“Hiersein” in Rainer Maria Rilke’s Seventh and Ninth Duino Elegies

by

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Contents

Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of the word “Hiersein” according to its meaning in the context of Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Duino Elegies*. The word “Hiersein”, a noun most accurately translated into English as “being-here”, appears only in the seventh and ninth of the ten *Elegies*. It is, however, a central concept of the *Elegies* and represents an essential stage in their progression.

The content of these two poems involves descriptions and imagery that further aid the reader in understanding what Rilke truly intended in his use of this word. In addition to the interpretation of these texts, analyses of two correlating texts, a segment of Walter Pater’s *The Renaissance* and *Ein Brief* by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, are included to provide further insight into the concept of “Hiersein”. In spite of their focusing primarily on the topic relating to “Hiersein”, both the seventh and the ninth *Elegies* possess elements which contradict it. These contradictions are also addressed here.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Born in the year 1875 and deceased in 1926, Rainer Maria Rilke's lifetime spanned the turn of the century. He was raised in an old-world setting in Prague, went on to experience the modern, industrial city life in Paris, and later lived through the horror of the First World War. Afflicted with nostalgia for a simpler time and surrounded by the dirt and decay of the modern world, Rilke sought to find some resolution in a world he felt disconnected from. The means by which he would do this was his writing.

Rilke's *Duino Elegies* are an excellent example of his life's work. The *Elegies* readdress many themes on which he focused in his earlier writings. His one and only novel, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, concentrates on the problem of man's alienation from the world, specifically in the age of industrialization. This problem later became the very basis upon which the *Elegies* are founded, and the solution for which they strive to find. His disdain for the industrial world also resurfaces in the *Elegies*. In his collection of poems, *Neue Gedichte*, also known as the "Dinggedichte", Rilke attempts to capture the true being of an object and eternalize it by transforming it into poetry. This transformation of an object of the external world through the inner human consciousness is another prominent theme in the *Duino Elegies*, and is a particularly important component in the concept of "Hiersein".

The *Elegies* begin with the lamentation of man's alienated situation in the earthly world and his longing for some form of unity epitomized in the absolute. As the *Elegies* progress, the mood of the poems gradually become less desperate, and eventually take up an optimistic outlook on human life. The turning point and first affirmation of this

positive attitude occurs in “The Seventh Elegy” in the simple statement, “Hiersein ist herrlich” (Rilke 31). This optimism, along with the word “Hiersein” and all its meaning, reappears and is further expanded upon in “The Ninth Elegy”.

My intention in this thesis is to more closely examine the meaning of the word “Hiersein” as it is used by Rilke in his *Duino Elegies*. This word is the name given to the concept that triggered the shift in mood in this elegiac cycle, and gave human life meaning and worth. In taking a more in-depth look at “Hiersein” and its context in these two *Elegies*, I aim to provide a detailed description of what brought resolution to the *Elegies* and became Rilke’s purpose in his poetry.

I divided my analysis into chapters according to the progression through which the concept of “Hiersein” is best understood and carried out. The first chapter is intended to provide a backdrop of the Rilkean universe, which is divided into two realms: the realm of the absolute and the finite, earthly realm. These are the setting of the *Duino Elegies*, and in order to understand “Hiersein” one must first understand exactly what is meant by the “hier”. The second chapter proceeds to further describe “Hiersein”, particularly in its context in “The Seventh Elegy”. This is where the focus is directed towards the earth and Rilke sheds light on the glory of being a part of it. The images of “The Seventh Elegy” then lead to the subject of the single moment that suffices for the achievement of “Hiersein”. The theme of moments of intense experience can be found in other literature from around this time period. The third chapter of this thesis takes a closer look Walter Pater’s and Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s take on the subject. The interpretation of these texts, especially that of Hofmannsthal, advances our analysis to focus on the role of the object in such intense moments. The following chapter is dedicated to this and the

task these objects charge us with: transformation. The opportunity afforded to mankind by "Hiersein" is to take these objects within our consciousness, and in so doing, transform them into an existence that transcends the limits of the earthly realm. The fifth chapter of this thesis serves to show how the concept of "Hiersein" developed in "The Ninth Elegy". The focus has shifted from transforming the visible objects of the world into invisible, internal entities, to the role of language through the names we give these objects. Transforming has progressed to saying as the task of rescuing these objects from their finite existence progresses to Rilke's poetic task of putting this new form of existence into words. The examination of the process generated by "Hiersein" would seem to have come to its final limit, yet there are aspects of these two *Elegies* that seem to contradict the very idea Rilke has deemed as our purpose in this life. This must not be simply ignored, and so the last chapter is devoted to addressing these contradictions and the holes in Rilke's solution to the human condition that they create.

