

if you are moved to homesickness for anything
in this dimension.][238]

Ever since the time of somnambulism (and later spiritualistic literature), the after-earthly mode of being has been described as a heightening of consciousness. In *Das Rätsel des Menschen* [The Riddle of Man] by Carl du Prel, which Rilke read as a young man, the baron gives the following description of death: "On the basis of the spiritualistic phenomena, death reveals itself as a heightening of the individuality, and since the life hereafter is in a certain sense corporeal, death can be considered the essence ('Essentifikation') of our whole being, both of the consciousness and of the corporeality."[239] Similarly, Rilke writes that Paula is mistaken if she longs after earthly things. Already in the poem *Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes* from 1904, Rilke had expressed his view of death by depicting the self-contained Eurydice as an ideal figure. Orpheus symbolizes the earthly[240] dimension and love as attachment; the dead Eurydice, on the other hand, does not long for the earth or earthly love:

Sie war in sich, wie Eine hoher Hoffnung,
und dachte nicht des Mannes, der voranging,
und nicht des Weges, der ins Leben aufstieg.
Sie war in sich. Und ihr Gestorbensein
Erfüllte sie wie Fülle.
Wie eine Frucht von Süßigkeit und Dunkel,
so war sie voll von ihrem großen Tode,
der also neu war, daß sie nichts begriff.[241]

[She was deep within herself, like a woman heavy
with child, and did not see the man in front
or the path ascending steeply into life.
Deep within herself. Being dead
filled her beyond fulfillment. Like a fruit
suffused with its own mystery and sweetness,
she was filled with her vast death, which was so new
she could not understand that it had happened.][242]

Rilke refers to these Eurydice-like dead in the first lines of the *Requiem*: "Ich habe Tote, und ich ließ sie hin / und war erstaunt, sie so getrost zu sehn, / so rasch zuhaus im Totsein, so gerecht, / so anders als ihr Ruf." ("I have my dead, and I have let them go, / and was amazed to see them so contented, / so soon at home in being dead, so cheerful, / so unlike their reputation.")[243] The reputation of the dead is, of course, that they return and *want* something from the living. Hitherto, 'Rilke's dead' had been "at home in being dead" and did not make their presence felt by the living. These Eurydice-like dead are more advanced or superior spirits, and Rilke imagined that Paula would belong to them. Therefore, he is disturbed that she has returned to the earthly realms: "Ich glaubte dich viel weiter. Mich verwirrts, / daß *du* gerade irrst und kommst, die mehr / verwandelt hast als irgend eine Frau."[244] ("I thought you were much further on. It troubles me / that *you* should stray back, you, who have achieved / more transformation than any other woman.")[245] The transformation Rilke refers to is Paula's artistic activity as a painter. Here, Rilke echoes the metaphysical poetics of Maurice Maeterlinck, who had influenced the young Rilke through his essays on the eminent role of the artist in the evolution of consciousness. Rilke called

this process the transformation of the visible world into invisible treasures.[246] The only explanation for Paula's return — according to Rilke—is the shock of her loved ones after her death, including Rilke himself.[247] Rilke makes it clear that his resistance to Paula's haunting does *not* correspond to his general opinion. In *some* cases, the appearance of a spirit in *this* world can be meaningful. According to Rilke, the advanced Eurydice-like spirits can come, for our sake, out of 'kindness' and 'abundance'.

Rilke realizes that he has to accept Paula's invisible presence: "Come into the candlelight / I'm not afraid / to look the dead in the face. When they return, / they have a right, as much as other Things do, to pause and refresh themselves within our vision."[248] In a letter to Franz Xaver Kappus, Rilke wrote that we should have "courage for the most strange" that we may encounter, including the spirit-world. [249] And in *Malte Laurids Brigge*, Count Brahe's ability to accept the paranormal as normal is presented as an ideal. The contrasting figure is Malte's father, Chamberlain Brigge, who, angry and terrified, stands up as the spirit Christine Brahe appears. The chamberlain is rebuked by Count Brahe, who claims that Christine is no stranger (she is a member of the family) and has a right to be amongst them (in the physical world).

The *Requiem for a Friend* revolves around the 'In-Between'; the intermediary realm where the physical world and the spiritual world meet. This contact contains two elements: a spiritualistic and a mediumistic. The spiritualistic dimension is related to the manifested haunting of the spirit Paula: she 'brushes' past Rilke, hoping "to knock / against something, so that the sound reveals"[250] her presence. He even compares her to a thief waking him up in the night.[251] Later, Rilke seeks a

positive contact: “If you are still here with me, if in this darkness / there is still some place where your spirit resonates / on the shallow soundwaves stirred up by my voice: / hear me; help me.”[252] At this point, Rilke considers the possibility that the physical soundwaves of his voice could reach Paula’s invisible realms.

The mediumistic aspect relates to the ability of the living to perceive and communicate with a spirit. Monika Fick has convincingly demonstrated that Rilke was acquainted with Jakob von Uexküll’s *Umwelt* theory and the epistemology of sensuous–supersensuous monism. Rilke combines the former with the latter: an occult reception of the idea that every being and species have different spaces of perception. Rilke continually refers to the *Umwelt* of animals as reaching into a realm invisible to the human eye; for example, an animal’s ability to perceive ghosts. In the *Requiem*, this idea manifests itself as Rilke’s wish to see the world through the eyes of the animal: “Dann aber will ich, wenn ich vieles weiß, / einfach die Tiere anschaun, daß ein Etwas / von ihrer Wendung mir in die Gelenke / herübergleitet; will ein kurzes Dasein / in ihren Augen haben, die mich halten / und langsam lassen, ruhig, ohne Urteil.“ (“And only then, when I have learned enough, / I will go to watch the animals, and let / something of their composure slowly glide / into my limbs; will see my own existence / deep in their eyes, which hold me for a while / and let me go, serenely, without judgment.”)[253] The role of the animal in this context is clear. Instead of grasping “like a blind man”, Rilke wants to see Paula with the clairvoyant gaze of the animal eye.

Let us now return to Rilke’s thoughts on the reason for Paula’s haunting. He perceives her intention as a ‘pleading’ (which he considers worse than a reproach). Whilst attempting to decipher

Paula's wish, Rilke seems indebted to a Swedenborgian notion that Goethe also takes up in *Faust*: that the spirits are able to make use of the physical senses of a living person: "Sag, soll ich reisen? Hast du irgendwo / ein Ding zurückgelassen, das sich quält / und dir nachwill? / Soll ich in ein Land, / das du nicht sahst, obwohl es dir verwandt / war wie die andre Hälfte deiner Sinne?" ("Tell me, must I travel? Did you leave / some Thing behind, some place, that cannot bear / your absence? Must I set out for a country / you never saw, although it was as vividly / near to you as your own senses were?"[254]) Rilke offers his sense organs to Paula so that she can experience that which she missed out on in life. In a similar way, Pater Seraphicus offers the "choir of blessed boys" to make use of his sensory organs in order to perceive the landscape of mountain defiles (*Bergschluchten*): "Steigt herab in meiner Augen / Welt- und erdgemäß Organ, / Könnt sie als die euern brauchen, / Schaut euch diese Gegend an!" [255] ("Down descending in the organ / Worldly—earthly of mine eyes, / As your own ye may employ them, / And upon this region gaze.[256]) Goethe had read Swedenborg in his youth, and he refers to the notion on several occasions. Rilke could have encountered this notion in Goethe, but it is more likely that he draws upon the same source as Goethe, i.e. Swedenborg himself.[257]

The *Requiem for a Friend* has a tripartite structure: a—b—a. In the first part (a), Rilke describes his emotional and spiritual resistance toward the experience of Paula's return to the physical earth as a ghost. Paula, whom Rilke—in virtue of her artistic ability and her 'unpossessive gaze'[258]—regarded as an advanced soul, returns and pleads for something which Rilke tries to decipher. In the second part (b), he is trying to find a meaning in her presence: "Wenn die Toten hier sind, haben sie

ein Recht dazu." ("When they [the dead] return, / they have a right".)[259] In the end, Rilke reverses the pleading by returning to his initial position (a):

> Komm nicht zurück. Wenn du's erträgst, so sei
> tot bei den Toten. Tote sind beschäftigt.[260]
>
> [Do not return. If you can bear to, stay
> dead with the dead. The dead have their own
> tasks.[261]

Only two days after writing *Requiem for a Friend,* Rilke began to write his *Requiem for Wolf Graf von Kalckreuth*, a work dedicated to a young poet who took his own life. In this Requiem, the spiritualistic context is less conspicuous. Rilke was not personally acquainted with Count Wolf Kalckreuth, but his fate touched him so deeply that he wrote a passionate speech to the dead. The theme of speech is contained in the famous motto: "Wer spricht von Siegen? Überstehn ist alles." ("Who talks of victory? To endure is all.") The young poet should have endured his fate, should not have chosen death so hastily. It is only at the end of the poem that Rilke alludes to explicitly spiritualistic themes:

> Sei nicht beschämt, wenn dich die Toten streifen,
> die andern Toten, welche bis ans Ende
> aushielten. (Was will Ende sagen?) Tausche
> den Blick mit ihnen, ruhig, wie es Brauch ist,
> und fürchte nicht, daß unser Trauern dich
> seltsam belädt, so daß du ihnen auffällst.[262]

[Don't be ashamed, when the dead brush against you,
those other dead, who held out to the end.
(What, after all, does end mean?) Exchange glances
peacefully with them, as is customary,
and have no fear of being conspicuous
through carrying the burden of our grief.][263]

In this poem, the poet is lectures the newly dead about the afterlife! He knows the customs of the dead. The question "Was will Ende sagen?" ("What, after all, does end mean?") is, of course, rhetorical: according to Rilke, human consciousness does not cease to exist after physical death. Rilke *knows* that Kalckreuth—choosing to take his own life—has violated the cosmic laws (warnings against suicide were common in spiritualistic and theosophical literature). Nevertheless, Rilke urges him not to be ashamed of his decision.

# Chapter 2

## Spiritualistic Elements in the First Duino Elegy

The first great works that Rilke completed after finishing *Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910) are connected with Duino; a place that held a special spiritual meaning for Rilke. At approximately the same time that Rilke wrote the first two *Duino Elegies*, he had an out-of-body experience where he 'stepped over to the other side of death'. Rilke explains that, whilst in this other state of consciousness, it would have been more surprising to encounter a person in the flesh than a spirit. Rilke's communication with Princess Taxis was not only about artistic, but also occult matters, which had an aesthetic significance for them. It was in this occult environment that the first *Duino Elegy* came into existence; a prose poem containing several spiritualistic passages. The beginning of the *First Elegy* is a cry of anguish to the supersensuous angel. The poetic persona is trying to approach the angel's mode of being. The following passage is devoted to the 'women in love' (*die großen Liebenden*). The second half of the *Elegy* is characterized by spiritualistic elements:

> Stimmen, Stimmen. Höre, mein Herz, wie sonst nur
> Heilige hörten: daß die der riesige Ruf
> aufhob vom Boden; sie aber knieten,
> Unmögliche, weiter und achtetens nicht:
> So waren sie hörend. Nicht, daß du *Gottes* ertrügest
> die Stimme, bei weitem. Aber das Wehende höre,
> die ununterbrochene Nachricht, die aus Stille sich bildet.

Es rauscht jetzt von jenen jungen Toten zu dir.
Wo immer du eintratest, redete nicht in Kirchen
zu Rom und Neapel ruhig ihr Schicksal dich an?
Oder es trug eine Inschrift sich erhaben dir auf, wie neulich
die Tafel in Santa Maria Formosa.

Was sie mir wollen? leise soll ich des Unrechts
Anschein abtun, der ihrer Geister
reine Bewegung manchmal ein wenig behindert.[264]

[Voices. Voices. Listen, my heart, as only
saints have listened: until the gigantic call lifted them
off the ground; yet they kept on, impossibly,
kneeling and didn't notice at all: so complete was
their listening. Not that you could endure
God's voice—far from it. But listen
to the voice of the wine
and the ceaseless message that forms itself out of silence.
It is murmuring toward you now from those who died
[young.
Didn't their fate, whenever you stepped into a church
in Naples or Rome, quietly come to address you?
Or high up, some eulogy entrusted you with a mission,
as, last year, on the plaque in Santa Maria Formosa.
What they want of me is that I gently remove the
appearance of injustice about their death—which at times
slightly hinders their souls from proceeding outward.][265]

The *First Elegy* and the *Tenth Elegy* frame the whole cycle of prose poems. In this prominent position, the two elegies acquire an increased significance. The *First Elegy* introduces themes

that are linked through leitmotiv to the following nine elegies. Here we encounter the first mythological figures characteristic of the *Elegies* as a whole: the angel, the animal, 'the women in love' (*die großen Liebenden*), the saint, and 'those who died young' (*die jungen Toten*). The final part of this prominent elegy is devoted to a spiritualistic topic, which underlines Rilke's attachment to spiritualism. And it is hardly a coincidence that the *Tenth Elegy,* the other cornerstone of the cycle, also evolves around a spiritualistic theme: the poetic creation of the *death realm of lament*.

The passage begins with two elements: 'voice' and 'heart'. Both words, however, no longer belong to conventional semantics, but are transformed into spiritualistic metaphors. The 'voices' belong to the spirits, and the 'heart' mediumistically[266] reaches into the supersensous realms. The omega point of the evolution of consciousness and the highest link in the great chain of being, God, is beyond the scope of the mediumistic poet. Without a veil, the divine light would blind the poet. Only the levitating saints who remain kneeling when the voice of God lifts them off the ground are able to bear this force. They are 'impossible' in two regards: firstly, because they disregard gravity by levitating and, secondly, because—from the perspective of normal existence—it is not possible to endure the immense power of God without a veil ("Not that you could endure God's voice—far from it").

Instead of following the 'impossible' saints, the poet turns to 'those who died young', whose voices are audible in the stillness of meditation.[267] The 'voice of the wind' ('das Wehende') and the 'ceaseless message' emanate from the ever-present spirits, whose attempts to communicate are mostly drowned in the noise and restlessness of everyday life. The

spirit's voices can only reach one's ear if one listens closely with the help of a 'sensitive heart'. Having established the necessary stillness, the 'murmuring' of 'those who died young' begins.

The following stanza displays a change of perspective. Until now, Rilke has been occupied with the possibility of a mediumistic reach into the supersensous realm of spirits. But, suddenly, the reader is placed in the perspective of the spirit itself:

Freilich ist es seltsam, die Erde nicht mehr zu bewohnen,
kaum erlernte Gebräuche nicht mehr zu üben,
Rosen, und andern eigens versprechenden Dingen
nicht die Bedeutung menschlicher Zukunft zu geben;
das, was man war in unendlich ängstlichen Händen,
nicht mehr zu sein, und selbst den eigenen Namen
wegzulassen wie ein zerbrochenes Spielzeug.
Seltsam, die Wünsche nicht weiterzuwünschen. Seltsam,
alles, was sich bezog, so lose im Raume
flattern zu sehen. Und das Totsein ist mühsam
und voller Nachholn, daß man allmählich ein wenig
Ewigkeit spürt. – Aber Lebendige machen
alle den Fehler, daß sie zu stark unterscheiden.
Engel (sagt man) wüßten oft nicht, ob sie unter
Lebenden gehn oder Toten. Die ewige Strömung
reißt durch beide Bereiche alle Alter
immer mit sich und übertönt sie in beiden.

Schließlich brauchen sie uns nicht mehr, die Früheentrückten,
man entwöhnt sich des Irdischen sanft, wie man den Brüsten

milde der Mutter entwächst. Aber wir, die so große
Geheimnisse brauchen, denen aus Trauer so oft
seliger Fortschritt entspringt -: *könnten* wir sein ohne sie?[1]

Of course, it is strange to inhabit the earth no longer,
to give up customs one barely had time to learn,
not to see roses and other promising Things
in terms of a human future; no longer to be
what one was in infinitely anxious hands; to leave
even one's own first name behind, forgetting it
as easily as a child abandons a broken toy.
Strange to no longer desire one's desires. Strange
to see meanings that clung together once, floating away
in every direction. And being dead is hard work
and full of retrieval before one can gradually feel
a trace of eternity.— Though the living are wrong to believe
in the too-sharp distinctions which they themselves have
[created.
Angels (they say) don't know whether it is the living
they are moving among, or the dead. The eternal torrent
whirls all ages along in it, through both realms
forever, and their voices are drowned out in its thunderous roar.

In the end, those who were carried off early no longer need us:
they are weaned from earth's sorrows and joys, as gently as
[children
outgrow the soft breasts of their mothers. But we, who do need
such great mysteries, we for whom grief is so often

[1] SW I 687f.

the source of our spirit's growth—: could we exist
[without *them*?[268]

Here we appreciate what it means to cross the border between physical and astral existence. The recently deceased speaks to the reader about this unsettling transition and the differences between these two modes of existence. At first, the text places particular emphasis on the things that one must forgo as a deceased person—the identity connected to one's name and social role—and laments that, in death, earthly expectations lose their meaning. We learn that being dead is "hard work and full of retrieval" until one grows accustomed to this timeless mode of existence.

In the last stanza, the psychological situation of 'those who were carried off early' ('die Frühentrückten') is contrasted with that of the bereaved. The 'outgrowing' of the earthly dimension is described as a natural and unproblematic process. Yet, for the bereaved, it is a different matter. When viewed from a conventional perspective, it is anything but easy to ascribe a positive meaning to the death of a loved-one. The grief one feels in such an existential situation is interpreted as an inner heaviness, and our spiritual growth is bound to the task of transforming the grief. Asking if we could exist without 'those who were carried off early', Rilke even equates the meaning of life with our ability—as spiritual alchemists—to transform emotional pain into inner gold (acceptance). From this spiritual perspective, grief is a blessing in disguise, since it allows us to overcome its resistance and develop spiritually.

# Chapter 3

## Scandinavian Courtesy and Spiritualistic Modernity in Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*

Rilke scholarship has been perplexed and troubled by the undeniable elements of spiritualism and paranormal occurrences in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*; a novel which otherwise seems to conform to the traditional view of modernistic nihilism. Undoubtedly, the novel mirrors Malte's genuinely modern experience of fragmentation, alienation, and existential anxiety confronted with the disturbing reality of the metropolis of Paris. However, in Rilke's only novel, this nihilistic modernity seems to coexist peacefully with ghosts and other paranormal phenomena. Apparently, Rilke did not make a clear distinction between the discourses of modernity and spiritualism. In the literature of nihilistic modernity around 1900, it was not uncommon for paranormal phenomena to be revealed as unreal or the product of deliberate fraud. Another strategy was chosen by Henry James, who, in his famous novel *The Turn of the Screw,* created such an ambiguous tension between psychology and parapsychology that the scholarship divided into two camps: the proponents of the hallucination theory and the proponents of the spiritualism theory. Rilke, however, had no intention of creating such ambiguity; nor did he wish to unmask the paranormal as fraudulent. When asked by the scholar Hermann Pongs about the 'occult incidents' in *Malte*, Rilke writes: "The 'occult occurrences' in Malte: in part accurately recounted experiences of childhood in Prague, in part things experienced and heard in Sweden. Here moreover

one of the reasons why the fictitious figure of M. L. Brigge was made a Dane: because only in the atmosphere of the Scandinavian countries does the ghost appear ranged among the possible experiences and admitted (which conforms with my own attitude)."[269]

In this letter, Rilke clearly commits to a view of the occult and paranormal as a legitimate part of reality. In the *Malte* novel, this is the positively connotated Brahe mentality. Considering the number of episodes relating to paranormal and spiritistic phenomena in the novel, this is a telling fact. The most important episodes are:[270]

1) The Christine (and the first Count Brahe) Episode[271]
2) The Ingeborg Episode[272]
3) The Ghost Hand Episode[273]
4) The Subtle-Matter Emotions[274]
5) The Ghost House Episode at the Schulins[275]
6) The second Count Brahe Episode[276]
7) The Automatically Writing Hand Episode[277]
8) The Goethe-Bettine Episode[278]

To these episodes we can even add the second version of the beginning of the novel. It begins with a scene in which Malte Laurids Brigge relays a ghost story to a friend in front of the fireplace:

> Es war als "wäre mir damals der wichtigste Wink meines Lebens gegeben worden, ein Rat, eine Lehre—und nun ist alles verfehlt nur weil ich diesen Rat nicht befolgt, weil ich diesen

> Wink nicht verstanden habe; weil ich nicht gelernt habe, nicht aufzustehen, wenn sie eintreten und vorübergehen, die, welche eigentlich nicht kommen dürften, die Unerklärlichen."[279]
>
> [It was, as if "I was given the most important hint of my life, an advice, a teaching—and everything has failed because I did not follow the advice, because I did not understand the hint; because I did not learn not to stand up when they arrive and walk by, those who should not actually be coming, the inexplicable."][280]

The spiritistic motif dominates the childhood memories and, in the second version of the beginning, Rilke reveals the deeper meaning of the sections taking place in Denmark. Here we have to understand the peculiarity of the passage: in his life, the most important advice Malte received was to remain seated when the ghosts arrived and walked past! 'Remain seated' must be understood metaphorically as an attitude corresponding to the so-called Scandinavian mentality mentioned in Rilke's letter to Pongs, which involved acknowledging and placing the ghost among the possible occurrences; a mentality which—according Rilke himself—accords with his own. And in the previously quoted *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rilke writes:

> That, when you come down to it, is the only kind of courage that is demanded of us: the courage for the oddest, the most unexpected, the most inexplicable things that we may encounter.

