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## The Later French Poems Translated by Neil Baldwin

Rainer Maria Rilke

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# THE LATER FRENCH POEMS

*Rainer Marie Rilke*

Translated by Neil E. Baldwin

## A Note on the Poems

*These four poems are from a sequence of 59 called Vergers, which Rilke wrote between January 1924 and May 1925, for the most part while he was living at Chateau de Muzot sur Sierre, Switzerland.*

*As early as 1899 he had been composing sporadic French lyrics; but in Spring 1922, after he had completed The Duino Elegies and The Sonnets to Orpheus, his native language resources were depleted. Exhausted, Rilke turned to the lighter, brighter strains of his adopted land in hopes of raising himself up out of malaise.*

*The French verses—he wrote more than 400 altogether—do seem at first glance to lack the density and force of the earlier and better-known work. They reflect back to the Erste Gedichte in their simplicity and innerness. But Rilke was dealing with different concerns here; we must realize that these are the poems of a dying man looking urgently to the pastoral landscape that surrounded him for surcease.*

N. B.

7 PAUME

À Mme et M. Albert Vulliez

Paume, doux lit froissé  
où les étoiles dormantes  
avaient laissé des plis  
en se levant vers le ciel.

Est-ce que ce lit était tel  
qu'elles se trouvent reposées,  
claires et incandescentes,  
parmi les astres amis  
en leur elan éternel?

O les deux lits de mes mains,  
abandonnés et froids,  
légers d'un absent poids  
de ces astres d'airain.

12

Comme un verre de Venise  
sait en naissant ce gris  
et la clarté indécise  
dont il sera épris,

ainsi tes tendres mains  
avait rêvé d'avance  
d'être la lente balance  
de nos moments trop pleins.

7 PALM

The soft bed of my palm  
is creased and wrinkled;  
stars that once slept here  
have gone away, gone up.

Will they find  
clear and fiery rest  
among friendly stars  
bursting endless?

O the two beds of my hands  
are empty and cold, light  
with the brazen weight  
of departed stars.

12

As a Venetian vase  
newborn knows clouds  
and the uncertain light  
yet to come for it,

so too your tender hands  
have dreamed before  
of lightly weighing  
our swollen lives.

21

Dans la multiple rencontre  
faisons à tout sa part,  
afin que l'ordre se montre  
parmi les propos du hasard.

Tout autour veut qu'on l'écoute—,  
écoutons jusqu'au bout;  
car le verger et la route  
c'est toujours nous!

28 LA DEESSE

Au midi vide qui dort  
combien de fois elle passe,  
sans laisser à la terrasse  
le moindre soupçon d'un corps.

Mais si la nature la sent,  
l'habitude de l'invisible  
rend une clarté terrible  
à son doux contour apparent.

21

In meeting many others  
let each play his part  
so that order may arise  
among these chance words.

All around need hearing—  
let us listen to the end  
for the orchard and the road  
are always our selves!

28 THE GODDESS

In sleeping empty noon  
she will pass through the terrace  
and leave no trace  
of body, no presence.

But if nature senses her  
so long invisible  
her soft shape  
becomes clear and terrible.