

RAINER

Duino Elegies

MARIA

The Sonnets to Orpheus

RILKE

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THE SIXTH ELEGY

Fig-tree, for such a long time I have found meaning
in the way you almost completely omit your blossoms
and urge your pure mystery, unproclaimed,
into the early ripening fruit.

Like the curved pipe of a fountain, your arching boughs
drive the sap

downward and up again: and almost without awakening
it bursts out of sleep, into its sweetest achievement.

Like the god stepping into the swan.

..... But *we* still linger, alas,
we, whose pride is in blossoming; we enter the overdue
interior of our final fruit and are already betrayed.

In only a few does the urge to action rise up
so powerfully that they stop, glowing in their heart's
abundance,

while, like the soft night air, the temptation to blossom
touches their tender mouths, touches their eyelids, softly:
heroes perhaps, and those chosen to disappear early,
whose veins Death the gardener twists into a different
pattern.

These plunge on ahead: in advance of their own smile
like the team of galloping horses before the triumphant
pharaoh in the mildly hollowed reliefs at Karnak.

The hero is strangely close to those who died young.

Permanence

does not concern him. He lives in continual ascent,
moving on into the ever-changed constellation
of perpetual danger. Few could find him there. But
Fate, which is silent about us, suddenly grows inspired
and sings him into the storm of his onrushing world.
I hear no one like *him*. All at once I am pierced
by his darkened voice, carried on the streaming air.

Then how gladly I would hide from the longing to be once
again

oh a boy once again, with my life before me, to sit
 leaning on future arms and reading of Samson,
 how from his mother first nothing, then everything, was
 born.

Wasn't he a hero inside you, mother? didn't
 his imperious choosing already begin there, in you?
 Thousands seethed in your womb, wanting to be *him*,
 but look: he grasped and excluded—, chose and prevailed.
 And if he demolished pillars, it was when he burst
 from the world of your body into the narrower world, where
 again

he chose and prevailed. O mothers of heroes, O sources
 of ravaging floods! You ravines into which
 virgins have plunged, lamenting,
 from the highest rim of the heart, sacrifices to the son.

For whenever the hero stormed through the stations of love,
 each heartbeat intended for him lifted him up, beyond it;
 and, turning away, he stood there, at the end of all
 smiles,—transfigured.