> That human beings have been cowardly in this regard has done life endless harm; the experiences we describe as 'apparitions', the entire so-called 'spirit world', death, all those things so closely akin to us have by our daily rejection of them been forced so far out of our lives that the senses with which we might apprehend them have atrophied.[281]

A character that represents this courage in an ideal way in *Malte Laurids Brigge* is Count Brahe. By means of his clairvoyance, he sees the dead as a natural part of reality.[282]

Three versions of the beginning of the novel are included in the *Sämtliche Werke*-edition of *Malte Laurids Brigge*. The first version is very short. In the second version, the third-person narrative is a classical ghost-story setup in front of the fireplace. Rilke, in other words, originally wanted to begin this 'first modern German novel' with Malte telling his friend about the haunting of Christine. However, it was not only in the second, but also the final version, in which spiritistic childhood memories were positively connotated. This is evident from the structural position of the Christine Brahe episode, which immediately follows the famous "Is it possible" passage and which, in a radical way, questions the validity of the existing cultural tradition. The scholar Schlütter identifies that Malte Laurids Brigge must begin to write about the 'real' and 'important' issues—and tells a ghost story! The ghost story following Malte's fundamental questions centers on Christine from Malte's childhood. It describes how Malte and his father visit Count Brahe, Malte's maternal grandfather, in the old

castle of Urnekloster (which, in English, literally means *Urn Monastery*). The Brahe lineage and the inhabitants of the castle all have a connection with the paranormal sphere. Count Brahe himself experiments with alchemy and regards the dead as actual existing entities. Malte's mother's distant cousin, Mathilde Brahe, is drawn to spiritualism: "[Sie unterhielt] eine sehr rege Korrespondenz mit einem österreichischen Spiritisten […], der sich Baron Nolde nannte und dem sie vollkommen ergeben war, so daß sie nicht das geringste unternahm, ohne vorher seine Zustimmung oder vielmehr etwas wie einen Segen einzuholen."[283] ("[she] maintained an extremely vigorous correspondence with an Austrian spiritualist who called himself Baron Nolde and was completely under his thumb, never doing the smallest thing without obtaining approval or, rather, what amounted to his blessing.")[284] Malte's mother recites a ghost story in which Ingeborg appears shortly after her hour of death and—invisible to humans—is seen by the clairvoyant dog. Sten, who is from the Danish peninsula of Jutland and works as Count Brahe's valet, reads the Swedish spirit-seer Swedenborg and descends from a Brahe-like family: "Die Familie Stens hatte seit je Umgang mit Geistern gehabt, und Sten war für diesen Verkehr ganz besonders vorausbestimmt. Seiner Mutter war etwas erschienen in der Nacht, da sie ihn gebar."[285] ("Sten's family had always been familiar with spirits and Sten was marked out by destiny for this kind of communication. His mother had seen an apparition on the night he was born."[286] And little Erik, Malte's cousin, closes the door behind the ghost Christine with a deep bow: a true display of 'Scandinavian courtesy'!

Let us take a closer look at the Christine episode. The haunting hour is during the evening meal. Even before Christine appears

as a ghost, her apparition is anticipated by the absence of Mathilde Brahe. Malte's father asks if Mathilde is unwell. Count Brahe answers: "Nein, sie wünscht nur, Christinen nicht zu begegnen."[287] ("No, she simply does not wish to meet Christine.") Malte's neighbor at dinner, the tan-faced major, leaves the table and tries to warn Erik and Malte who, despite his efforts, remain seated. Both Mathilde and the Major know what awaits those who decide to stay. Suddenly, a slim lady in a light-colored dress appears. Malte's father leaps to his feet and moves towards the lady, "totenbleich im Gesicht, mit herabhängenden geballten Händen" ("his face deathly pale, his fists clenched at his sides").[288] When the 'lady' is about to pass the table, the count demonstrates his equanimity and says to Malte's father: "Du bist heftig, Kammerherr, und unhöflich. Was läßt du die Leute nicht an ihre Beschäftigungen gehen?" ("You are impetuous, Chamberlain, and discourteous. Why do you not let people go about their business?") When asked who it was, the count answers: "Jemand, der wohl das Recht hat, hier zu sein. Keine Fremde. Christine Brahe." ("Someone who has every right to be here. Not a stranger. Christine Brahe.")

The next morning, Malte's father begins to pack and prepare for their departure. However, instead of leaving, he changes his mind and remains at *Urnekloster* with Malte for an additional eight or nine weeks. Laconically, the text says: "wir sahen noch dreimal Christine Brahe."[289] ("we saw Christine Brahe on three further occasions.")[290]

At the time, Malte was unaware that Christine had died many years previously whilst giving birth to her second child. He did not know that she was a dead woman. Yet Malte's father—who is described as a man "eager to be logical and clear-thinking"—was in possession of this information. In other words, Malte's

father was a rationalist to whom the appearance of the 'impossible' (a ghost) in the otherwise normal reality was a serious blow. What follows in the ensuing months is the inner development of Malte's father towards a 'Brahesque' concept of reality; the very mentality which Rilke ascribes to Scandinavia in the aforementioned *Letter to a Young Poet*. Malte notes: "Ich sah, ohne zu begreifen, wie er mit sich kämpfte, ich erlebte es, ohne zu verstehen, wie er sich endlich bezwang."[291] ("I could see, though I could not appreciate, how he struggled with himself; I witnessed it without understanding how he finally won through.")

When Christine appears for the final time, the characters who contrast Count Brahe's stoicism are the major and Mathilde Brahe, who again anticipates the haunting. Mathilde jumps up and disappears with a "shrill wail". This time, the major cannot escape and has to endure the quiet walking-by of Christine Brahe, albeit not stoically. The major cuts a poor figure: His mouth is open and his tongue moves about behind his decayed teeth; his hands are trembling and he is slumped face-down on the table. The major is not courageous enough to "face the strangest, most unusual, most inexplicable experiences that can meet us", as Rilke writes to the young poet—on the contrary. Finally, Count Brahe raises his glass to Malte's father as a final test to see how he has fared with his inner struggle. As Christine walks by, he reaches for his glass and lifts it "wie etwas sehr Schweres eine Handbreit über den Tisch"[292] ("a hand's-breadth above the table") as if it were something very heavy. He does not possess the mastery of the smiling old man, but he passes the test. He and Malte are now able to leave.

Thus far, we have been discussing the final version of the beginning of Rilke's *Malte Laurids Brigge.* In this final

version, the central character is Malte's father, and not Malte himself, since it is Malte's father who cannot remain calmly seated during Christine's apparition. In the second version, however, it is Malte who cannot remain seated, whereas Malte's father 'had still been able to [remain seated], albeit not effortlessly'. In the final version of the novel, Malte's father gradually learns to overcome his fear of Christine's ghost and to stay calm in her presence. The fact that Malte—at the time of the apparitions—is unaware of Christine's ghostly ontological status remains unchanged.[293]

The Ingeborg Episode is a ghost story which Malte's mother used to tell him. Ingeborg is a member of the Brigge family who live on the Ulsgaard Estate. However, at an early age, she dies of an illness. Malte's mother narrates a ghostly scene that takes place shortly after the funeral. Malte transcribes the story as his mother used to tell it. After having described the family's attempt to restore an atmosphere of normality following their tragic and painful loss, Malte's mother dramatically anticipates the occurrence of the impossible: "Aber an diesem Nachmittag, Malte, da sie wirklich nicht mehr kommen konnte, –: da kam sie. Vielleicht war es unsere Schuld; vielleicht haben wir sie gerufen."[294] ("But on that afternoon, Malte, when she really could not come anymore—she did come. Perhaps it was our fault; perhaps we called her.") The personal pronoun 'we' refers to the members of the Ulsgaard family, who are gathered for tea on the terrace. It is the time of day when Ingeborg usually brought the mail. Having momentarily forgotten Ingeborg's death, Malte's mother is expecting Ingeborg to arrive at any moment, when, suddenly, the dog jumps up:

Da schoß schon Cavalier, wie er immer tat, unter dem Tisch hervor und lief ihr entgegen. Ich hab es gesehen, Malte, ich hab es gesehen. Er lief ihr entgegen, obwohl sie nicht kam; für ihn kam sie. Wir begriffen, daß er ihr entgegenlief. Zweimal sah er sich nach uns um, als ob er fragte. Dann raste er auf sie zu, wie immer, Malte, genau wie immer, und erreichte sie; denn er begann rund herum zu springen, Malte, um etwas, was nicht da war, und dann hinauf an ihr, um sie zu lecken, gerade hinauf. Wir hörten ihn winseln vor Freude, und wie er so in die Höhe schnellte, mehrmals rasch hintereinander, hätte man wirklich meinen können, er verdecke sie uns mit seinen Sprüngen. Aber da heulte es auf einmal, und er drehte sich von seinem eigenen Schwunge in der Luft um und stürzte zurück, merkwürdig ungeschickt, und lag ganz eigentümlich flach da und rührte sich nicht.[295]

[… Cavalier shot out from under the table, as he always did, and ran towards her. [I saw it, Malte; I saw it.] He ran towards her, although she was not there; for him she *was* there, coming. We grasped that he was running to meet her. Twice he looked round towards us, as if putting a question. Then he raced towards her, as he always did, Malte, just as he always did, and reached her—for he began to frisk right around, Malte, around something that was not there, and then up at her to lick her, right up. We heard him whimpering for joy, and to see him jump right

> up like that, you could really have thought he was concealing her from us by his jumping. But suddenly he howled out, and swung back in mid-air from his own momentum, and plunged to the ground with a remarkable clumsiness and lay there, curiously flat, not making a move.[296]]

Although the chamberlain is not usually fond of animals, he honors the dog by carrying it into the house. The numerous assurances made by Malte's mother ("I saw it"), are intended to anticipate critical objections. Through its ability to sense a wider field of reality, the dog clearly belongs to the 'Scandinavian' or Brahesque category; something which the Rilke scholar Eppelsheimer also recognizes: "The fact that the dog in this 'apparition' scene carries the name 'Cavalier' tells us that it—in this moment—is the only one who shows the spirit the appropriate reverence while the humans are caught in impolite rigidity."[297]

Whereas the spirit is perceived by a collective in the Christine episode—making it impossible to reject it as a subjective hallucination—Rilke, in the Ingeborg episode, makes use of another artful 'trick': he lets the dog witness the impossible coming of the deceased: "letting the dead be perceived, not by a human, but by a dog, is an additional ploy of the author. Thereby he anticipates many counter-arguments of the inveterate skeptic. In this way, human manipulation or fraud is out of the question."[298] The Ingeborg episode is followed by the episode with the ghost hand, which might belong to Rilke's own childhood memories.[299] In recent scholarship on spiritualism in Rilke's work, the ghost hand has—under the

banner of postmodernism—given rise to several metapoetic reflections.[300] Since in this study we deal with spiritualism primarily as a cultural code, we will take a closer look at a possible *source* for this episode. First of all, let us lend our ear to Malte's narrating voice. The experience of the ghost hand took place when Malte was still a young child ("Wie klein ich damals noch gewesen sein muß, sehe ich daran, daß ich auf dem Sessel kniete, um bequem auf den Tisch hinaufzureichen, auf dem ich zeichnete.")[301] ("How small I must still have been at the time I can see from the fact that I was kneeling on the armchair to be within easy reach of the table I was drawing on.")[302]. As a child, Malte had neither the linguistic nor the cognitive abilities to communicate his experience. Once, after his mother told him the Ingeborg story, he almost mentioned his experience with the 'hand': "[I]n diesem Augenblick hätte ich es gekonnt."[303] ("On one occasion, when it had grown almost dark as she told this story, I was on the brink of telling Maman about the 'hand': at that moment, I could have.")[304] Eventually, Malte comes to the conclusion that this episode was incommunicable: "Ich fürchtete mich vor Mamans Gesicht, wenn es sehen würde, was ich gesehen habe."[305] ("And […] I was afraid of what Maman's face would be like, once it saw what I had seen."[306]) Here, Malte brings up a motif which combines the contemporary perspective of the metropolis of Paris with his Danish childhood memories: the 'seeing'. Malte's project of 'learning to see' does not accidentally lead to a reflection upon the experiences of childhood that are connected with the super-sensual and clairvoyance. In the relation to his mother, there seems to be a close connection between 'narration' and 'imaginative seeing' as a visionary capability. This is the difference between mere fantasy of the fairy-tale and the real wonders of imagination:

> Wenn Maman mal eine halbe Stunde kam und Märchen vorlas […], so war das nicht um der Märchen willen. Wir hatten einen anderen Begriff vom Wunderbaren. Wir gaben nicht viel darauf, durch die Luft zu fliegen, die Feen enttäuschten uns, und von den Verwandlungen in etwas anderes erwarteten wir uns nur eine sehr oberflächliche Abwechselung.[307]
>
> [At times, when Maman came for half an hour to read me fairy tales […], it was not for the sake of the stories. We were in agreement that we did not care for fairy tales. Our idea of what was wondrous was a different one. We felt that the most wondrous thing of all was when things happened perfectly naturally. We were unimpressed by flying through the air; fairies disappointed us; and when things were transformed into something else, we had no expectation of anything but the most superficial of changes.][308]

An example of the genuinely wondrous appeared in the Ingeborg episode. Malte was only able to *see* Ingeborg when his mother described how the dog's jumping movements outlined the contours of her body. In the second Count Brahe episode, we hear that the "days of telling stories" were before Malte's time.[309] Count Brahe, on the other hand, was a storyteller. When Abelone is unable to write 'Eckernförde' during a dictation, he says, "Sie kann es nicht schreiben […]

und andere werden es nicht lesen können. Und werden sie es überhaupt *sehen*, was ich da sage?“[310] (“She can’t spell it, […] and no one else will be able to read it. Will they even *see* what I’m writing?”[311])

The highlighted *seeing* (*Sehen*) is the imaginative seeing which makes the narrated real.[312] Because imaginative *seeing* is so intense, Malte is afraid of his mother’s terrified face when she *sees* his story of the ‘hand’. Later, at *Urnekloster*, he is keen to relay the story to little Erik, but he never gets the opportunity. This means that the narrative realization of this experience is saved for the Parisian author Malte.

In the episode with the ‘hand’, Rilke carefully describes how the young Malte is sitting at the table drawing and suddenly drops his crayon to the floor. With an abundance of details, the reader learns about his search for the crayon in the dim light under the table. Suddenly, something impossible happens:

> Aber wie hätte ich darauf gefaßt sein sollen, daß ihr mit einem Male aus der Wand eine andere Hand entgegenkam, eine größere, ungewöhnlich magere Hand, wie ich noch nie eine gesehen hatte. Sie suchte in ähnlicher Weise von der anderen Seite her, und die beiden Hände bewegten sich blind aufeinander zu. Meine Neugierde war noch nicht aufgebraucht, aber plötzlich war sie zu Ende, und es war nur Grauen da. Ich fühlte, daß die eine von den Händen mir gehörte und daß sie sich da in etwas einließ, was nicht wieder gutzumachen war. Mit allem Recht, das ich auf sie hatte, hielt ich sie an

> und zog sie flach und langsam zurück, indem ich die andere nicht aus den Augen ließ, die weitersuchte. Ich begriff, daß sie es nicht aufgeben würde, ich kann nicht sagen, wie ich wieder hinaufkam.[313]
>
> [But how could I have expected another hand suddenly to come towards it from the wall, a larger and unusually thin hand, such as I had never seen before? It was searching in similar fashion, from the other side, and the two outspread hands moved blindly towards each other. My curiosity was not yet satisfied, but all at once it was at an end, and all that remained in its place was horror. I sensed that one of the hands belonged to me and that it was about to enter into something that could never be righted again. Asserting all the right I had over it, I stopped it and withdrew it, slowly and held flat, never taking my eyes off the other hand as it continued to search. I cannot say how I got up again.][314]

The young boy's horror transfers to his body. He sits paralyzed in the armchair. He is pale and his teeth are chattering. Noticing his frightful state, his alarmed governess shakes him. Malte wants to tell her about the episode, but the experience turns out to be incommunicable: "Ich schluckte ein paarmal; denn nun wollte ich es erzählen / Aber wie? Ich nahm mich unbeschreiblich zusammen, aber es war nicht auszudrücken, so daß es einer begriff. Gab es Worte für dieses Ereignis, so war

ich zu klein, welche zu finden.“[315] (“I swallowed a couple of times; for now I wanted to tell her. / But how? I made an indescribable effort to pull myself together, but it could not be expressed so that someone else would understand. If there were words for what had happened, I was too small to find them.”)[316] The young child cannot find the right words. Having reached the necessary development of consciousness, the twenty-eight-year-old Malte uses the experience as a means of artistic articulation. The reader, then, has to decide whether he really *sees* the ‘hand’ as a result of Malte’s description.

