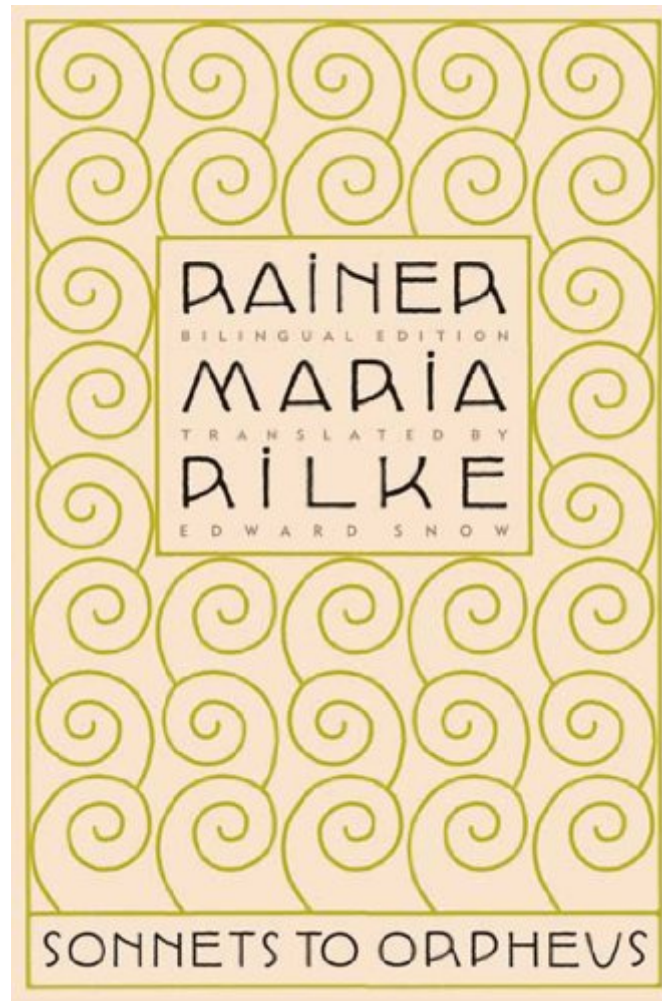


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# Sonnets To Orpheus (German Edition)



## Synopsis

Breathing, you invisible poem! World-space in pure continuous interchange with my own being. Equipose in which I rhythmically transpire. Written only four years before Rilke's death, this sequence of sonnets, varied in form yet consistently structured, stands as the poet's final masterwork. In these meditations on the constant flux of our world and the ephemerality of experience, Rilke envisions death not only as one among many of life's transformations but also as an ideally receptive state of being. Because Orpheus has visited the realm of death and returned to the living, his lyre, a unifying presence in these poems, is an emblem of fluidity and musical transcendence. And Eurydice, condemned to Hades as a result of Orpheus's backward glance, becomes in Rilke's universe a mythical figure of consolation and hope. Edward Snow, in his translations of *New Poems*, *The Book of Images*, *Uncollected Poems*, and *Duino Elegies*, has emerged as Rilke's most able English-language interpreter. Adhering faithfully to the intent of Rilke's German while constructing nuanced, colloquial poems in English, Snow's *Sonnets to Orpheus* should serve as the authoritative translation for years to come.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The *Sonnets to Orpheus* was written by Rilke over a few days' period during his winter visit to

Switzerland. It came to form almost magically, "with no doubts in any of the words" in Rilke's introduction. The Sonnets tell the classical Greek tragedy of Orpheus, who with his gift of music on the lyre charmed death to give his love back from the underworld, only to lose her forever when he broke his promise and looked back to see if she was still with him. This work is considered an interesting development in German poetry because of its improvisational creativity of the author, and is difficult to translate because of the liberties taken in the writing. In my opinion this translation is best one to date: in contrast to the popular translation by M. D. Herter Norton, which strived for accuracy at the cost of eloquence. Charming, entertaining, bittersweet, and always the contradiction between optimism and tragedy in a fatalistic touch, this is one of my favourite literary work to date.

Edward Snow, who has earned multiple awards for his translations, applies his gift to the original German poems written almost a century ago by master poet Rainer Maria Rilke in *Sonnets To Orpheus*. A bilingual German/English edition each poem in both languages on every two-page spread, *Sonnets To Orpheus* resonates with introspective contemplation on the finality of time, transition, change, and death; Rilke wrote it only four years before his own passing. A classic work that remains vividly relevant today. Does it really exist, Time the Destroyer? / When, on the peaceful mountain, does it crush the fortress? / And this heart, always the gods' possession, / when does the Demiurge pillage it?

*Sonnets to Orpheus*, is a masterpiece of the first order. I've known this book since I was 17 and first tried to wade through it in the German original. (This volume contains English translations facing the original German for each poem.) Only in *Neue Gedichte*, does Rilke occasionally surpass the sheer strength and beauty of these poems...not counting the completely exceptional and beyond the pale *Duino Elegies* (I am about to review that one in a few moments...). The translator has done an impeccable job of making this volume accessible to modern day American English speakers. If you love poetry, or know someone who does, please consider buying this book for yourself or as a gift.

Rilke is generally regarded as Romantic so the use of "mystic" in describing this work slightly misuses terms. But I use it to describe his "inspired" groping towards something "beyond". This specific translation may not appeal to everyone as it is firmly couched within the academic style of its period, and being thirty-eight years removed from the original publication, admirably expresses the original's language. C.F. MacIntyre's introduction is both scholarly and contextualizing, de-mystifying Rilke's prophetic-like "entrustment" of these songs by linking them up to a larger

contemporary literary context.

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