As mentioned above, recent scholarship has focused its attention on the perspective of metapoetics. However, if the *ghost hand* were just a metaphor of artistic writing, why should Rilke go to such lengths to describe the experience and its horror in such detail? Why does he make such an effort to linguistically confer the shock to the reader? Is it really sufficient to interpret the episode as a metapoetic allegory? It is certainly not sufficient if the aim of such artistic expression is to generate a transformative experience. Postmodernism has certainly drawn marginalized discourses into the field of scholarly investigation. Unfortunately, this has led to a certain interpretative lopsidedness, since the paranormal is reduced to a metaphor of poetics. This, however, is a misapprehension. In Moritz Baßler’s analysis of Rilke’s work, the ghost hand is simply a step in the development toward the ‘saying of the radically different’.[317] Baßler even criticizes Rilke for not finding the appropriate textures for the *écriture automatique*:

> Die merkwürdige Zwischenstellung des *Malte* liegt also darin, dass er die spiritistisch-

> emphatische Rhetorik poetologisch vertextet, ohne selber die dazu passenden Texturen aufzuweisen. Was der Modernität dieses Textes Abbruch tut, ist, wenn man so will, die Tatsache, dass es darin noch nicht genug spukt. Maltes Schreibhand verselbständigt sich gar nicht, das Projekt einer *écriture automatique* wird im Text nicht umgesetzt […].[318]
>
> [The strange intermediate position of *Malte* rests on the fact that Rilke finds language for the spiritistic-emphatic rhetoric, without himself finding the appropriate textures. In a way, one could say that the text is not haunted enough, and that this detracts from its modernity. Malte's writing hand does not assume independent existence, and thus the project of *écriture automatique* is not implemented in the text].[319]

The normativity expressed by Baßler is in accordance with the postmodern paradigm that regards literary texts as meta-reflections on writing. In this context, a ghost hand cannot be a 'real' ghost hand! The reader who opens himself to the underlying conception of reality will discover that more is at stake in *Malte* than the writing process itself.[320] Perhaps Rilke reproduced his own childhood experiences when writing the ghost hand episode, as he seems to suggest in the letter to Pongs. However, in spiritualist literature, we can also locate a possible model for the ghost hand in *Malte*.[321] As we established earlier, Rilke was familiar with Carl de Prel's *Der Spiritualismus*. In this work, du Prel quotes William Crookes:

"A luminous hand came down from the upper part of the room, and after hovering near me for a few seconds, took the pencil from my hand, rapidly wrote on a sheet of paper, threw the pencil down, and then rose up over our heads, gradually fading into darkness."[322] This independent luminous hand—which takes a pencil, frantically writes, and subsequently disappears—could easily be interpreted as an allegorical description of the *écriture automatique* had the intention not been entirely unambiguous.

In another famous passage involving automatic writing, Rilke uses biblical language to express its visionary prospect:

> Aber es wird ein Tag kommen, da meine Hand weit von mir sein wird, und wenn ich sie schreiben heißen werde, wird sie Worte schreiben, die ich nicht meine. Die Zeit der anderen Auslegung wird anbrechen, und es wird kein Wort auf dem anderen bleiben, und jeder Sinn wird wie Wolken sich auflösen und wie Wasser niedergehen. Bei aller Furcht bin ich schließlich doch wie einer, der vor etwas Großem steht, und ich erinnere mich, daß es früher oft ähnlich in mir war, eh ich zu schreiben begann. Aber diesmal werde ich geschrieben werden.[323]
>
> [But a day will come when my hand will be far away from me, and, when I command it to write, the words it writes will be ones I do not intend. The time of that other interpretation will come, and not one word will be left upon another, and

> all the meanings will dissolve like rain. Though I am full of fear, I am yet like a man in the presence of greatness, and I recall that I often used to have this sensation within me before I began to write. But this time it is I who shall be written.][324]

Some scholars have interpreted these lines as an expression of mysticism. Although mysticism should not be disregarded, in this passage, Rilke draws more upon the contemporary current of spiritualism and automatic writing. The medieval mystic saw him- or herself as the instrument of God; in the context of modern occultism and spiritualism, there are at least four explanations for the source of automatic writing: it could be suggestions from spirits; it could be the own 'transcendental I' (the soul); it could be perceived agnostically as 'unknown forces'; or it could be explained as the workings of the unconscious mind. Malte's will commands his hand to write, but, as Malte remarks, "the words it writes will be ones I do not intend". An almost identical passage is found in Madame Guyon's *Les Torrents Spirituels*—quoted by du Prel in a passage on mediumship.[325] The time of 'the other interpretation' (der anderen Auslegung) heralds a modern spiritual and mediumistic art. The tone of language is prophetic and the style biblical: the old meaning (Sinn) will dissolve like clouds (wie Wolken) and new meaning will fall down 'like rain' (wie Wasser niedergehen). Post-structuralist interpreters misunderstand this metaphor when they claim that all meanings dissolve. The bad artist (the young, immature Malte) writes, whilst the mediumistic artist (the ideal Malte of the future) 'is written'.

In the final part of *Malte Laurids Brigge*, the relationship between the young Bettine von Arnim[326] and the elderly Goethe is part of Rilke's exploration of 'intransitive love'. It is, however, no ordinary love story; Goethe is, so to speak, confronted with a metaphysical being:

> Sie [Bettine] hat von Anfang an sich im Ganzen so ausgebreitet, als wär sie nach ihrem Tod. Überall hat sie sich ganz weit ins Sein hineingelegt, zugehörig dazu, und was ihr geschah, das war ewig in der Natur; dort erkannte sie sich und löste sich beinah schmerzhaft heraus; erriet sich mühsam zurück wie aus Überlieferungen, beschwor sich wie einen Geist und hielt sich aus.[327]
>
> [From the very start she was present in everything, as if she already had her death behind her. Everywhere she [Bettine] entered into the profound depths of being, herself a part of it, and whatever happened to her was an eternal part of Nature; there she recognized herself, and pulled back with something akin to pain; she pieced herself together again, laboriously, as if inferring herself from the tales people tell, and conjured herself up like a spirit, and endured herself.][328]

Rilke combines two spiritualistic motives in order to deconstruct the Goethe myth: the field of perception of the dead (Totenwahrnehmung) and automatic writing.

The state-of-being-dead is described as being one with the world. In the poem *Der Tod des Dichters* [The Poet's Death], Rilke lets us see the world with the gaze of the dead poet: the expanded field of vision encompasses meadows (Wiesen) and streams (Wasser). Similarly, Bettine is not alienated from the surrounding nature, but rather part of it.

In order to understand these two experiences of a new *Umwelt*, we have to know the occult implications. Carl du Prel explained occult epistemology as follows: the beyond is *this* world perceived differently (das Jenseits ist das "anders angeschaute Diesseits" [329]). At first glance, the Bettine-Goethe constellation seems to be about Goethe's failure to respond to Bettine's intransitive love. However, the spiritualistic motif introduced at the beginning of the passage describing Bettine's expanded perception of the dead is relevant throughout this episode. As mentioned, Bettine had extended herself into the totality (das Ganze), "as if she had her dead behind her"; she 'conjured herself up like a spirit'. Later, we hear that she is not human, but 'elemental' (Element). In other words, the epistolary love encounter between the great poet (Goethe) and the spirit (Bettine) has spiritualistic undertones. This reading is further supported by the poetic-mediumistic imperative that the poet should have written what Bettine "dictated, with both hands, like John on Patmos,[330] kneeling."[331] The poet should have written what the spirit dictated! The poet did not "humble himself" before the spirit. He did not renounce his 'splendour' (his earthly personal I, his social role), and

therefore he missed the glories of the mediumistic poet, presented (again) in biblical language:

> Es gab keine Wahl dieser Stimme gegenüber, die ‘das Amt der Engel verrichtete’; die gekommen war, ihn einzuhüllen und zu entziehen ins Ewige hinein. Da war der Wagen seiner feurigen Himmelfahrt. Da war seinem Tod der dunkle Mythos bereitet, den er leer ließ.[332]
>
> [That voice, which ‘performed the office of the angels‘, left him no choice; it was come to enfold him and bear him away to eternity. Here was the chariot of his fiery ascension. Here was the dark myth he left void, prepared against his death.][333]

The narrator is aware that this interpretation radically contradicts traditional Goethe reception: “Alle haben diese Antworten gelesen und glauben ihnen mehr, weil der Dichter ihnen deutlicher ist als die Natur.”[334] (“Everyone has read those replies, and people place more credence in them, because the poet is more intelligible to them than Nature.”[335]) Despite his status as the very symbol of poetic greatness, according to the narrator, Goethe missed the ‘chariot of his fiery ascension’ to eternity. His death could have been ‘ein dunkler Mythos’ (‘a dark myth’); if only he had obeyed the ‘voice’, he could have ‘performed the office of the angels’, i.e. the ultimate achievement of the mediumistic poet. The poet Goethe did not achieve this *mediumistic* greatness.

The paranormal and ghostly themes in *Malte Laurids Brigge* are not restricted to spiritualism and automatic writing. In two episodes, Rilke seems to have been influenced by the theosophical theories on subtle matter.[336] Although art scholarship has established the impact of these theories (e.g. Besant and Leadbeater's *Thought-forms* from 1901) on the development of non-figurative and avant-garde art works, there is still a need to investigate their impact on literature.[337] An implication of the subtle matter theory is that feelings and thoughts leave subtle-matter (or astral) traces.[338] This is particularly true for strong (negative) emotions. In *Malte Laurids Brigge*, such traces are depicted with great intensity:

> Die Existenz des Entsetzlichen in jedem Bestandteil der Luft. Du atmest es ein mit Durchsichtigem; in dir aber schlägt es sich nieder, wird hart, nimmt spitze, geometrische Formen an zwischen den Organen; denn alles, was sich an Qual und Grauen begeben hat auf den Richtplätzen, in den Folterstuben, den Tollhäusern, den Operationssälen, unter den Brückbögen im Nachherbst: alles das ist von einer zähen Unvergänglichkeit, alles das besteht auf sich und hängt, eifersüchtig auf alles Seiende, an seiner schrecklichen Wirklichkeit. Die Menschen möchten vieles davon vergessen dürfen; ihr Schlaf feilt sanft über solche Furchen im Gehirn, aber Träume drängen ihn ab und ziehen die Zeichnungen nach.[339]

> [The existence of the terrible in every particle of the air. You breathe it in as part of something transparent; but within you it precipitates, hardens, acquires angular, geometrical forms in among your organs; for all the torments and horrors suffered at places of execution, in torture chambers, in madhouses, in operating theatres, under the arches of bridges in late autumn—all this is possessed of a tenacious permanence, all of it persists and, jealous of all that is, clings to its own frightful reality. People would prefer to be able to forget much of it; sleep files away gently at the grooves in the brain, but dreams drive it away and trace the lines anew.][340]

The style of Rilke's prose differs fundamentally from the mostly idealizing accounts of the occultists; we only have to compare it to Rudolf Steiner's *Aus der Akasha-Chronik*, in which fantastic phases of early human development are described in a matter-of-fact and objective manner. By virtue of his artistic sensitivity, Rilke is capable of depicting the ugly side of human existence. It is no coincidence that, in the preceding note, Malte reflects upon the aesthetics of the ugly in Baudelaire's famous poem *Une Charogne*. Without borrowing any technical terms from theosophy or occultism, Rilke evokes the terrible consequences of living in places with affective subtle-matter traces of great human suffering: places of execution, torture chambers, madhouses, and operating theatres. Rilke does not write that the terrible is present on the plane or in the Akasha record, but that, "Die Existenz des Entsetzlichen in jedem Bestandteil der Luft." ("The existence

of the terrible in every particle of the air.") Rilke's literary and phenomenological intensity replaces the abstract conceptual language of occultism. We learn that these traces of suffering are of "tenacious permanence" and "jealous of all that is". This is the negative version of Rilke's idea of an evolution of consciousness: the negative traces are just as 'solid' and real as the 'art-works' ('Kunst-Werke'), which Rilke thought could be saved through creation in invisible realms. Past suffering affects the living, who 'breathe it in', whereupon "it precipitates, hardens, acquires angular, geometrical forms in among" the organs. The hard, geometrical forms are symbolic representations of the *new* suffering caused by the old subtle-matter traces of suffering. According to Malte, these traces cannot be suppressed: even the 'gentle sleep' is disturbed by dreams that 'trace the lines anew'; judging from the terrible circumstances of their formation, it should not be difficult to infer the nature of these dreams.

These emotional subtle-matter traces in places of great human suffering are not the only examples of 'astral' traces from the past. As noted by the Rilke scholar Benjamin Morse, 'ghost-streets' and 'ghost-houses' often occur in Rilke's works and letters.[341] The main theme of the Schulin episode is the power of the invisible. From the very beginning of the Schulin note, the line between the real and the unreal, reality and imagination, the visible and the invisible, is blurred: the sleigh ride to the Schulins is a journey from conventional reality to another dimension: "Zwischendurch fing es an, still weiterzuschneien, und nun wars, als würde auch noch das Letzte ausradiert und als führe man in ein weißes Blatt."[342] ("As we drove, the snow began to fall silently once more, and now it was as if all that remained had been erased and we were driving

on to a blank page.")[343] The Schulins' former residence burned down a few years earlier but, tellingly, the sleigh driver 'forgets' it is no longer there: "Georg hatte ganz vergessen, daß das Haus nicht da war, und für uns alle war es in diesem Augenblick da."[344] ("Georg had completely forgotten that the house was not there, and for all of us it was there at that moment." [345]) As they ascend the former outside staircase, they are disorientated in the darkness, until a lantern appears and directs them. Malte's father remarks, "Wir steigen hier herum wie die Gespenster"[346] ("Here we are, wandering about like ghosts").[347]

Now they have to descend the staircase and are admitted into one of the remaining side wings. By referring to the family as ghosts wandering in the darkness, Rilke alludes to occultist epistemology as a metaphor for the limited scope of human perception—a motif occurring in many guises; for example, as blindness.[348]

As we saw in the Ingeborg episode, Malte and his mother form an alliance of belief in the supernatural. Here, Malte and his mother insist that the house is still there. The invisible presence of the old castle—only sensed by Malte and his mother—forms a counterpoint to the Schulin family's obsession with (naturally *invisible*) smells. The countess perceives a smell, but the count tries to convince her it is not real: "'Nein, Kind, das bildest du dir ein', sagte der Graf, aber er hatte dasselbe beunruhigte Gesicht […]. Die Gräfin war von ihrer sogenannten Einbildung nicht abzubringen."[349] ("'No, child, you're imagining that', said the Count good-humouredly, but all at once his face wore the same troubled expression as hers […]. There was no convincing the Countess that what she asserted was, as he put it, imagination.")[350] Now the Schulins begin to trace the

(imaginary?) smells. The invisible house and the invisible smells melt together in Malte's experience, resulting in 'fear of ghosts':

> Aber auf einmal […] überfiel mich zum erstenmal in meinem Leben etwas wie Gespensterfurcht. Es wurde mir klar, daß alle die deutlichen großen Menschen, die eben noch gesprochen und gelacht hatten, gebückt herumgingen und sich mit etwas Unsichtbarem beschäftigten; daß sie zugaben, daß da etwas war, was sie nicht sahen. Und es war schrecklich, daß es stärker war als sie alle.[351]
>
> [But all at once […] I was overcome, for the first time in my life, by something akin to a fear of ghosts. It dawned on me that all these assertive, grown-up people who had just been talking and laughing were going about bent over, occupied with something they could not see. And the terrible thing was that it was stronger than all of them.][352]

In the Schulins' reality, conventional hierarchies and boundaries between the real and the unreal, the visible and invisible, and the factual and imaginary break down. The collapse of the hierarchy between adults and children arouses Malte's fear, since, when faced with a disturbing invisible presence, the adults—who are usually so self-assured—are rendered just as helpless as children. The fear of the invisible is transferred to the astral presence of the burnt-down house:

Malte and his mother cling to each other, trembling, until the ghost house completely disappears.[353]

At the beginning of this chapter, we noted that at no point is the reality of the paranormal occurrences in *Malte* challenged. When the Rilke scholar Daragh Downes questions the authenticity of Malte's paranormal childhood experiences on the basis of strict parapsychological standards, he misses Rilke's point. Rilke is not interested in presenting external evidence or convincing the reader through parapsychological hard cases; rather, he strives to provide an authentic account of the inner life of the characters. If paranormal experiences have transformative power, they by far exceed the presentation of external evidence. Therefore, one can say that the main focus lies on the *inner* transformational potential of the experience, not on its objective truth. When analyzing the spiritistic notes in *Malte*, it is important not to lose sight of the central factor in the paranormal episodes: the individual psychological reactions of those who experience them. This is evident in the Christine episode, where the main character is neither the ghost nor Malte, but his rationalistic father, who, during his stay at the castle *Urnekloster*, is challenged by 'impossible' and 'inexplicable' experiences. He eventually undergoes an inner development leading to a more 'Brahesque' attitude towards the inexplicable. Malte himself is not aware of Christine's ghostly status and, therefore, does not achieve the inner potential of this occurrence. To a lesser degree, this also applies to the other witnesses of the paranormal. With the utmost care, Rilke describes the psychological reaction patterns of all the people seated at the table: the Brahesque attitude is presented positively, whereas the inner resistance attitude is negatively

valorized. If Rilke had had skeptical intentions, he would—as in other ghost stories from this period—have debunked the paranormal activities as fraud. Rilke had no intention of convincing anyone about "the strangest, most unusual, most inexplicable experiences, one can have" through a hard case, i.e. a case that meets the strict standards of psychic research. Instead, he let the eyewitnesses and their psychological reactions speak for themselves. Since the Enlightenment, authors have invoked irony when engaging with paranormal phenomena. The fact that Malte's paranormal and spiritistic experiences are narrated *without* irony speaks volumes.

# Epilogue: Contemporary Spiritual Rilke Reception

In Europe, the academic reception of Rilke's work is mostly atheistic, and the paradigm blindness associated with this perspective has led to a neglect of the spiritual components of Rilke's worldview. The American academic community is generally less hostile towards spirituality and is therefore more inclined to acknowledge the spiritual components in Rilke's work. The apologetic reception of Rilke, which flourished before WWII when Rilke was revered as a prophet and poet-seer, reoccurred in the eighties due to the New Age movement. In the same way that contemporary European Rilke scholarship has mistakenly reduced Rilke to a Nietzschean atheist, so contemporary spiritual Rilke reception faces its own dangers; for example, drawing spurious conclusions by analogy and assigning the poet to dubious or mistaken traditions.

In 1995, Kathleen L. Komar provided a summary of spiritual Rilke reception in America, and her findings are still relevant today.[354] Modern spiritual non-confessional movements are usually called *New Age*. However, it can be problematic to group all the different spiritual movements under this one umbrella. Academics are often critical of new age literature, dismissing it sociologically as a flight from the meaningless, alienated reality of modern urban life. This reductionist (and, at best, half-true) diagnosis misjudges a part of modern spirituality that aims to distance itself from the simplistic messages and beliefs of popular self-help literature. Due to the all-encompassing nature of the new age label, a minority of

writers who work seriously with contemporary spirituality wish to dissociate themselves from the New Age majority.

In Komar's article *Rilke: Metaphysics in a New Age*, we encounter both groups. Komar investigates a series of spiritual Rilke adaptations.[355] She observes that Rilke is widely read by so-called new age authors: "While it may not be surprising that Bly or Mitchell, both excellent Rilke translators, cite Rilke's works, it is surprising to see the range of repercussions that Rilke's poetry has in America of the 1990s. What many of these disparate texts share is a fascination with rethinking the metaphysical realm from a new angle to produce something akin to 'New Age Metaphysics'. The authors are seeking new ways in which to understand our world in a larger spiritual context defined by individual experience. Rilke seems to be a recurring feature of this rethinking."[356] Rilke's most frequently cited work is *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* [Letters to a Young Poet]. This collection of letters "comes closest to Rilke's own self-help manual and the text in which he most directly pours forth advice on life, consciousness, and aesthetic creation[.] […] In his letters to Kappus, Rilke advises turning inward in order to concentrate one's spiritual and aesthetic energies. Only by going into himself alone can the writer gain inspiration, only then can he return to nature to understand it more profoundly, having transformed it and himself within."[357] The letters to Kappus also appear within the context of contemporary consciousness studies at the Institute of Noetic Sciences. In the anthology *Noetic Sciences Collection: Ten Years of Consciousness Research*, a passage from the *Letters to a Young Poet* is quoted in which Rilke writes about being patient with the unresolved questions within. Instead of being impatient, one should "live the questions" and perhaps live

"into the answers".[358] With no accompanying commentary, this quote is placed next to passages from Einstein, Li Po, and the Dalai Lama. By virtue of this grouping, Rilke is presented as an explorer of consciousness among other pioneers seeking to "merge internal and external space in a transformed moment of epiphany."[359] Komar concludes that Rilke's advice to Kappus—which concerns the organic development of consciousness taking place beyond the mere intellect—is anything but out of place in the context of articles on 'altered states', 'Buddhist inner science', and the 'survival of consciousness'.

Joan Borysenko, co-founder of the *Mind/Body Clinic*, refers to Rilke in the book *Guilt is the Teacher, Love is the Lesson*, since Rilke has the gift of evoking dreams, myths, and metaphors "that can awaken the reader and realign him with the flow." Komar clarifies this further: "The flow here is the course of life or the cosmos with which one must seek to align his own feelings and actions. The capacity to envision this alignment or to capture it in metaphor or image is what draws Borysenko to the poets."[360] However, Borysenko also refers to Rilke in the context of the love relationship; an area of life where Rilke himself was never at ease. Komar highlights the irony of making Rilke an advisor of married couples. As Komar notes, Rilke's advice to Kappus—to seek loneliness whilst in a relationship—is a more self-oriented than relationship-oriented strategy; and it did indeed have the opposite effect in Rilke's own life.

In addition to the *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rilke's late *magna opera*, the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, and the *Duino Elegies* are often emphasized by proponents of modern spirituality. In *The Gospel According to Jesus*, the famous Rilke translator and author Stephen Mitchell attempts to restore the original

spiritual enlightenment in the New Testament. Mitchell produces a new translation of the gospels, which he then compares to accounts and writings from wisdom teachers and enlightened masters from other traditions. It is in this context that he draws upon Rilke's work. Mitchell finds a convincing parallel between the mustard seed parable in the New Testament and a passage from Rilke's *Sonnet to Orpheus* (Part I, 12), in which a farmer sows and patiently waits for the harvest: "Die Erde *schenkt*" ("the Earth *pours out*"[361]). According to Mitchell, the birth of the kingdom of heaven in the biblical parable takes place *in* the consciousness itself. Common to both passages is the motif of an awakening of human consciousness. Mitchell also interprets Rilke's motif of the 'productive pain' spiritually. Rather than wasting our pain, we could learn to benefit from it. A person truly capable of mourning inherits the kingdom of heaven of higher consciousness. Komar concludes:

> Stephen Mitchell finds a rather convincing fit between Rilke's sense of spiritual consciousness and that invoked by the word of Jesus and by other spiritual teachers ranging from Buddha to Kierkegaard. Mitchell's focus on the late Rilke, the poet come to aesthetic and spiritual maturity, gives his image of the poet a more richly complex and ambiguous texture than that provided by the *Letters to a Young Poet*. Less a direct dispenser of self-help advice and more a patient witness of spiritual quest, the late Rilke gives Mitchell room to maneuver in the metaphysical realm.[362]

Perhaps the previous examples do not entirely accord with the common perception of New Age. *A Book of Angels* by Sophy Burnham, however, is a prime example of a biased and problematic new age reception strategy. Burnham's book presents the angel as a supersensous helper assisting humans in need. On the one hand, she tries to argue for the existence of angels by means of eyewitness reports. On the other hand, Burnham quotes historical sources such as Meister Eckehart, Milton, Blake, Poe, Swedenborg, and Rilke as additional 'evidence'. Burnham quotes a passage from the *Second Duino Elegy*, where Rilke suggestively evokes the destructive force of the archangel for contemporary man. However, in her search for analogies, she ignores the fact that Rilke's angel is far more complex than her own harmless helpful beings, as this passage from Komar identifies:

> Rilke's angels, in contrast, would really not be at home in the parking lot of our local mall. Since they are already perfected consciousness they wouldn't bother with us, whom they 'sublimely disdain to destroy.' Rilke's difficult complexity of a consciousness that has achieved perfection and, therefore, also indifference to our human strivings is too easily transposed by Burnham into friendly spirits bringing us messages and helping us out in car accidents and other tight spots. By associating Rilke's angels with the nice protective creatures who have nothing better to do than watch over us, she trivializes

> what is a very cerebral exploration of the possibilities of consciousness.[363]

In Germany, there has been a reception of Rilke's works comparable to Burnham's new age trivialization. Between 2001 and 2010, the musicians Angelica Fleer and Richard Schönherz produced five albums—Rilke-Projekt I to V. They cooperated with famous German actors and singers who, in this project, performed Rilke's poems to their 'background music'.[364] The CDs proved very popular in Germany (the first of the albums has sold more 150,000 copies). The Rilke poems selected for the CDs certainly do not belong to the Rilke canon; instead, the selection seems more of an arbitrary combination of drafts alongside youthful and canonical poems. Yet the poems were not chosen for their canonical status, but for their suggestiveness. It is characteristic that, on the first track of *Rilke-Projekt I*, Nina Hagen, the famous operatic punk singer, reads, whispers, and sings the text of a draft written by Rilke in the early summer of 1909, *Vergiß, vergiß* [Forget, forget]—capturing the magic of a summer night. The last sentence reads: "Nun aber laß uns ganz / hinübertreten in die Welt hinein / die monden ist –" ("Now let us fully / cross the line to the other, moon-like world –").[365] This is not the poet of *New Poems* published a couple of years earlier. Nor is it the poet inspired by Rodin to write *Dinggedichte* and seeking artistic 'objectivity'. Here, Rilke appears as a neo-romantic poet longing for a re-enchantment of the world. The theme of a moon-like other realm reappears in the poem *Der Tod der Geliebten* [Death of the Beloved] where the dead beloved "went gliding to the shades unknown".[366] The bereaved "fühlte, daß sie drüben nun / wie einen Mond ihr Mädchenlächeln

hatten“[367] (felt that her “girl’s smile like a moon was theirs to own”[368]). The connection between the two moon motives is hardly coincidental. The late poem *Jetzt wär es Zeit, daß Götter träten aus / bewohnten Dingen*[369] [Now it is time that gods came walking out / of lived-in Things[370]] fits nicely with the New Age atmosphere, since the poem expresses a longing for a new spiritual age. The poem revolves around the situation *before* this numinous shift has taken place. Finally, the German actor Mario Adorf reads the second poem from the *Book of Hours: Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen* [I live my life in widening rings].[371] The metaphor of the widening rings of consciousness is quite comparable to a modern perspective of self-development. In other words, the selection criterion seems to be predominantly *spiritual*.

Apart from the *Rilke-Projects*, there are two strands of contemporary spiritual Rilke reception in Germany that are worth noting: the anthroposophical and the modern contemplative. Although Rilke himself was critical of his anthroposophical friends’ attempts to proselytize him and convert him to Steiner’s movement, there are undeniably shared traits between Rilke and Steiner due to the larger context of the spiritual and occultist discourse. It is no coincidence that two of the most important contributions to spiritual Rilke scholarship are written by anthroposophical authors (Alfred Schütze and Wolfgang Eppelsheimer). However, there are also contemporary anthroposophists who refer to Rilke, such as Georg Kühlewind and Jelle van der Meulen.[372] The Hungarian philosopher Georg Kühlewind (1924-2006) differs from the anthroposophists who interpret Rilke on the basis of the ontological metaphysics of Steinerian cosmology. Instead, he uses language philosophy as a means of approaching the

spiritual dimension of Rilke's works.[373] Kühlewind correctly observes an overcoming over the conceptually static structures of nominalism in Rilke's works.

The contemplative strand of contemporary spiritual Rilke reception cannot be described adequately by appealing to scholarly distinctions between an apologetic, reductionist, or empirical approach to Rilke's works. The main purpose of this approach is not academic research, but spiritual phenomenology. The Benedictine Willigis Jäger and the Jesuit Niklaus Brantschen have both submitted themselves to rigorous Zen training and now carry the title 'Zen Master'. Jäger interprets Rilke's peak experiences as equivalent to the nonconfessional transpersonal experiences of Hölderlin and Nietzsche.[374] Brantschen uses Rilke's poem *Wenn es nur einmal so ganz stille wäre* [If only it were absolutely quiet here at times[375]] from the *Book of Hours* as the basis of a spiritual meditative guide. According to Brantschen, Rilke's poem involves a series of five contemplative stages: 1) seeking stillness, 2) enduring stillness, 3) enjoying stillness, 4) letting go of stillness, 5) being stillness. These five stages structure Brantschen's book on stillness as a spiritual technique.

Johannes Heiner[376] has written two books on Rilke: *Wege ins Dasein. Spirituelle Botschaften der* Duineser Elegien *von Rainer Maria Rilke*[377] [Pathways into Dasein. Spiritual Messages in Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies*] and *Poesie des einfachen Lebens—Poésie de la vie simple*[378] [Poetry of the Simple Life] on Rilke's French poems. Heiner's interpretation of the *Duino Elegies* is written in a deliberately non-scholarly style. In fact, Heiner breaks with all the conventions of academic practice: to avoid subjectivity, biographical readings, and comparison between spiritual experiences. The

interpretations of the *Elegies* are subjective from the outset, since they are written as letters to friends that were then transformed into diary entries. Heiner's main concern is to communicate the difficult *Elegies* to a non-academic readership. Due to the subjective, spiritual, and existential character of his readings, he achieves a rare blend of 'simple' language and existential reflection.

How should scholars evaluate modern contemplative Rilke reception? The answer is that it possesses a certain legitimacy because it is not bound to a confessional-religious interpretative framework, only to a (hypothetically universal) spiritual phenomenology. Unlike early Rilke scholarship, its proponents do not advocate a spiritual teaching in which we may believe. They compare their own peak experiences with those appearing in Rilke's works. Such a comparison can, however, only take place in the realm of subjectivity and cannot be examined by an intersubjective community of scholars.

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At this point we can take a closer look at the *reasons* for this modern spiritual Rilke reception. To scholars interpreting Rilke from an atheistic/Nietzschean perspective, modern spiritual reception may seem only arbitrarily connected with Rilke's world. In reality, there is an unbroken continuity from historical western esotericism to new age and modern spirituality, as demonstrated by Wouter J. Hanegraaff in *New Age Religion and Western Culture.* Hanegraaff includes the following "basic tendencies", which he regards as constitutive for new age religion:

- *This-worldliness, particularly of the weak variety*

- *Holism*
- *Evolutionism*
- *The psychologization of religion and sacralization of psychology*
- *Expectations of a coming New Age*[379]

**This-worldliness of the weak variety** is a category based on Lovejoy (*The Great Chain of Being*). Since Rilke's culture criticism is a double demarcation from *this-worldliness* (focusing solely on earthly experience) and *other-worldliness* ("the belief that both the genuinely 'real' and the truly good are radically antithetic in their essential characteristics to anything to be found in man's natural life."[380]), it corresponds to the category *weak this-worldliness*; Hanegraaff's term for the mentality of New Age. Here, the view is directed towards an improved *this-world*. This element is structurally related to the fifth point on the list, *expectations of a coming New Age*.

Hanegraaff's category *this-worldliness, particularly of the weak variety* is actually slightly misleading, since the idea of another supersensous dimension is an integrated part of New Age. Those ascribing to the new age tradition do not long for life after death, but it is also not the case that they simply long for a better *this-world*. Actually, Rilke's metaphor of a *Kugel des Seins* ('sphere of being')—implying a *balance* between the sensuous and supersensuous—paints a more accurate picture of the overall mentality of New Age.

**Holism** is a theory based on the assumption that reality is a whole or a totality. Holism is often defined in opposition to other positions that are perceived as either *dualistic* or

*redutionist*. Holism rejects all forms of dualistic conceptions: between God and man, man and nature, and spirit and matter, (whether this be the Christian asceticism or Cartesianism [the ontological difference between *res cogitans—res extensa*[381]] variety of spirit-matter dualism). Holism also opposes all kinds of reductionism: it rejects fragmentation "which treats organic wholes as mechanisms that can be reduced to their smallest components and then explained in terms of the latter"[382] and also the tendency to reduce spirit to matter "so that spirit becomes merely a contingent 'epiphenomenon' of essentially material processes."[383]

Rilke adheres to both of these anti-dualistic and anti-reductionistic holistic tendencies. Failing to understand the holistic nature of Rilke's world conception has lead to a series of misunderstandings in Rilke scholarship. The gravest of these is the equation of Rilke's rejection of Christian dualism with Nietzschean immanentism. According to Manfred Engel, Rilke's concept of reality is bound to earthly existence and the visible world. When Rilke claims there is no beyond (Jenseits) and no this-world (Diesseits), Engel interprets this as Rilke accepting only the *Diesseits*! But Rilke did indeed divide the world into a sensuous and a supersensous part. When Rilke criticizes the Christian idea of the beyond, he is actually criticizing the Christian *split* between nature and the beyond. For Rilke, the border between this world and the beyond is fluid. Contrary to the Christian conception of the beyond, Rilke embraced the possibility of a mutual contact and interaction between the physical and the non-physical realm. He thought that the artistic or spiritualistic medium was able to reach into the non-physical realm with the 'antennas of the heart'.[384] And he also believed that non-physical entities were able to manifest

and communicate with the living.[385] When Rilke wished to express his holism, he used concepts as *Das Ganze* (the totality), *Das Vollzählige* (the complete), *Der Doppelbereich* (the twofold realm) or *Die Kugel des Seins* (the sphere of being).[386] All of these concepts point to the same occultist world conception: sensuous-supersensous monism. Perhaps the *sphere of being* gives the best visual illustration of this epistemology: one half of reality is visible (sensuous), the other invisible (supersensous). In *Ur-Geräusch,* Rilke elaborates on the position of the human being: He is not—in a Kantian sense—bound to the transcendental prison of the visible world; rather, the 'spotlights' of his senses illuminate small areas of the totality and, through synaesthesia or clairvoyance, he is able to discover new areas in the night of the unknown.

The other element of holism, anti-reductionism, finds expression in Rilke's rejection of materialism and scientism. Opposing materialism was an integral part of the anti-naturalistic program of the symbolists. In a letter to the parapsychologist Carl du Prel, Rilke had offered his pen as a weapon in the struggle against the "foggy stench of materialism". What Rilke wanted to fight against was not science, but scientism. In du Prel's philosophical works, Rilke identifies two anti-materialistic arguments founded in Kant's philosophy. Kant had outlined three autonomous value spheres, on which his three critiques were based: the *Critique of Pure Reason*, *of Practical Reason*, and *of Aesthetic Judgment*, or, in other words: science, morality, and art. Due to the success of natural science and technology, scientism believed that natural science had rendered the validity claims of morality and aesthetics obsolete. By demonstrating the inability of natural

science to deal with literature and music, du Prel argues in favor of the autonomy of the Kantian value sphere.

Another Kantian objection raised by du Prel concerns the materialist reduction of mind to matter: "The materialist is wholly imprisoned in appearance. He holds the eye to be the mere mirror of phenomena, and the world to be just what it is for sense (im Kopfe); and so in the investigation of the object is to be found the solution of the world-enigma. Of Kant's problem he has no apprehension."[387] Rilke did not remain a du Prel follower, but they shared certain holistic ideas due to their affiliation with occultist discourse. As evidenced by Hanegraaff's studies, anti-reductionism and anti-dualism continue as an intrinsic element of the historical current of esotericism.

Whereas Darwinian evolution is based on biological axioms such as natural selection, **evolutionism** is a broader term designating a spiritual conception of evolution as being teleological and creative. In the chapter "Carl du Prel as Nietzschean Eagle", we saw that Rilke's God is evolutionary and processual. The roots of his 'becoming God' lie in esotericism (Jakob Böhme), the temporalized Chain of Being (Hegel, Schelling, Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Bergson), and Blavatskyan Theosophy. As a young man, Rilke was heavily influenced by Maurice Maeterlinck's essays on esotericism and mysticism. In his own writings on Maeterlinck, Rilke enthusiastically conveys Maeterlinck's depiction of human evolution as being equivalent to the 'spirit of the beehive' (*l'esprit de la ruche*). Just as the bees—governed by a

collective intelligence—collect honey, the spiritual mission of mankind is to collect 'invisible treasures'.[388]

As Hanegraaff's studies demonstrate, New Age continues the tradition of esoteric evolutionism. When he observes that New Age evolutionism is less rooted in Darwinism than in romanticism, the resemblance with Rilke's evolutionary God is evident. Both within esotericism and occultism around 1900 and during the last thirty to forty years of New Age, the emphasis has not been on the scientific theories *per se*, but the degree to which these theories can be eclectically assimilated into the various romantic conceptions of evolutionism. Another common feature of Rilkean and New Age evolutionism is Emersonian Transcendentalism. As Hanegraaff writes, it "became fundamental to a characteristically American cultural tradition, which was congenial both to romantic evolutionism and pragmatic attitude toward scientific theories of evolution."[389] Rilke's writing of the *Book of Hours* coincided approximately with his reading of Emerson's essays, and the becoming God is, without any doubt, a common motif.

**The psychologization of religion and sacralization of psychology** are basic esoteric ideas (i.e. belonging to the historical esoteric movement) which are also constitutive elements of New Age. C. G. Jung is an important link between historical esotericism and New Age. In fact, Jung's thoughts can be described in precisely this way: a psychologization of religion and a sacralization of psychology. He interprets religious symbols as archetypical elements of the psyche and, at the same time, he perceives the psyche as reaching into the numinous. Rilke shared this view of the unconscious, which

can be traced back to romanticism. Whereas Freudian psychology primarily perceives the unconscious as a latent power threatening subjective autonomy, the romantic theory of the unconscious implies a creative potential. In her monograph on Rilke and Jung, Martina Wegener-Stratmann has demonstrated that Rilke had a much greater affinity with Jung's psychology than with Freud's.[390] Rilke's close friend Lou Andreas-Salomé was a pupil of Freud and, unsurprisingly, influenced Rilke in regard to psychology. Despite representing theories closer to Jung than Freud, in an enforced display of loyalty to her mentor, she officially rejected Jung.[391] In reality, although she polemicized against Jung, Lou's theory of an 'Urgrund' was more romantic and thereby closer to Jung's conception of a 'collective unconscious' than Lou was willing to admit. According to Wegener-Stratmann, Lou's 'politically' motivated hostility towards Jung was the reason why Rilke did not occupy himself with Jungian philosophy. Rilke's well-known refusal to submit to Freudian therapy stems from his diverging view of the unconscious. In a letter to psychologist Emil Gebsattel, Rilke famously rejects therapy as a means to expel his 'devils' because, at that point, he feared it would drive out his angel, too.[392] He saw in the unconscious a prerequisite for artistic creation and was opposed to the instrumentality and rationality of Freudian psychotherapy. Rilke argued that his spirituality (Frömmigkeit) could not be aligned with a Freudian 'cleaning up' of the psyche, as Rilke referred to it in a letter to Emil Freiherr von Gebsattel.[393] Instead, he trusted the 'higher order' ['höhere Ordnung']—a numinous providence—and demonstrated a belief in the psyche's ability to reach into deeper mysterious dimensions.[394] This is also evident when Rilke writes in a letter that the history of God is "an almost never-explored area of the human soul

[Gemüt] […]"[395] And this is where Rilke is in alignment with the esoteric and Jungian psychologization of religion and sacralization of psychology. For Rilke, the unconscious consists of 'devils' [pathology, prerational impulses] and 'angels' [higher energies, transrational impulses] that are co-dependant. Rilke sees artistic production as the result of the harmonizing forces of the psyche. Rilke calls this conception of the psyche the *pyramid of consciousness* [Bewusstseins-pyramide]. The consciousness to which we have access in ordinary life is represented by the top of the pyramid. Rilke views the base of the pyramid as reaching into realms of consciousness that are independent of time and space. The late-romantic psychologist Carl Gustav Carus described a similar movement of descent from ordinary consciousness to the 'depths of the unconscious'.[396] In other words, Rilke is spiritually closer to C. G. Carus and C. G. Jung than to Freud. Where, then, is the link to New Age? One point of agreement is indicated by the New Age slogan 'we create our own reality', which is clearly an expression of a 'psychologization of the sacred'. The fundamental idea is that the human psyche is not cut off from the world, but interconnects with it and influences it in mysterious ways. Rilke certainly expresses himself in a similar anti-Cartesian way in the *Letters to a Young Poet*: "[We] shall gradually learn to recognize that what we call fate originates in ourselves, in humankind, and does not work on us from the outside."[397] The fact that fate originates *in ourselves* and does not work on us from the outside strongly resembles the New Age axiom. Rilke even psychologizes the world so radically that subject and world are perceived as fundamentally identical: "We have no reason to be mistrustful of our world, for it is not against us. If it holds terrors they are *our* terrors, if it has its abysses these abysses belong to us, if there are dangers

then we must try to love them."[398] In other words, it appears that the esoteric lineage goes from romanticism via Jung to New Age.

**Expectations of a coming New Age** is obviously *the* hallmark of the New Age movement. The New Age soteriology is based on a negative view of the present world order, which is either rejected as being dogmatically religious or materialistic. This feeling—living in a historically sinister epoch that will eventually be superseded by a new (golden) age—was also widespread around 1900. A famous example is Kandinsky's experimental *Deluge* paintings that were inspired by theosophical ideas: the apocalyptic breakdown of materialism and the spiritual rebirth of humanity. Another literary example is Hermann Hesse's *Demian* (1919), in which the old paradigm has to break down in order for a new evolutionary development to emerge. Rilke shared this soteriological sentiment. In order to 'orchestrate' the contrast between these two conditions—the old and the new—as effectively as possible, the old world order governed by religion and positivism is necessarily deemed obsolete. In *Malte Laurids Brigge*, the narrator asks:

> Ist es möglich […], daß man noch nichts Wirkliches und Wichtiges gesehen, erkannt und gesagt hat? Ist es möglich, daß man Jahrtausende Zeit gehabt hat, zu schauen, nachzudenken und aufzuzeichnen, und daß man die Jahrtausende hat vergehen lassen wie eine Schulpause, in der man sein Butterbrot ißt und einen Apfel?

> Ja, es ist möglich.
>
> Ist es möglich, daß man trotz Erfindungen und Fortschritten, trotz Kultur, Religion und Weltweisheit an der Oberfläche des Lebens geblieben ist? […]
>
> Ja, es ist möglich.[399]

> [Is it possible […] that we have neither seen nor perceived nor said anything real or of any importance yet? Is it possible that we have had thousands of years to look, ponder and record, and that we have let those thousands of years pass like a break at school, when one eats a sandwich and an apple?
>
> Yes, it is possible.
>
> Is it possible that despite our inventions and progress, despite our culture, religion and knowledge of the world, we have remained on the surface of life? […]
>
> Yes, it is possible.][400]

The following question may come to mind: from which higher perspective does Malte deconstruct the official consensual truths of history and culture? As Daragh Downes rightly identifies, this is an epistemological question: "I suggest that we read this last agonised question, which laments a failure to penetrate the *Oberfläche des Lebens*, in a boldly neo-Faustian sense, with Malte announcing an occult project of *Sehenlernen*

in which he, the apprentice Mage, is to hone his Brahesque ambition of developing paranormal powers. For Malte here, knowledge seems rather to be a matter more of *gnosis* than of mere *episteme*."[401] It is the epistemological step from *episteme* towards *gnosis* that shows us why this is not a case of a postmodern dissolution of *all* meaning.[402] Malte does not remain at this point of radical questioning, but uses it as a springboard to a possible new beginning.[403] Malte's insight leads to a new project of writing 'night and day'; the spiritualistic nature of the project reveals itself as Malte starts narrating a ghost story.

The soteriological tension expressed by Malte is equally present in the *Seventh Duino Elegy*:

> Jede dumpfe Umkehr der Welt hat solche Enterbte,
> denen das Frühere nicht und noch nicht das Nächste gehört.
> Denn auch das Nächste ist weit für die Menschen. *Uns* soll
> dies nicht verwirren; es stärke in uns die Bewahrung
> der noch erkannten Gestalt.[404]

> [Each torpid turn of the world has such disinherited ones,
>
> to whom neither the past belongs, nor yet what has nearly
> [arrived.
>
> For even the nearest moment is far from mankind. Though
> [we
>
> should not be confused by this, but strengthened in our task
> [of preserving
>
> the still-recognizable form.][405]

Since humanity has evolved beyond the old paradigm, a large group of 'disinherited' recognize the need for a cultural renewal. Although the old culture has lost its relevance, the evolutionary emergence (das Nächste) has not yet manifested itself. In a letter to Dorothea von Ledebur dated December 19, 1918, Rilke describes how he, since he can remember, "wished humanity nothing more urgently than that it might some time or other be empowered to turn up an entirely new page of the future, on to which the whole wrong sum of the unfortunate past need not be carried over."[406] Rilke had once perceived the Russian Revolution as such an event, but soon discovered it "was spirit only in the name".[407] What Rilke hoped for instead was a spiritual revolution. Again we see the 'unfortunate past' being contrasted with the 'new page of the future'. However, Rilke provides no specific clarification of what this new future will bring.

Having compared Rilke and his epoch with Hanegraaff's six points marking the continuity of esotericism within New Age, we may safely assume that the line of continuity from esotericism and occultism around 1900 to New Age esotericism of the last decades is unbroken. Therefore, we should not be surprised that contemporary spiritual literature displays such an extensive interest in Rilke's work. What is even more illuminating is the further conclusion that esoterism is not a premodern phenomenon occurring unwarrantly in modernity: esotericism mirrors the process of secularization.[408] The affinity between Rilke's spiritual worldview and that of New Age relies on their shared foundation in esoteric discourse. This accounts for the numerous structural similarities belonging to the cultural criticism of the two epochs. Rilke anticipated many spiritual

trends in the twentieth century. And this explains why Rilke's spirituality still appears so strikingly modern up to this day. We may safely assume that Rilke will remain a faithful companion for future generations of spiritual seekers.

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[1] Surette, Leon: *The Birth of Modernism*. Montreal/ Kingston/ London/ Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994, p. 161.

[2] One might say that spiritualism, occultism, and alchemy constitute the 'practical' side of esotericism. Related themes are: telepathy, clairvoyance, astrology, and psychometry. Esotericism itself is a thought structure that differs from other historical movements.

[3] One example is the concept of the 'unconscious', which is misunderstood as a primarily Freudian concept. In reality, the 'unconscious'—as the term was used around 1900—often had epistemological rather than inner-psychical implications linking it to the romantic understanding of the concept.

[4] Loers, Veit (ed.): *Okkultismus und Avantgarde. Von Munch bis Mondrian 1900-1915*. Catalog to the exhibition in Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt (June 3 - August 20, 1995). Ostfildern: Edition Tertium, 1995.

[5] Rilke: *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke.* Vol. II. (1910-1926). Trans. Jane Bannard Greene/M. D. Herter Norton. N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 1947/48, p. 356.

[6] Cf. Schneditz, Wolfgang: *Rilkes letzte Landschaft*. Salzburg: Pallas, 1951.

[7] Blokesch, Georg H.: "Rilke und das Übersinnliche. Aus unbekannten Papieren der Fürstin Marie von Thurn und Taxis", in: *Die literarische Welt*. Vol. 9 (1933), Issues 14-15, pp. 3-5.

[8] Blokesch, Georg H.: "Rilke und das Übersinnliche", p. 3.

[9] Schütze, Alfred: *Rainer Maria Rilke. Ein Wissender des Herzens*. Stuttgart: Urachhaus, 1938.

[10] Morse, B. J.: "Rainer Maria Rilke and the Occult", in: *The Journal of Experimental Metaphysics*. July1945, October 1945, and January 1946 (This article is available in the German Literature Archive in Marbach. Library number: R.A.:5E – Mor), p. 4.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Morse: "Rainer Maria Rilke and the Occult", p. 3.

[13] Morse: "Rainer Maria Rilke and the Occult", p. 4.

[14] Cf. Faivre, Antoine: *Access to Western Esotericism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, p. 12.

[15] Faivre, Antoine: *Access to Western Esotericism*, pp. 25.

[16] Gabriel Marcel uses the term *esquisse* (*sketch*).

[17] Marcel, Gabriel: "Rilke et l'occulte", in: *Les Lettres: poésie, philosophie, littérature, critique*. Vol. 4. Issues 14-15-16 (Paris, 1952), pp. 136-147. Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) was one of the first existentialists, and he is credited as being the first to coin the term 'existentialism'. In 1929, he became a Catholic. His main works are *Le mystère d'être* (1951) and *L'homme problematique* (1955). He addressed the theme of channeling in the forewords to Marcelle de Jouvenel's two books *Au diapason du ciel* and *Quand les sources chantent*.

[18] Wydenbruck, Nora: *Para-Normal. Personal Experiences and Deductions*. London: Ryder, 1939.

[19] Eppelsheimer, Rudolf: *Rilkes larische Landschaft. Eine Deutung des Gesamtwerks mit besonderem Bezug auf die mittlere Periode*. (LOGOI Vol. 3. Eds. Gerhard Kienle, Manfred Krüger, and Dieter Lauenstein). Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1975.

[20] Fick, Monika: *Sinnenwelt und Weltseele. Der psychophysische Monismus der Jahrhunderte*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993.

[21] Treitel, Corinna: *Avatars of the Soul: Cultures of Science, Medicine, and the Occult in Modern Germany*. Diss. Harvard University, 1999, p. 3.

[22] Treitel also mentions W. B. Yeats, who wrote automatically for the spirit Leo, and André Breton, who linked surrealism with automatic writing.

[23] Treitel: *Avatars of the Soul*, p. 237.

[24] Magnússon, Gísli: *Dichtung als Erfahrungsmetaphysik. Esoterische und okkultistische Modernität bei R.M. Rilke*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009.

[25] Wilber, Ken: "Integral Art and Literary Theory", in: *Eye of Spirit: An Integral Vision for a World Gone Slightly Mad*. Boston: Shambhala, 2001, pp. 87-126.

[26] *Apologetic* is my own term. Hanegraaff speaks of the *religionistic* method.

[27] Hanegraaff, Wouter J.: "Empirical method in the study of esotericism", in: *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 7:2 (1995), p. 102.

[28] "The empirical study of religions can be distinguished from theological, positivist-reductionist and religionist approaches by its practice of permanent epoché (suspension of normative judgment)." Hanegraaff, Wouter J.: *New Age Religion and Western Culture*. Albany: SUNY Press 1998, p. 4.

[29] Ibid.

[30] The concepts 'emic' and 'etic' originate in the linguistic terms 'phon*emic*' and 'phon*etic*'.

[31] Cf. the chapter "Ideology and criticism", in: Foucault, Michel: *The Order of Things*. New York: Vintage Book, 1994, pp. 236.

[32] Mehring, Walter: *Die verlorene Bibliothek*. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1952, p. 198.

[33] Letter to Professor Hermann Pongs October 21, 1924. Rilke, R.M.: *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke*. Vol. II, p. 357. German original: Rilke: *Briefe aus Muzot*. Ruth Sieber-Rilke/Carl Sieber (eds.). Leipzig: Insel, 1937, p. 323.

[34] "One of the most remarkable stories in the book is the very gruesome story of the *hand*, which Rilke always maintained to be true." Cf. Morse: "Rainer Maria Rilke and the Occult", p. 24.

[35] Prater, Donald: *A Ringing Glass. The Life of Rainer Maria Rilke*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1986, p. 4.

[36] Prater, Donald: *A Ringing Glass*, p. 5.

[37] Letter to Lou April 15, 1904. Rilke, Rainer Maria/Andreas-Salomé, Lou: *Briefwechsel*. Ed. Ernst Pfeiffer. Zürich: Max Niehans & Wiesbaden: Insel-Verlag, 1952, p. 143.

[38] Prater: *A Ringing Glass*, p. 5.

[39] Werfel, Franz: "Begegnungen mit Rilke", in: *Das Tage-Buch*, Vol. 8. Issue 4. (1927), pp. 140-144. [Trans. Culturebites] The laying on of hands (Handauflegen) motif also occurs in an article by Strindberg: A.S.: "Mystik – bis auf weiteres". Cf. *Freie Bühne für modernes Leben*, Vol. 2 (1891), pp. 977-982 and Monika Fick: *Sinnenwelt und Weltseele*, p. 126.

[40] In 1913 Rilke wrote the essay *Über den jungen Dichter* where he expressed his enthusiasm for the young Werfel.

[41] Burckhardt, Carl J.: *Memorabilien: Erinnerungen und Begegnungen*. München: Callwey, 1978, p. 339. [Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA)]

[42] Ibid.

[43] In February 1897, Rilke wrote "vor etwa zwei Jahren" ("approximately two years ago"). Rilke: *Briefe aus den Jahren 1892 bis 1904*. Eds. Ruth Sieber-Rilke/Carl Sieber. Leipzig: Insel, 1939, p. 33.

[44] Ibid. Rilke had tried to express a similar *weltanschauung* ("eine ähnliche Weltanschauung auszusprechen").

[45] Rilke: *Briefe aus den Jahren 1892-1904*, p. 6. [Trans. Culturebites]

[46] Rilke: *Briefe aus den Jahren 1892-1904*, p. 7. [Trans. Culturebites]

[47] Flammarion, Camille: *Urania*. Trans. Augusta Rice Stetson. Boston: Estes & Lauriat, 1890, p. 173.

[48] Rilke: *Briefe aus den Jahren 1892-1904*, p. 8. [Trans. Culturebites]

[49] In *The Horla* by Maupassant we find an almost identical passage where the hypnotic experiments function as a link to the supersensous realm. Cf. Maupassant, Guy de: *The Horla and Other Stories*. Rockville, MD: Wildside, 2007, pp. 13.

[50] An 'apparition of a loved one' can be found in the novel *The Friend of Friends* by Henry James, where it constitutes *the* central motif. Carl du Prel, whom Rilke read in the same period, writes about the materialization of supersensous beings: du Prel, Carl: *Das Rätsel des Menschen*, p. 78. Cf. Wilpert, Gero von: *Die deutsche Gespenstergeschichte. Motiv. Form. Entwicklung*. Stuttgart: Kröner, 1994, p. 316; 318; 320; 392.

[51] Cf. Boismont, Brierre de: *Des hallucinations ou Histoire raisonnée des apparitions, des visions, des songes, de l'extase*. Paris, 1845.

[52] Cf. Mousseaux, Gougenot de: *Les Hautes phénomènes de la magie précédés du spiritisme antique.* Paris: Plon, 1864.

[53] Flammarion does not mention a source, but speaks of Baron Dupotet's article on "Animal Magnetism". Cf. Flammarion: *Urania*, p. 187. According to Flammarion, Jung-Stilling reports this case in 1814. Baron Dupotet's work *Traité complet du magnétisme* is cited by Schopenhauer in the chapter "Animal Magnetism and Magic" from *On the Will in Nature*: "But this immediate power which the will can exercise over other persons, is brought to light best of all by the admirable experiments made, even in public, by M. Dupotet and his pupils in Paris, in which a stranger is guided and determined at pleasure by the magnetiser's mere will, aided by a few gestures, and is even forced into the most extraordinary contortions." Schopenhauer, Arthur: *Two Essays.* London: George Bell and Sons, 1889, p. 330. Dupotet is also mentioned in the "Essay on Spirit Seeing", in

Schopenhauer, Arthur: *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*. Vol. I. Trans. E. F. J. Payne. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000 ([1]1974), p. 247; 290.

[54] Despite Kant's skepticism towards Swedenborg's visions in general, he did not find any rational arguments against the truthfulness of these three displays of clairvoyance by Swedenborg. Cf. Kant's letter to Charlotte von Knobloch, "Anhang", in: Kant, Immanuel: *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik.* Ed. Karl Kehrbach. Leipzig: Reclam, n.d., pp. 69-75.

[55] The field of parapsychology was divided into two camps: those who explained the paranormal phenomena as unknown forces (animism) and those who believed the unknown forces to be spirits (spiritualism). Throughout his life, Rilke adhered to the spirit hypothesis.

[56] Flammarion: *Urania*, pp. 200.

[57] Schopenhauer's *Versuch über das Geistersehn und was damit zusammenhängt* [Essay on Spirit Seeing and everything connected therewith] explains the phenomenon of apparition by means of a so-called 'Traumorgan' ('organ of dreams'). He describes the altered perception as follows: "It is just as if our skull had become transparent so that the external world entered the brain directly and immediately instead of by an indirect path and through the narrow portal of the senses." Schopenhauer, Arthur: "Essay on Spirit Seeing and everything connected therewith", in: A.S.: *Parega and Paralipomena*. Vol. I, p. 239.

[58] Monika Fick is one the few Rilke scholars who recognizes the presence of occultistic epistemology in Rilke's works. She connects the physiological Kant interpretation (Hermann v. Helmholtz) to Carl du Prel and Rilke: Fick: *Sinnenwelt und Weltseele*, p. 213.

[59] "Die Wissenschaft ist ganz gewiß unterwegs, festzustellen, daß alle diese [synästhetischen] Erscheinungen peripherische Schwingungen darstellen, welche, von einem gemeinsamen Zentrum ausgehend, uns nur deshalb andersartig zum Bewußtsein kommen, weil unsere beschränkten Organe immer nur Stücke dieses weiten Kreises wahrzunehmen vermögen. Warum sollte also nicht auch hier die Kunst vorausgehen und mit diesen Mitteln neue Pfade finden in die Teilnahme des Einzelnen?" Rilke, Rainer Maria: *Sämtliche Werke in sechs Bänden* [= SW]. Ed. Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1987, p. 384.

[60] Rilke expresses this idea in a letter to Franz Xaver Kappus. Cf. Rilke, R.M.: *Letters to a Young Poet.* Trans. Charlie Louth. London: Penguin 2012 ([1]2011), p. 41.

[61] "Wir empfangen Eindrücke durch die Sinne", sagte er, "durch Auge, Ohr, Geschmack. Zwischen diesen Sinnen sind 'Leerräume', die zwar bei den Urvölkern noch ausgefüllt sind, aber bei uns erstorben." / Und er zog auf der Papierserviette einen Kreis, den er in einzelne Sektoren teilte, wobei er diese abwechslungsweise schattierte, so dass zuletzt etwas wie eine Scheibe mit schwarzen Keilschriftzeichen entstand. // "Diese Teile urbar zu machen, ist nötig", fuhrt er fort, "das gibt genug zu tun." Und er begann über Huysmans Symphonie der Gerüche zu reden. Steffen: "Erinnerung an Rainer Maria Rilke", p. 6.

[62] "Stellt man sich das gesamte Erfahrungsbereich der Welt, auch seine uns übertreffenden Gebiete, in einem vollen Kreise dar, so wird es sofort augenscheinlich, um wieviel größer die schwarzen Sektoren sind, die das uns Unerfahrbare bezeichnen, gemessen an den ungleichen lichten Ausschnitten, die den Scheinwerfern der Sensualität entsprechen." SW VI 1091.

[63] du Prel, Carl: *Das Rätsel des Menschen. Einleitung in das Studium der Geheimwissenschaften*. Leipzig: Reclam, 1893; du Prel, Carl: *Der Spiritismus. Leipzig: Reclam*, [1892].

[64] Freud, Sigmund: *The Interpretation of Dreams*. London: Allen & Unwin, [4]1971, p. 63.

[65] Rilke, R. M.: "Auch ein Münchner Brief", in: R.M.R.: *Schriften*. Ed. Horst Nalewski. Frankfurt a. M./Leipzig, 1996, p. 42.

[66] Ibid. [Trans. Culturebites]

[67] Rilke: *Briefe aus den Jahren 1892-1904*, p. 33.

[68] Rilke: *Briefe aus den Jahren 1892-1904*, p. 31. [Trans. Culturebites]

[69] Ibid. [Trans. Culturebites]

[70] Letter to Carl du Prel from February 16, 1897. Rilke: *Briefe aus den Jahren 1892-1904*, p. 31.

[71] "Wenn ich in das Wesen Ihrer Wissenschaft eindringen darf, vielleicht ist es mir mal vergönnt mit Wort und Feder einer von den Verbündeten des neuen Glaubens zu werden, der hoch über die Kirchturmkreuze ragt.". Rilke: *Briefe aus den Jahren 1892-1904*, p. 32.

[72] Rilke: *Briefe aus den Jahren 1892-1904*, p.33.

[73] SW III, pp. 556.

[74] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA).

[75] According to Albert Steffen, this visit at du Prel's house did not go well: "The conversation turned to the supernatural, which Rilke probably wanted to grasp, despite suspicions, but did not want to explore too inquisitively. He had apparently developed an aversion to it during Karl [Carl] du Prel's visit, who had told him of his occult experiences in such a tasteless manner. He had not read the books on spiritualism, of which du Prel had given him the titles, and he had not taken him up on his invitation to pay a return visit." (Steffen, Albert: *Dichtung als Weg zur Einweihung*. Dornach: Verlag für schöne Wissenschaften, 1960, p. 28. Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA)). Perhaps this would make some scholars reluctant to investigate Rilke's du Prel reception; in my opinion, this would be a misapprehension. Nevertheless, Steffen's account explains why Rilke did not become "a member of the new faith" ("Verbündeter des neuen Glaubens") after all. Later in his life, Rilke would differentiate sharply between the 'speech acts' of literature and the unambiguous prose of many occultistic works.

[76] On June 9, 1899, Rilke expressed this view himself when he wrote to Frieda von Bülow that Florence was a 'preparation for Moscow'. He now feels that 'the Russian things' will give him the names for the 'religiousness of his soul' ('Frömmigkeiten meines Wesens'). Schnack, Ingeborg: *Rainer Maria Rilke. Chronik seines Werkes 1875-1926* [*Rilke-Chronik*]. Frankfurt am Main/Leipzig: Insel 2009, p. 93.

[77] This first version of *Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben* was written in Berlin-Schmargendorf between September 20 and October 14, 1899. The second book, *Das Buch von der Pilgerschaft*, was written in Westerwede near Bremen between September 18 and September 25, 1901. The third book, *Das Buch von der Armut und vom Tode*, was written between April 13 and April 20, 1903 in Viareggio. The three books were published together as *Das Stundenbuch* in 1905.

[78] *The Book of Hours* is Rilke's first attempt at composing a cycle of poems tied together by certain existential and spiritual themes.

[79] Rilke, R. M.: *The Book of Hours*. Trans. Susan Ranson. Camden House, 2008, p. 3.

[80] Traditionally, mystics have described God as light, thereby emphasizing his immaterial nature. Rilke inverts this metaphor and describes God as dark. The darkness has a sensuous quality, linking it to Nietzsche's notion of the Dionysian.

[81] Rilke: *The Book of Hours: Prayers to a Lowly God* (Part I: *The Book of Monkish Life*), p. 43.

[82] Rilke: *The Book of Hours: Prayers to a Lowly God*, p. 31.

[83] Rilke: *The Book of Hours: Prayers to a Lowly God*, p. 30.

[84] "Und wenn die Frommen sagen: "Er ist", und die Traurigen fühlen: "Er war", so lächelt der Künstler: "Er wird sein". Und sein Glauben ist mehr als ein Glauben; denn er selbst baut an diesem Gott. Mit jedem Schauen, mit jedem Erkennen, in jeder seiner leisen Freuden fügt er ihm eine Macht und einen Namen zu, damit der Gott endlich in einem späten Urenkel sich vollende, mit allen Mächten und allen Namen geschmückt." SW V 427. ("Über Kunst" (1898), in: SW V 426-434). [Trans. GM].

[85] Rilke: *The Book of Hours: Prayers to a Lowly God*, p. 125.

[86] Heller, Erich: *Nirgends wird Welt sein als innen. Versuche über Rilke*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1975, p. 55.

[87] Here we find the reason for the anachronistic shock the contemporary reader may experience when reading *Nachtwachen des Bonaventura*. The novel was written in 1804 and mentions Darwin's theory of an evolution of man from the ape. Charles Darwin was born in 1809, but his grandfather, Erasmus Darwin had already presented ideas that were in accordance with the temporalized chain of being and anticipated Charles Darwin's empirically founded theory of evolution. The fact that 'Bonaventura' satirizes the theory shows how controversial Erasmus Darwin's theory was. Cf. Conner, Frederick William: *Cosmic Optimism: A Study of the Interpretation of Evolution by American Poets from Emerson to Robinson*. Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1949, p. 25. Conner mentions Erasmus Darwin's *Zoonomia; or The Laws of Organic Life* from 1794-96.

[88] Cf. the chapter "The Temporalizing of the Great Chain of Being", in: Lovejoy, Arthur O.: *The Great Chain of Being*. Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, England: Harvard University Press 2001 ([1]1936), pp. 242-287.

[89] Leibniz paved the way for a temporalization of the chain of being. As demonstrated by Lovejoy, Plato's philosophy consisted of two parts that were hard to reconcile: "The first is the vision of a world which is through and through rational, fashioned completely, so far as the nature of a created world permits, after the model of the eternal order of the Ideas in the Divine Reason. It was, therefore, [...] an immutable world. [...] In the other vision, the time-process, conceived as continuous augmentation of realized values, is the most significant aspect of reality – and change is the most indispensable mark of excellence." Lovejoy: *The Great Chain of Being*, pp. 261.

[90] Rilke was familiar with Emerson's essay *The Over-Soul*, contained in his Reclam collection of Emerson essays.

[91] Trans. GM. "Die Mehrheit transcendentaler Subjekte widerspricht nicht notwendig dem Monismus. Unbestreitbar ist ein Ameisenstaat oder ein Bienenstaat durch eine Art Gesamtgeist monistisch zusammengehalten, was aber die Individualität der Ameisen und Bienen nicht aufhebt. So hebt auch der metaphysische Monismus den metaphysischen Individualismus nicht notwendig auf." du Prel: *Die Entdeckung der Seele durch die Geheimwissenschaften*. Vol. I, p. 215.

[92] SW V 545.

[93] Letter to Kappus, December 23, 1903. Rilke: *Letters to a Young Poet***,** p. 29.

[94] Rilke: *The Book of Hours*. Trans. Ranson, p. 31.

[95] Rilke: *The Book of Hours: Prayers to a Lowly God*, p. 43.

[96] The controversial biologist Rupert Sheldrake claims that a collective of insects, e.g. bees or ants, are held together by a morphogenetic field: Cf. the chapter: "Societies of Insects", pp. 226-231, in: Sheldrake, Rupert: *The Presence of the Past. Morphic Resonance and the Habits of Nature*. London: Collins 1988.

[97] This might explain the existence of three complete English translations of *The Books of Hours*: Rilke: *The Book of Hours: Prayers to a Lowly God.* Translated by Annemarie S. Kidder. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press 2002; Rilke: *The Book of Hours*. Translated by Susan Ranson. Camden House 2008; Rilke: *Book of Hours: Love Songs to God,* Translated by Anita Barrows and Joanne Macy. New York: Riverhead Books, 1996.

[98] The chapters in question are chapter 5 ("L'hypothèse néo-spirite. Les apparitions") and chapter 6 ("Les communications avec les morts"), and chapter 7 ("La correspondence croisée").

[99] Letter to Marie Taxis, February 6, 1913. Rilke, Rainer Maria/Thurn und Taxis, Marie von: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. I. Zürich: Niehans & Rokitansky, 1951, p. 263. [Trans. Culturebites]

[100] Rilke to Marie Taxis, February 27, 1913. Rilke, Rainer Maria/Thurn und Taxis, Marie von: *The Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke and Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis.* Translated and introduced by Nora Wydenbruck. Vol. I. London: Hogarth, 1958*,* p. 88. Cf. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. I, p. 271.

[101] The unabridged German translation of *La Mort* was published in 1913 under the title *Vom Tode*. Trans. Friedrich v. Oppeln-Bronikowski. Jena, 1913.

[102] Halls, Wilfred Douglas: *Maurice Maeterlinck: A Study of His Life and Thought*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1960, p. 89.

[103] Letter to Marie Taxis, January 15, 1918. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. II, p. 533.

[104] SW VI 862.

[105] Rilke, Rainer Maria: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge.* Trans. Michael Hulse. London: Penguin, 2009*,* p. 107.

[106] Rilke: *Letters.* Vol. II, p. 316. (German: Rilke: *Briefe in zwei Bänden* [= *Briefe*]. Ed. Karl Altheim. Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1950.Vol. II, p. 380). Cf. the letter to Countess Sizzo, April 12, 1923. Rilke: *Briefe*. Vol. II, pp. 406.

[107] Letter to Countess Margo Sizzo, Epiphany [January 6] 1923. Rilke: *Letters*. Vol. II, p. 316.

[108] Surette: *The Birth of Modernism*, p. 26

[109] "Chapitre VIII. La Réincarnation", pp. 147-155.

[110] Recently, books on hypnotic regressions concerning the life-between-lives (what Rilke calls *Daseinszwischenräume*) have been on the bestseller lists: Michael Newton: *Journey of Souls.* St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn, 1994; *Destiny of Souls.* St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn 2000; *Life Between Lives: Hypnotherapy for Spiritual Regression.* St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn 2004; *Memories of the Afterlife.* St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn 2009. On the basis of his own experience with clients, Newton claims that their testimonies about the life-between-lives are consistent: "The astounding thing I found as I progressed with my research was that once subjects were regressed back into their soul state they all displayed a remarkable consistency in responding to questions about the spirit world." (M.N.: *Journey of Souls,* p. 5).

[111] Maeterlinck, Maurice: *Our Eternity – 1913,* Trans. Alexander Teixeira De Mattos. Reprint. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger 2004, pp. 153.

[112] Rilke to Marie Taxis, December 16, 1913. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, p. 110. "Haben Sie Schrenck-Notzing's Buch gesehen, über das sich die Zeitungen in Deutschland, jetzt sogar auch hier, aufregen: es heißt: *Materialisations Phänomene* (mit 150 Abbildungen und 30 Tafeln)?" Rilke

to Marie Taxis, December 16, 1913. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. I, p. 336.

[113] Rilke to Marie Taxis, December 21, 1913. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, pp. 111. Cf. Marie Taxis to Rilke, December 21, 1913. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. I, p. 339.

[114] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA). Cf. Marie Taxis to Rilke, 21. December 1913. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. I, p. 339.

[115] "[…] [E]very serious investigator who undertakes this research must guard himself against the exploitation of his observations by visionaries to satisfy some need of religious belief. For the spiritistic hypothesis rests essentially on the metaphysical tendency implanted in mankind (experimental religion)." Schrenck Notzing, Albert Freiherr von: *Phenomena of Materialisation. A Contribution to the Investigation of Mediumistic Teleplastics.* London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & co, 1923, pp. 16.

[116] Wolffram, Heather: *Stepchildren of Science: Psychical Research and Parapsychology in Germany, c. 1870-1939*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009, pp. 131.

[117] Schrenck Notzing: *Phenomena of Materialisation,* p. 249.

[118] Cf. Bauer: "Spiritismus und Okkultismus", in: *Okkultismus und Avangarde*, p. 79.

[119] Rilke to Marie Taxis, December 27, 1913. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. I, pp. 343. Cf. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, pp. 113.

[120] Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. I, p.343.

[121] Letter to Nora Wydenbruck-Purtscher, August 11, 1924. Rilke: *Letters*. Vol. II, p. 343.

[122] Letter to Nora Wydenbruck-Purtscher, August 11, 1924. Rilke: *Letters*. Vol. II*,* p. 344.

[123] This is at least how Rilke saw it in this letter. Rilke acquired a planchette and experimented with it. He kept participating in spiritualistic seances until 1921. Seemingly, he perceived them as being less instrumental as Schrenck's scientific investigations.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA). Cf. Rilke to Marie Taxis, January 15, 1918. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel,* Vol. II, pp. 534.

[126] Tischner, Rudolf: *Über Telepathie und Hellsehen. Experimentell-theoretische Untersuchungen*. Munich, 1920 (*Grenzfragen des Nerven- und Seelenlebens*, Issue 106). The second edition was already published in 1921. Rilke also encloses an article by Adolf Koelsch: "Am Rand des Noch-nicht-Gewußten", *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, May 11 and 12, 1921 (Nr. 688, 694).

[127] In 1920, Rudolf Tischner wrote a monograph on the medium Ludwig Aub. Tischner, Rudolf: *Ludwig Aub. Eine psychologisch-okkultistische Studie*. Mutze: Leipzig, 1920.

[128] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA). Cf. Letter to Wunderly-Volkart, May 20, 1921. Rilke: *Briefe an NWV*. Vol. I, pp. 439.

[129] Tischner writes that spiritualism is an *interpretation* of the occult facts that has not yet been verified, but should not be dismissed with a sarcastic comment. He calls it a 'scientific question which should definitely be taken seriously' (eine durchaus erstzunehmende wissenschaftliche Frage). Tischner: *Telepathie und Hellsehen*, p. 2.

[130] Wasielewski, Michael von (Ed.): „Ein Briefwechsel Rainer Maria Rilkes mit Waldemar von Wasielewski", in: *Blätter der Rilke-Gesellschaft*. Vol. 24 (2002), p. 191. [Trans. Culturebites]

[131] Nora Purtscher-Wydenbruck (1894-1959), born Countess Wydenbruck, was the niece of Princess Marie Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe. In 1919 she married the painter Alfons Purtscher.

[132] Wydenbruck: *The Para-Normal*, p. 19.

[133] Hanns von Gumppenberg (1866-1928), who is largely unknown today, started his artistic career fighting spiritualism (and religion) vehemently. One of his earliest works, *Die Spiritisten* [The Spiritualists] (1885), criticized spiritualism on the basis of scientific skepticism. His play *Messias* portrays Jesus as a normal human being and corresponds thematically with Rilke's *Visions of Christ* (1896-98, unpublished). Due to a lack of recognition, Gumppenberg experienced a grave crisis. He originally went to a seance in order to expose the medium as a fraud. Instead, he left the seance convinced about the authenticity of the medium. At these seances, the spirit guide 'Geben' appeared, and on the basis of the dialogues he led with her, Gumppenberg developed a spiritual worldview with Gnostic traits, not fundamentally different from Blavatsky's theosophy. The result of the meeting was a pamphlet with the modest title: *Das dritte Testament. Eine Offenbarung Gottes* [The Third Testament. A Revelation of God]. Although the text made him a laughing-stock among his contemporaries, he adhered to the spiritual worldview developed with the medium Mrs. M. This is

clearly reflected in the titles of his works: *Kritik des Wirklich-Seienden* [Criticism of the Real-Beingness] (1892), *Der fünfte Prophet* [The Fifth Prophet] (1895), *Grundlagen der wissenschaftlichen Philosophie* [The Principles of Scientific Philosophy] (1903) und *Philosophie und Okkultismus* [Philosophy and Occultism] (1921).

[134] In Nora Wydenbruck's case, this was—unlike Gumppenberg—a gradual process: "My husband and I attended one of their [the circle of the medium Maria Silbert in Graz] seances, but I was far from convinced that there was anything supernatural about the table-rapping we heard, or the sudden touches of 'ghostly' hands that took place in the dark." (p. 21) Wydenbruck's first reaction towards the telekinetic phenomena was dismissive: "This, I felt convinced, must be either due to clever trickery or to mass-hypnosis." (p. 22) On one occasion, friends came to visit her, Olga and her mother Baroness Mary G. Through table-turning, the Baroness was asked to sit by herself at the other end of the room: "As soon as the Baroness sat down on the sofa, about eighteen feet from our table, three loud knocks were heard out of the wall over her head, and they were repeated even more loudly when the sitting was closed.

I have heard many raps and knocks since at seances, or simply while talking to physical mediums […] At that time, however, they were the first genuine evidence I had received that a physical effect can take place without a tangible cause. These three knocks knocked over all my theories; there could be no question of fraud, suggestion, auto-hypnosis, or mass-hypnotism, owing to the unprepared, informal, and experimental character of our meeting." Wydenbruck, Nora: *The Para-Normal. Personal Experiences and Deductions.* London: Ryder, 1939, pp. 22-23.

[135] During the first three months, mediumistic contact was achieved through glass moving. From then on the Baroness worked as a trance medium.

[136] The following is an example of a typical dialogue with 'Nell':
I [Nora]: "Is there a God?"
Nell: "You cannot imagine Him: He is above your comprehension."
I: "Which of the existing religions comes nearest the truth?"
Nell: "None."
I: "Was Jesus Christ God, or was He merely the best and wisest of men?"
Nell: "I do not wish to answer that question."
I: "Is He to be understood as a partial manifestation of the incomprehensible God?"
Nell: "All great souls are that."

Wydenbruck, Nora: *The Para-Normal*, p. 19.

[137] Rilke to Nora Wydenbruck-Purtscher, August 11, 1924. Rilke: *Briefe*, Vol. II, p. 451.

[138] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA). Marie Taxis to Rilke, February 5, 1918. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, p. 167. Cf. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. II, pp. 535.

[139] Rilke: *Letter,* Vol. II, pp. 341.

[140] Rilke: *Briefe*. Vol. II, pp. 451.

[141] Lovejoy: *The Great Chain of Being*, pp. 24.

[142] Cf. the *mysterium tremendum* of Rudolf Otto. R.O.: *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*. Breslau: Trewendt und Granier, 1922, pp. 13-27.

[143] Rilke to Franz Kappus Xaver, August 12, 1904. Rilke: *Letters to a Young Poet*, p. 41.

[144] Rilke: *Briefe*. Vol. II, pp. 453.

[145] "Later I wrote him a very full account of our seances (which had then terminated), and so afterwards received the following, the last letter I was ever to receive from him". Wydenbruck, Nora: *The Para-Normal*, p. 66.

[146] It is probable that Nora Wydenbruck was mistaken about the date. She writes that Rilke died at little more than one year later. According to Wydenbruck's dating, Rilke would have died in December 1925. Since Rilke died in December 1926, Countess Nora is either wrong about Rilke's letter or Rilke's death. Moreover, the Countess uses the word 'later' and adds that this was Rilke's last letter to her. Therefore, the letter is most likely from September 5, 1925 (instead of 1924).

[147] Rilke to Nora Wydenbruck September 5, 1924 (1925?), in: Wydenbruck, Nora: *The Para-Normal*, pp. 66.

[148] Rilke to Marie Taxis, December 27, 1913. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, p. 113.

[149] Taxis, Marie: *Memoirs of a Princess. The Reminiscences of Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis.* Translated and compiled by Nora Wydenbruck. London: Hogarth, 1959, p. 138.

[150] Taxis, Marie: *Memoirs of a Princess*, pp. 141.

[151] Jung, Carl Gustav: *Memories, Dreams, Reflections.* New York: Vintage Books, 1989, p. 99.

[152] Cf. Gruber: *Die Seherin von Prevorst*, pp. 237.

[153] Maiden name: Princess Maria Theresa (Gegina) Hohenlohe (1860–1916).

[154] Letter from the April 5, 1912. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, p. 40.

[155] Rilke to Marie Taxis, April 5, 1912. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, p. 40.

[156] Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, pp. 41.

[157] Ironically, the oracles were wrong. Gegina Schlick died four years later in 1916, aged only 55.

[158] The Princess did not rule out the possibility of reincarnation. Rilke's view was more complex. Cf. Chapter II. 4.2. "Reinkarnation vs. aufsteigende Metempsychose", in: Magnússon, Gísli: *Dichtung als Erfahrungsmetaphysik*, pp. 120-126.

[159] Since his youth, Rilke was familiar with a religio-psychological model operating with the psychological effect of religious ideas. This religio-psychological idea transcends Feuerbach's theory of projection, since it focuses on the phenomenological perspective and the possible positive effect of religious ideas. In this regard, Rilke could very well be influenced by William James's pragmatism. Rilke knew the work of W. James and referred to him affirmatively. Nora Wydenbruck omitted the passage about Maeterlinck and William James. Cf. the German original: Rilke to Marie Taxis, February 6, 1913. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. I, p. 263.

[160] Taxis, Marie: *Memoirs of a Princess*, pp. 165.

[161] From September 30 until October 4, 1912. The appendix with the seance protocols is unfortunately not included in the English translation. Cf. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. II, p. 897-914.

[162] Taxis, Marie: *Memoirs of a Princess*, p. 180.

[163] Taxis, Marie: *Memoirs of a Princess*, p. 181.

[164] Ibid.

[165] This is what the spirit calls itself. Rilke asks: "Is Raimondine speaking?", because this name was mentioned earlier. The 'spirit' answers: "No, I am one of those who just loved, unknown to you." Since then she is only called *die Unbekannte,* 'the Unknown Lady', both here and in the subsequent letters between Rilke and the Princess. [Tran. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA)]

[166] Kafka, Franz: *Collected Stories*. Trans. Willa & Edwin Muir. (Everyman's Library). London: A. A. Knopf, 1993, p. 24. Prater calls these answers "Delphic, to say the least". Prater: *A Ringing Glass*, p. 214.

[167] The 'greats lovers' ('die großen Liebenden') were one of Rilke's favorite subjects. He asks the 'Unknown Lady': "Do you still know the entirety of your destiny?" and the Unknown Lady answers: "There was too much red blood in my heart, and so it had to bleed, stabbed with a blade." Rilke: "Are you still able to talk about your love?". The Unknown Lady: "The point of the blade often destroys the poison of love. […] Hasty, cruel, short." Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel,* Vol. II, p. 911. As mentioned earlier, the Unknown Lady calls herself "one of the many that only loved". The fact that the Unknown Lady was one of 'the great lovers' probably led Princess Marie to believe that Rilke communicated metapsychically with his own subconscious.

[168] Taxis, Marie: *Memoirs of a Princess*, p. 181. "wo Stahl sich sanft an Engel (?) schmiegt // wie die Wellen tönen tönen wirst auch Du." Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. II, p. 901.

[169] "In Toledo, wirst Du mir dort nahe sein?" Ibid.

[170] Taxis, Marie: *Memoirs of a Princess*, p. 185.

[171] Taxis, Marie: *Memoirs of a Princess*, p. 182. Cf. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. II, p. 905.

[172] "Ja, aber mein Herz hat keine Stimme jetzt, warum? Warum?" Ibid.

[173] The Unknown Lady: "That is better—my light always shines, but at times there are shadows between you and me." Taxis, Marie: *Memoirs of a Princess*, p. 182.

[174] Die Unbekannte: "Laufe voran, ich werde dir folgen / Stahl Brücke" / Rilke: "Bitte sage mir, *welche* Brücke." / Die Unbekannte: "Leichter dort." Cf. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. II, p. 906. [Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA).]

[175] Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. II, p. 907.

[176] "Ja gegen die Kirche (?) wo blutiges Stahl herniederhengt." Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. II, p. 910. [Trans. Culturebites.]

[177] Marie Taxis writes: "The communications of the planchette, whether they came from the Beyond or not, put an end to Rilke's indecision. Now he knew where he must go; he was being called to Toledo." Taxis, Marie: *Memoirs of a Princess*, p. 183.

[178] Leppmann, Wolfgang: *Rilke. A Life*. Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1984, p. 277.

[179] Perhaps it is the same session in Munich: "[Rilke] confessed that he had attempted to experiment with a medium, but she only produced the usual

banalities. The Unknown Lady had not appeared again." Taxis, Marie: *Memoirs of a Princess*, p. 183.

[180] Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters,* pp. 66

[181] Rilke: *Selected Letters,* p. 219.

[182] Leppmann, Wolfgang: *Rilke. A Life*, p. 277.

[183] The Princess narrates two episodes taking place in Venice in April and November 1911. Benvenuta had a similar experience, which she linked to the princess's Venetian experiences. Cf. Hattingberg, Magda von: *Rilke und Benvenuta. Ein Buch des Dankes.* Wien: Wilhelm, 1943, p. 164.

[184] The episode narrated by the princess, in which Rilke and she find a miniature of the Empress Maria Ludovica, may seem trivial on the surface, but Rilke's utterance "There is no such thing as chance" is characteristic of his worldview. Cf. Taxis, Marie: *Memoirs of a Princess,* p. 159.

[185] "Ich fragte nach *Wolf*, Du wolltest nicht hören". Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel,* p. 906. [Trans. Culturbites]

[186] "Flowers, too, bow in all directions" ("Auch Blumen neigen sich nach allen Seiten"). Ibid. [Trans. Culturebites] The Unknown Lady seems to be more interested in arranging the details of their 'rendezvous' in Toledo.

[187] Taxis, Marie/Rilke: *Letters,* p. 116. "Es rauschen die Z(?)eiten wie Wälder". Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. II, p. 904. [Trans. Culturebites]

[188] "Aber weißt Du denn nicht alles?". Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. II, p. 907. [Trans. Culturebites]

[189] Marie Taxis to Rilke, November 11, 1912. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. I, pp. 224.

[190] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA). Cf. Kassner, Rudolf: "Zum Briefwechsel zwischen R.M. Rilke und der Fürstin Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe", in: Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. I, p. XXXVI.

[191] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA). Cf. Marie Taxis to Rilke, August 10, 1913. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. I, p. 306.

[192] "*Wo*, liebe Fürstin, bekommt man eine solche kleine Planchette? Könnten Sie mir eine besorgen lassen? Oder sagen, *wo* man's findet? Mich drängts zur Unbekannten." Rilke to Marie Taxis, July 29, 1913. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. I, p. 304.

[193] She adds: "Have you heard anything from the 'Unknown Lady recently, I wonder?" Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters,* p. 102.

[194] Rilke to Marie Taxis, October 21, 1913. [Letter in French]. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters,* p. 105.

[195] Marie Taxis's nickname for Rilke. In her *Memoirs* she writes: "During the summer I solemnly declared, to Rilke's delight, that I wanted to find a new name for him, for my own personal use. […] "Doctor Seraphicus!" It flashed suddenly into my mind, as though someone had whispered it in my ear, and I could not think how it had come to me. […] And yet, was it not a premonitory inspiration? I understood from the bottom of my heart when the great hour came at last, the hour of his Second Elegy, the wonderful invocation of the Angels." The nickname is often abbreviated when Rilke signs his letters: D. S. Cf. Marie Taxis: *Memoirs of a Princess*, p. 144.

[196] Marie Taxis to Rilke, October 26, 1913. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, p. 106.

[197] Original German title: "Materialisationsphänomene", Engl. translation 1920.

[198] Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, pp. 113.

[199] "Do you think Miss Hofmeister has returned to Munich? Might she be willing to try again with my planchette?". Trans. GM. "Ob Fräulein Hofmeister jetzt wieder in München ist? Und ob sie sich wohl einmal bereitfände, meine *planchette* zu versuchen?" Rilke to Marie Taxis, December 30,1916. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. II, p. 501.

[200] "Every one of your letters would do me good, possibly also a message, if something relevant to me should emerge during the [automatic] 'writing'. Hopefully, the 'Unknown Lady' has not given up on me?" Trans. G.M. "Jeder Brief wäre Wohlthun für mich, eventuell auch Nachricht, wenn beim [automatischen] 'Schreiben' sich etwas herausstellt, was mich anginge. Die 'Unbekannte' hat mich doch nicht aufgegeben?" Rilke to Marie Taxis, January 5, 1915. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. I, p. 397.

[201] Marie Taxis to Rilke, April 8, 1915. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, p. 137.

[202] Rilke to Marie Taxis, April 13, 1915. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, p. 138.

[203] Rilke's disappointment with the poor results of the spiritualistic activities in Munich is confirmed in at letter to Marianne Mitford from April 12, 1915 (the day before the letter to the Princess).

[204] In the middle of August 1920, the Unknown Lady conveys a similar message: "*Poeta* – ? he is not to collect sand – desert-sand – his knowledge?

Singing – not earthly – too distracted – should collect himself." [My trans.] ("Poeta – ? nicht soll er Sand sammeln Wuesten Sand – sein Wissen? Singen – nicht irdisch – zu viel zerfahren – sich sammeln –" .) Marie Taxis to Rilke, August 16, 1920. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. II, p. 617. Rilke was impressed by these words. He writes to 'Dory' von der Mühll: "The letter from Princess Taxis didn't exactly contain new scoldings, but rather many convincing and urgent matters, even from the realms of 'another world'. Strange voices." [My transl.] ("Im Brief der Fürstin Taxis standen nicht gerade neue Scheltungen, aber doch viel überzeugend Dringliches, sogar aus den Bereichen der 'anderen Welt'. Kuriose Stimmen.") Letter from August 25, 1920. R.M.R.: *Briefe an Schweizer Freunde*. Ed. Rätus Luck. With the collaboration of Hugo Sarbach. Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1994, p. 90)

[205] This idea can be traced back to the *Corpus Hermeticum* that was widespread within the esoteric and occultistic movements: "*Corpus Hermeticum* XI 20-22 states that an understanding of God can only be attained by those who have experienced to the fullest all aspects of the universe; and under the impact of the 'temporalization of the Great Chain of Being', the conclusion was drawn that such understanding would require many lifetimes. Thus, romantic minds could come to conceptualize the supreme fulfillment as that point at which 'man, at the end of his pilgrimages, consciously perceives its chain in its entirety'. Perfect gnosis would thus imply the attainment of a fully-conscious understanding of one's whole reincarnational history, and a contemplation of the ultimate perfection of the intricate pattern of experienced events." Hanegraaff: *New Age Religion*, p. 479.

[206] Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters,* p. 123.

[207] The discourses 'psychology' and 'parapsychology' were not sharply separated in this epoch. Cf. Simon, Tina: *Rilke als Leser. Untersuchungen zum Rezeptionsverhalten. Ein Beitrag zur Zeitbegegnung des Dichters während des ersten Weltkrieges.* Frankfurt a. M. et al.: Lang 2001, p. 269.

[208] Marie Taxis to Rilke, on April 8, 1915. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, p. 137.

[209] Rilke to Marie Taxis, April 13, 1915. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, p. 138.

[210] Rilke to Marie Taxis, January 18, 1920. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, p. 182.

[211] Marie Taxis to Rilke, January 18, 1920. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, p. 183.

[212] Rilke to Marie Taxis, May 3, 1920. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, p. 184.

[213] Rilke to Marie Taxis, April 24, 1918. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, p. 173.

[214] Rilke to Wunderly-Volkart, November 30, 1920. Quoted from: Salis, Jean Rodolphe: *Rainer Maria Rilke. The Years in Switzerland*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press,1964, p. 92. Cf. Rilke to Wunderly-Volkart, November 30, 1920. R.M.R.: *Briefe an Nanny Wunderly-Volkart* [NWV]. Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1977. Vol. I, p. 349.

[215] Boventer tries to cover up this fact by starting with the spiritualistic explanation and subsequently quoting the psychological letter to 'Nike'. Nevertheless, he has to admit to changing the chronology: "As Rilke's secrecy regarding Count C. W. is from a later point in time, it is taken to be his final word." ("[D]a Rilkes Geheimnistuerei um den 'Grafen C. W.' in die folgende Zeit fällt, wird sie für seine letzte Aussage gehalten.") Cf. Boventer, Hans: *Rilkes Zyklus 'Aus dem Nachlaß des Grafen C. W.*, p. 9. What he calls "Geheimnistuerei" ("secrecy") really *was* Rilke's last word, and not the rational-psychological explanation.

[216] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA). Rilke to Marie Taxis, December 15, 1920. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, p. 195.

[217] The Princess is most fond of the Egyptian poem *In Karnak wars.* She humorously mentions an incarnation as pharaoh as the reason for this affinity!

[218] Including two poems from the second part: *Schöne Aglaja* (II 9) and *Ich ging; ich wars* (II 10).

[219] Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters*, p. 200.

[220] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA). Marie Taxis to Rilke, April 3, 1921. Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. II, p. 646.

[221] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA). Rilke to Wunderly-Volkart, December 13, 1921. Rilke: *Briefe an NWV*. Vol. I, p. 608.

[222] Helen Sword retells the circumstances in a similar way: "Even when, in 1920, friend installed him in a luxurious Swiss country house, where his solitude was assured and his every material need was met with alacrity (including his desire for an efficient but unobtrusive housekeeper), he was able to produce nothing more impressive than a series of rather conventional verses for which, perhaps wisely, he refused to take full responsibility. Instead, he attributed them to a ghostly eighteenth-century figure called "Count C. W.": "Er dichtet manches, was ich nie gebilligt haben würde." ("He composes many poems that I myself would never have approved of.")" Sword, Helen: *Engendering Inspiration: Visionary Strategies in Rilke,*

*Lawrence, and H.D.* University of Michigan Press, 1995, pp. 65. Cf. Boventer: *Rilkes Zyklus 'Aus dem Nachlaß des Grafen C. W.'*, p. 39.

[223] Treitel: *Avatars of the Soul*, p. 237.

[224] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA). Rilke to Wunderly, November 18, 1919. Rilke: *Briefe an NWV*, p. 19.

[225] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA). Rilke: *Briefe an Schweizer Freunde*, p. 720.

[226] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA). Burckhardt: *Memorabilien*, pp. 337.

[227] Ibid.

[228] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA). Kopp, Peter F.: "Rilke und Basel", in: *Baselbieter Heimatblätter*. Vol. 70. Issue 3 (2005), p. 117.

[229] Rilke to Marie Taxis, December 27, 1913, p. 113.

[230] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA). Rilke to Wunderly, June 5, 1920. Rilke: *Briefe an NWV*. Vol. I, pp. 247.

[231] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA). Rilke: *Briefe an Schweizer Freunde*, p. 194.

[232] Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA). Kopp: "Rilke und Basel", p. 119.

[233] The link between distance hypnosis and parapsychology is evident in Maupassant's tale *The Horla*. Cf. Maupassant: *The Horla*, pp. 13.

[234] Schrenck-Notzing obtained his doctorate in 1888 with the thesis *Die therapeutische Verwertung des Hypnotismus*. Cf. Bauer: "Spiritismus und Okkultismus", p. 75.

[235] Fanny Clavel retells an additional episode from October, 1920, where Rilke once more demonstrated his talent in distance hypnosis: "Just how well we were attuned to each other was also demonstrated on another occasion, when, at the rear of Ritterhof, in Hans von der Mühll's house [Theodora ['Dory'] von der Mühll's husband; she is the sister of Carl Burckhardt], I was led by Rilke, blindfolded, over to a bookcase, and after a brief hesitation pulled out a small book from the Insel series, namely: 'Das Marien-Leben', with a strong feeling that it was right. I then received the book from him as a gift with a fine dedication." [Trans. Culturebites (proprietor Annemette Fogh MA).] Cited in Kopp: "Rilke und Basel", p. 199. Cf. Clavel-Respinger, Alexander und Fanny: *Das Buch vom*

*Wenkenhof*. Introduction by Carl J. Burckhardt. Basel: Helbing, 1957. Rilke mentions this experiment in a letter to her from February 14, 1924: "Lorsque, dans notre jeu, je vous ai guidé, tenant votre main, par la pensée constamment communiquée, vers cette pendule dont, selon notre décision, vous deviez remuer les aiguilles." Cf. Rilke: *Briefe an Schweizer Freunde*, p. 398.

[236] Owing to the explicitly biographical background and occasion of the *Requiem for a Friend*, I consciously commit the intentional fallacy and thus refer to the poetic persona as *Rilke* and the 'you' as *Paula*.

[237] SW I 647.

[238] Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of RMR*. Edited and translated by Stephen Mitchell. New York: Vintage, 1989, p. 73.

[239] My translation. Cf.: "[A]us den spiritistischen Phänomenen [läßt sich] der Tod als eine Steigerung der Individualität erkennen, und da sich dabei der jenseitige Zustand in gewissem Sinn als ein leiblicher verrät, so kann der Tod als eine Essentifikation unseres ganzen Wesens, des Bewußtseins sowohl, wie der Leiblichkeit angesehen werden." du Prel: *Das Rätsel des Menschen*, pp. 71.

[240] In the *Requiem for a Friend,* Rilke uses the phrase: 'die Welt, wo Säfte *wollen*' ("a world where bodies have their will"). Cf. SW I 651. In the same sense, Orpheus belongs to the earthly realm in two regards: as an incarnated human and as a man ruled by his sexual urges.

[241] SW I 544.

[242] Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of RMR*, p. 51.

[243] SW I 647.

[244] Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of RMR*, p. 51.

[245] SW I 647.

[246] Cf. the Chapter "Rilke und Maeterlincks Bewusstseinsevolution – die Bienen des Unsichtbaren", in: Magnússon: Dichtung als Erfahrungsmetaphysik, pp. 196-209.

[247] "Doch daß du selbst erschrakst und auch noch jetzt / den Schrecken hast, wo Schrecken nicht mehr gilt" ("But that you too were frightened, and even now / pulse with your fear, where fear can have no meaning") Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of RMR,* p. 73.

[248] Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of RMR,* p. 77.

[249] Rilke: *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter*, p. 44.

[250] Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of RMR,* p. 73. Cf. SW I 647.

[251] SW I 648.

[252] Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of RMR,* p. 85.

[253] Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of RMR,* p 75. Cf. SW I 649.

[254] Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of RMR,* p 75. Cf. SW I 648.

[255] Goethe, Johann Wolfgang: *Faust. Der Tragödie erster und zweiter Teil*. Ed. Erich Trunz. Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1991, p. 358. Erich Trunz: "Der Pater Seraphicus läßt die Seligen Knaben die Welt durch seine Augen sehen, sie erblicken Felsen, Gebirgsbach und Bäume". J.W.G.: *Faust,* p. 737.

[256] Goethe, Johann Wolfgang: *Faust. Part* II. Trans. Leopold J. Bernays. London 1839, p. 201.

[257] Erich Trunz mentions the following two letters. Goethe writes to his mother on October 3, 1785: "If people wish, like the Swedenborgian spirits, to see through other eyes, they would do best to choose the eyes of a child."[257] And, on November 28, 1806, he writes to F. A. Wolf: "Why can I not at once, honored friend, on receiving sink your letter, sink myself for a short time in your being, like those *Swedenborgian* spirits who sometimes receive permission to enter into the organs of sense of their master, and through the medium of these to behold the world?"[257] There were three works by Swedenborg in the library of Goethe's father, including Fr. Chr. Oetinger's translation from Latin into German: *Von den Erdkörpern der Planeten und des gestirnten Himmels Einwohnern*. Cf. Trunz' commentary in: Goethe, Johann Wolfgang: *Faust*, p. 737.

[258] Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of RMR*, p. 77.

[259] Ibid.

[260] SW I 656.

[261] Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of RMR*, p. 87.

[262] SW I 664.

[263] SW I 664.

[264] SW I 687.

[265] Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of RMR*, p. 153.

[266] In a letter to Gertrud Ouckama Knoop from January 1922, Rilke used the metaphor 'antennas of the heart' to describe her daughter Wera's

mediumistic ability to reach beyond the earthly realms into the more-than-earthly. Rilke: *Briefe*. Vol. II, p. 294.

[267] In *Trésor des armes* by Maeterlinck, Rilke read a Claude St. Martin-quote: "Have we […] advanced one step further on the radiant path of enlightenment, that leads to the simplicity of men?" Maeterlinck answers: "Let us wait in silence: perhaps ere long we shall be conscious of the 'murmur of the gods'." Maeterlinck, Maurice: *The Treasure of the Humble.* Trans. Alfred Sutro. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company/London: George Allen/Ruskin House, 1902, p. 42. Rilke turns the stillness, which favors the 'murmur of the gods', into the 'murmur of the spirits'.

[268] Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of RMR*, p. 155.

[269] Rilke: *Letters.* Vol. II., p. 356.

[270] The episodes here are listed in the order they appear in the novel, though my analysis of them may differ from this sequence.

[271] SW VI 729-741.

[272] SW VI 787-792.

[273] SW VI 792-797

[274] SW VI 776-778.

[275] SW VI 836-842.

[276] SW VI 844-851.

[277] SW VI 747-757.

[278] SW VI 897-898.

[279] SW VI, pp. 951.

[280] SW VI, pp. 951.

[281] Rilke to Franz Kappus Xaver, August 12, 1904. Rilke: *Letters to a Young Poet*, p. 41.

[282] Cf. the letter to Nora Purtscher-Wydenbruck, August 11, 1924. Rilke: *Briefe*. Vol. II, p. 453.

[283] SW VI 731.

[284] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 18.

[285] SW VI 847.

[286] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 97.

[287] SW VI 736.

[288] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p.22.

[289] Ibid.

[290] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p.24.

[291] Ibid.

[292] SW VI 741.

[293] According to Wolfgang Eppelsheimer, the most important person in this relevant story is Malte's father. Eppelsheimer considers an 'opening of the consciousness' toward the sphere of the supersensuous to be the poetical function of this ghost story. Eppelsheimer: *Rilkes larische Landschaft*, p. 183.

[294] SW VI 790.

[295] SW VI 791.

[296] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 58. The sentence in brackets [I saw it, Malte; I saw it.] was forgotten or omitted by Michael Hulse.

[297] Trans. GM. "Daß der Hund dieser 'Erscheinungs'-Szene ausgerechnet 'Cavalier' heißt, bedeutet uns, er sei in diesem Moment der einzige, der dem Geist die schuldige Reverenz erweist, während der Mensch in unhöflicher Starre verharrt." Eppelsheimer: *Rilkes larische Landschaft*, pp. 179.

[298] My translation: "Nun steckt darin, dass hier die Tote nicht von einem Menschen, sondern vom Hund wahrgenommen wird, noch eine weitere List des Autors. Er schlägt damit dem eingefleischten Skeptiker von vornherein manches Gegenargument aus der Hand. Menschliche Manipulation oder Täuschung sind hier ausgeschlossen." Ibid.

[299] In the aforementioned letter to Pongs, Rilke writes that the paranormal occurrences in Malte are partly his own personal childhood memories.

[300] The ghost hand of the childhood scene is linked to the 'hand of the other interpretation'. Cf. Baßler: "Auf dem Zwischenplane – Gespenster bei Ibsen, Rilke und Breton", in: Deppermann, Maria (ed.): *Ibsen im europäischen Spannungsfeld zwischen Naturalismus und Symbolismus*. Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 1998, pp. 342 and Pytlik: *Okkultismus und Moderne*, pp. 191.

[301] SW VI 793.

[302] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 59. SW VI 793.

[303] SW VI 792.

[304] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 59. SW VI 792.

[305] SW VI 792.

[306] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 59.

[307] SW VI 799.

[308] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 64.

[309] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 95. "Dass man erzählte, wirklich erzählte, muß vor meiner Zeit gewesen sein." SW VI 844.

[310] SW VI 847.

[311] *Rilke: The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 97.

[312] The highlighted *seeing* [*Sehen*] is related to the creative process of the visionary artist. In the Ibsen note, the artist is searching for equivalents in the visible world of what he had seen inside (*unter dem Sichtbaren nach Äquivalenten für das innen Gesehene*). SW VI 785.

[313] SW VI 795.

[314] *Rilke: The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 61.

[315] SW VI 796..

[316] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge,* p. 61.

[317] Baßler, Moritz: "Auf dem Zwischenplane – Gespenster bei Ibsen, Rilke und Breton", p. 343.

[318] Ibid.

[319] Trans. GM.

[320] Further poetological/postmodern interpretations of the ghost hand can be found in the additional article by Baßler: "Maltes Gespenster", p. 248, and by Wagner-Egelhaaf, Martina: *Mystik der Moderne. Die visionäre Ästhetik der deutschen Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1989, p. 92 and Pytlik: *Okkultismus und Moderne*, p. 191.

[321] In the early tale *Teufelsspuk* (1899) [SW IV 574-581], Rilke introduces a materialization: "Die Gestalt ließ sich auf dem Bette nieder und materialisierte sich offenbar heftig". SW IV 579.

[322] Crookes, William: *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* [Reprinted from The Quarterly Journal of Science]. London: J. Burns 1874, p. 93. Carl du Prel quotes the following German edition: Crookes, William:

"Notizen einer Untersuchung über die sogenannten spirituellen Erscheinungen während der Jahre 1870-73", in: *Psychische Studien*. Vol. I. issue 4. (1874), p. 159. As a young man, Rilke read du Prel's book *Der Spiritualismus* containing the mentioned passage. Cf. du Prel: *Der Spiritualismus*, p. 39.

[323] SW VI 756.

[324] Rilke: The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, p. 34.

[325] "[...] beim Schreiben sah ich, dass ich Dinge schrieb, die ich nicht gewußt hatte [...]". du Prel: *Die Entdeckung der Seele durch die Geheimwissenschaften*. Vol I, p. 225. Cf. Braungart, Georg: "Spiritismus und Literatur um 1900", in: *Ästhetische und religiöse Erfahrungen der Jahrhundertwenden*. Vol. II. Eds. Wolfgang Braungart/Gotthard Fuchs/Manfred Koch. Paderborn: Schöningh 2002, pp. 91.

[326] Bettine (or Bettina) von Arnim (born Brentano), 1785-1859. She was Clemens Brentano's sister and married his friend Achim von Arnim in 1811. Clemens, Achim, and Bettine were prominent writers in the Romantic era.

[327] SW VI 897. Cf. Fick: "Spiritismus, Okkultismus, Gnostizismus und Rilkes Roman *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*", in: *Europäische Jahrhundertwende – Literatur, Künste, Wissenschaften um 1900 in grenzüberschreitender Wahrnehmung*. Eds. Werner Frick & Ulrich Mölk. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2002", pp. 78.

[328] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, pp. 131.

[329] Monika Fick interprets Bettine von Arnim's 'perception of dead' on the basis of du Prel's occultistic epistemology. Cf. Fick, Monika: "Spiritismus, Okkultismus, Gnostizismus", p. 79.

[330] The source of the John on Patmos motif is a painting by Hans Memling from 1479 where John dictates the revelation. It looks as if John is writing with both hands, but here Rilke misunderstands the posture (productively!): John has a quill in one hand and a quill knife in the other; a necessary tool for writing with a quill. To Rilke, writing with two hands means that you act as a medium and write automatically. When describing the process of 'dictating' the *First Duino Elegy*, Rilke wrote to Princess Taxis on January 16, 1912 that he felt like John on Patmos: "I hesitate infinitely, dear Princess, after writing what was so violently dictated to me the other day here on this Patmos, so that, when I think of it, I feel as though I had written with both hands, to the right and the left, like the Apostle in St. John's Hospital in Bruges, so as to capture every word that was being given to me." Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Letters,* p.31.

[331] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 132.

[332] SW VI 898.

[333] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 132.

[334] SW VI 898.

[335] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 132.

[336] The so-called Akashic Records are related to the theories about the astral plane and subtle matter. Akâsha is the Hindu word for ether (the fifth element), but, in Theosophy and Anthroposophy, it is defined as the universal memory which can be accessed by the psychics. (Cf. Hanegraaff: New Age Religion, p. 255; 454; Blavatsky, Helena P.: *The Secret Doctrine*. Vol. I. Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1988, p. 18.) Later, the American psychic Edgar Cayce claimed to tap into the Akashic records (*The Hall of Records*). [Cf. Johnson, K. John: *Edgar Cayce in Context: The Readings, Truth and Fiction.* State University of New York Press, Albany, 1998, p. 67] C. G. Jung's concept of the collective unconscious could be rooted in this theosophical term. In New Age literature, the concept is ubiquitous. Rilke might have learned about the Akashic Records from reading Annie Besant. [Cf. Mercier: *Les sources ésotériques et occultes,* Vol. II, p. 60.] Along with Charles W. Leadbeater, Annie Besant was the most important continuator of Blavatskyan Theosophy. Rudolf Steiner developed his own spiritual community in 1912, the Anthroposophical Society. He wrote a book about his clairvoyant readings of Akashic Records: Steiner, Rudolf: *Aus der Akasha-Chronik*. Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag 2002. We know for sure that Rilke read an article by Maeterlinck who refers to a 'cosmic store of knowledge' ("kosmischen Schatz aus Wissen"). Maeterlinck: "Über das Leben nach dem Tode", in: *Neue Rundschau.* Vol. 24/1 (1913), p. 245 [Cf. the letter to Marie Thurn und Taxis February 6, 1913: Rilke/Marie Taxis: *Briefwechsel*. Vol. I, p. 263]. In his most esoteric book, *Le Grand Secret*, Maeterlinck used the term Akasha chronicle: M.M.: *Le Grand Secret*. Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1921, p. 287.

[337] Cf. Loers, Veit (ed.): *Okkultismus und Avantgarde. Von Munch bis Mondrian 1900-1915*.

[338] In Hermann Graf Keyserling's *Travel Diary of a Philosopher*, which Rilke read three times, the count writes: "What is the explanation of this 'psychic atmosphere' which is manifestly real in the objective sense, and whose existence I feel more clearly the longer I live? I do not know. I assume that it is a question of waves belonging to an 'ether' which hardly corresponds to that of the physicist, but which are nevertheless vibrations of

a material kind. No doubt thoughts are just as much 'things' as the objects of the external world, no less real and probably more enduring than we suppose. The spirit of an age is an entity no less objective than the physical air. If mental images were not material, they could not be infectious. I do not know, either, how else I could sense a psychic atmosphere directly, how else I could be influenced so strongly by the place in which I happen to be, and be affected differently in accordance with the beings who constantly live, or have lived, there. Only he can doubt the reality of psychic atmosphere whose senses are too blunt to feel it. Its theory has never yet been written down. The only coherent attempt of which I know originates from the old Indians: I mean the obscure teachings of the Tattvas." Keyserling, Hermann Graf: *Travel Diary of a Philosopher*. Trans. J. Holroyd Reece. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1925. Vol. I, pp. 222.

[339] SW VI 776.

[340] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 48.

[341] Morse: „Rilke and the Occult", p. 17. Cf. Magnússon: *Dichtung als Erfahrungsmetaphysik,* pp. 308.

[342] SW VI 837.

[343] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 90.

[344] SW VI 838.

[345] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 90.

[346] SW VI 838.

[347] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 90.

[348] Maeterlinck used the motif of blindness in his plays and essays. Rilke was strongly influenced by Maeterlinck in the 1890s and wrote poems such as *Das Lied des Blinden* [The Blind Man's Song] (Rilke: SW I 449) and *Die Blinde* [The Blind Woman] in the Schmargendorf Diary (Rilke: *Tagebücher der Frühzeit,* pp. 332).

[349] SW VI 840.

[350] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 92.

[351] SW VI 841.

[352] Rilke: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 93.

[353] SW VI 842.

[354] Komar, Kathleen L.: "Rilke: Metaphysics in a New Age", in: *Rilke Reconsidered*. Ed. Sigrid Bauschinger & Susan L. Cocalis. Tübingen/Basel: Francke, 1995, pp. 155-169.

[355] Burnham, Sophy: *A Book of Angels: Reflections on Angels Past and Present and True Stories of How They Touch Our Lives.* New York: Ballantine, 1990; Bly, Robert: *Iron John: A Book About Men*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1990; McNeill, Barbara/Guidon, Carol (eds.): *Noetic Sciences Collection: 1980-1990, 10 Years of Consciousness Research*. Sausalito, CA: Institute of Noetic Sciences, 1991; Mitchell, Stephen: *The Gospel According to Jesus: A New Translation and Guide to His Essential Teachings for Believers and Unbelievers*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993 (1. edition 1991); Borysenko, Joan: *Guilt is the Teacher, Love is the Lesson*. New York: Warner, 1990; Moore, Thomas: *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

[356] Komar: "Rilke: Metaphysics in a New Age", p. 155.

[357] Komar: "Rilke: Metaphysics in a New Age", p. 157.

[358] Rilke: *Letters to a Young Poet*, p. 18. Rilke: *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter*, p. 21.

[359] Komar: "Rilke: Metaphysics in a New Age", p. 157.

[360] Komar: "Rilke: Metaphysics in a New Age", p. 159.

[361] Rilke, Rainer Maria: *Sonnets to Orpheus*. Trans. David Young. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987, p. 25.

[362] Komar: "Rilke: Metaphysics in a New Age", p. 161.

[363] Komar: "Rilke: Metaphysics in a New Age", pp. 163.

[364] Fleer, Angelica/Schönherz, Richard: *Bis an alle Sterne. Rilke-Projekt I* . BMG 2001; A.F. & R.S..: *In meinem wilden Herzen. Rilke-Projekt II.* Random House Audio 2002; A.F. & R.S.: *Überfließende Himmel. Rilke-Projekt III.* Random House Audio 2004; A.F. & R.S.: Rilke Projekt IV *Weltenweiter Wandrer* (Sony Music, 2010).

[365] SW II 363.

[366] Rilke, R.M.: *The Best of Rilke: 72 Form-true Verse Translations with Facing Originals*. Trans. Walter W. Arndt. Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 1989, p. 109.

[367] SW I 561.

[368] Rilke, R.M.: *The Best of Rilke*, p. 109.

[369] SW II 185.

[370] Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, p. 277.

[371] At this point, the music develops in a pathetic way. The wordless scales sung by Monserrat Caballé make a hollow impression.

[372] In Jelle van der Meulen's *Herzwerk. Über die Lüge, den Abgrund und die Liebe.* (Stuttgart: Urachhaus 2006), Rilke is cited in the title. The word 'Herzwerk' occurs in the poem *Wendung*.

[373] Cf. Kühlewind, Georg: *Vom Normalen zum Gesunden. Wege zur Befreiung des erkrankten Bewußtseins*. Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben [5]1995 ([1]1983), p. 243; G.K.: *Das Gewahrwerden des Logos*. Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben [2]1990; G.K.: *Weihnachten. Die drei Geburten des Menschen*. Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben [3]1999.

[374] Jäger, Willigis: *Die Welle ist das Meer. Mystische Spiritualität*. Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder 2004.

[375] Rilke: *Book of Hours. Prayers to a Lowly God*, p. 9.

[376] Johannes Heiner teaches meditation at Benediktushof in Würzburg which is lead by Willigis Jäger. He holds lectures and workshops on Rilke and spirituality. His website (www.lyrikrilke.de) offers a variety of articles, illustrations, seminars, etc.

[377] Heiner, Johannes: *Wege ins Dasein. Spirituelle Botschaften der 'Duineser Elegien' von Rainer Maria Rilke*. Berlin: Goldbeck-Löwe 2004.

[378] Heiner, Johannes: *Poesie des einfachen Lebens/Poésie de la vie simple. Die französischen Gedichte von Rainer Maria Rilke*. Berlin: Goldbeck-Löwe 2005.

[379] Cf. Hanegraaff: *New Age Religion*, pp. 365.

[380] Lovejoy, Arthur: *The Great Chain of Being*, p. 25.

[381] Hanegraaff describes the problem with this type of dualism: "The Cartesian dilemma, as is well known, consists in the problem of how a strict dualism of *res cogitans* versus *res extensa* is to be reconciled with the fact that the former is able to act upon the latter. Explanations in terms of instrumental causality have to make assumptions which are all *a priori* incompatible with the basic dualism, i.e. they must assume that the two substances can make contact with each other, or that one can be reduced to the other, or that there is a third substance of some kind which mediates between the two (in which case the problem shifts to the question of how *this* substance relates to the two others)." Hanegraaff: *New Age Religion*, p. 427.

[382] Hanegraaff: *New Age Religion*, p. 119.

[383] Ibid.

[384] Rilke to Gertrud Ouckama Knoop, January 1922. Rilke: *Briefe*. Vol. II, p. 294.

[385] This can be observed in his *Requiem for a Friend* and at the Duino seances. where he communicates with the spirit of the *Unknown Lady* through a medium, Marie Taxis's son, Pascha.

[386] Letter to Countess Margo Sizzo, Epiphany [January 6] 1923: "The content of 'initiations' was, I am sure, nothing but the imparting of a 'key' that permitted the reading of the word 'death' *without* negation; like the moon, life surely has a side permanently turned away from us which is not its counter-part but its complement toward perfection, toward consummation, toward the really sound and full sphere and orb of being." Rilke: *Letters*. Vol. II, p. 316.

[387] du Prel: *The Philosophy of Mysticism*. Trans. C. C. Massey. Vol. I. London: George Redway 1889, p. 7.

[388] SW V 545.

[389] Hanegraaff: *New Age Religion*, p. 470.

[390] Wegener-Stratmann, Martina: '*Über die unerschöpfliche Schichtung unserer Natur'. Totalitätsvorstellungen der Jahrhundertwende. Die Weltbilder von Rainer Maria Rilke und C. G. Jung im Vergleich*. Frankfurt a. M./Berlin et al.: Lang 2002.

[391] Wegener-Stratmann: '*Über die unerschöpfliche Schichtung unserer Natur'*, p. 143.

[392] Letter to Emil Freiherr von Gebsattel, January 24, 1912. Rilke: *Briefe*. Vol. I, p. 350.

[393] Letter to Emil Freiherr von Gebsattel, January 14, 1912. Rilke: *Briefe*. Vol. I, p. 342.

[394] Rilke: *Briefe*. Vol. I, p. 343.

[395] Letter to Lotte Hepner on November 8, 1915. Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Marie Rilke*, p. 340. "Könnte man die Geschichte Gottes nicht behandeln als einen nie angetretenen Teil des menschlichen Gemütes […]?" Rilke: *Briefe*. Vol. II, p. 54.

[396] Carus, Carl Gustav: *Psyche. Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Seele*. Pforzheim: Flammer & Hoffmann 1846, p. 1.

[397] Letter to Kappus, Borgebygård, August 12, 1904. Rilke: *Letters to a young Poet*, p. 39.

[398] Rilke: *Letters to a Young Poet,* p. 42. "Wir haben keinen Grund, gegen unsere Welt Mißtrauen zu haben, denn sie ist nicht gegen uns. Hat sie Schrecken, so sind es *unsere* Schrecken, hat sie Abgründe, so gehören diese Abgründe uns, sind Gefahren da, so müssen wir versuchen, sie zu lieben." Rilke: *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter*, p. 45.

[399] SW VI, pp. 726.

[400] Rilke, Rainer Maria: *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge,* p. 15.

[401] Downes, Daragh: *The Fear and Trembling of Malte Laurids Brigge*. Vol. I. Diss. The University of Dublin, Trinity College 2002, p. 154.

[402] "[…] Malte's dismissal of the past millenia [sic] as a waste of time on a spiritual criterion undermines the argument that he is essentially preoccupied with the tide of modernity." (Downes: *The Fear and Trembling of Malte Laurids Brigge*. Vol. I, p. 160, Footnote 27)

[403] SW VI 728.

[404] SW I 712.

[405] Rilke: *The Selected Poetry of RMR*., p. 189.

[406] Rilke to Dorothea von Ledebur December 19, 1918. Rilke: *Letters*. Vol. II, p. 183. Cf. *Rilke-Chronik*, p. 615.

[407] Ibid.

[408] Hanegraaff speaks of the four 'mirrors of secular thought': 1. Esotericism Between Enlightenment and Counterenlightenment. 2. The Impact of the Study of Religions. 3. Evolution as Religion. 4. The Psychologization of Esotericism. Cf. Hanegraaff: *New Age Religion*, pp. 411-513.

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