Chapter 2: The Absolute and the Earthly Realms

In the opening lines of the first of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* the poet contemplates calling out to the "Engel Ordnungen" or "angelic orders". As his designated starting point of the cycle of poems, the importance of the concept of these "angelic orders" is undeniable. The theme is carried on and reappears throughout the proceeding *Elegies*. It is therefore essential to acquire a firm understanding of what Rilke intended these "angelic orders" to be. We know from the letter he wrote to his Polish translator with the aim to aid him in his work with the *Elegies* that the angels of the *Elegies* are in no way related to the angels of Christianity. Rather, these angels were chosen as the beings to represent and reside in a realm of existence Rilke deems as all-encompassing. This absolute realm transcends time and space to include all that ever has or will exist in all of creation in a domain of infinite simultaneity.

> Für den Engel der Elegien sind alle vergangenen Türme und Paläste existent, *weil* längst unsichtbar, und die noch bestehenden Türme und Brücken unseres Daseins *schon* unsichtbar, obwohl noch (für uns) körperhaft dauernd. Der Engel der Elegien ist dasjenige Wesen, das dafür einsteht, im Unsichtbaren einen höheren Rang der Realität zu erkennen. (Fülleborn 322)

This concept is alluded to in "The First Elegy" as well. "Engel (sagt man) wüßten oft nicht, ob sie unter/ Lebenden gehn oder Toten (Rilke 10)."

Perhaps the best way to grasp the concept of a unified, all-encompassing realm and the beings that would exist within it is in contrast to its antithesis: the earthly realm in which we exist and which we recognize as our reality. Instead of the simultaneity or, better said, timelessness of the absolute realm, time in the earthly realm is linear. All creation in the earthly realm has a beginning, a duration and an end. So much has come before, of which we can only know a little, and what will come is completely out of our reach. Only that which persists around us is truly at our disposal, but even that is ever-changing. This world and all that exists within it is fleeting. All life forms have only a limited time to live and all inanimate objects too will one day perish one way or another. The fleeting nature of this earthly realm is summed up in these words from "The First Elegy": "Bleiben ist nirgends (9)." This transitoriness is further emphasized in the third stanza of "The Second Elegy",

> Denn wir, wo wir fühlen, verflüchtigen; ach wir
> atmen uns aus und dahin; von Holzglut zu Holzglut
> geben wir schwächern Geruch. Da sagt uns wohl einer:
> ja, du gehst mir ins Blut, dieses Zimmer, der Frühling
> füllt sich mit dir... Was hilfts, er kann uns nicht halten,
> wir schwinden in ihm und um ihn. Und jene, die schön sind,
> o wer hält sie zurück? Unaufhörlich steht Anschein
> auf in ihrem Gesicht und geht fort. Wie Tau von dem Frühgras
> hebt sich das Unsre von uns, wie die Hitze von einem
> heißen Gericht. (11-12)

Animals, the creatures with which we coexist in this realm, are not self-reflecting beings. They do not distinguish between their inner selves and the outer world. Because of this, they maintain a unified existence with nature. This idea is also present in "The First Elegy":

> und die findigen Tiere merken es schon,
> daß wir nicht sehr verläßlich zu Haus sind
> in der gedeuteten Welt. (7)

Inanimate objects, too, exist at one with nature as they have no form of consciousness at all. That both the angel and the object share this commonality of a unified existence, and that mankind cannot help but be divided is implied in "The Fourth Elegy":

> Engel und Puppe: dann ist endlich Schauspiel.
> Dann kommt zusammen, was wir immerfort
> entzwein, indem wir da sind. (21)

In man's self-conscious recognitions he is left alienated from the rest of nature in the earthly realm he somehow belongs to. He is torn in two by a tug-of-war between the outer, earthly world and his inner consciousness. Finding himself in this undesirable position, man then longs for and strives towards what was stripped of him in his self-

conscious awareness: a unified existence. The animals, objects and angels, all of which possess this unified state, are to be envied.

As Komar mentions, in the Rilkean view, one is not able to revert from a self-conscious to a more naive state (11). Once a person has matured past the blissful naivety of infancy and childhood, and has become a self-conscious individual he or she cannot rid themselves of this dooming self-awareness. Consequently, achieving unification with nature as the animal experiences it is impossible for the human. Man's only hope of attaining this sought-after fulfillment is through transcendence. As humans are the only beings to experience this disconnect, the pursuit of reunification is uniquely human as well.

Because man has the ability to reflect upon himself, on his inner being, he is burdened with the recognition that his existence on this planet will, like all else on earth, one day come to an end. Realizing the fleetingness of his own existence then becomes further motivation to strive towards transcendence toward a higher form of being.

Since Rilke put an increasingly greater distance between his own beliefs and the ideals of Christianity, he had to find a different path to transcendence than that promised by the church in the idea of the afterlife. The path he chose, or rather created for himself, on which to find a means of transcendence are the ten poems he entitled, *Duineser Elegien*. If one is to look again at the opening lines of "The First Elegy" there is a new profundity to be found. "WER, wenn ich schriee, hörte mich denn aus der Engel/ Ordnungen?" (Rilke, 7). These lines suggest a desire to reach out and find some way to connect to that absolute, angelic realm. There it might be possible to attain that higher state of existence necessary to rid man of the curse of alienation. Finding that possibility

to transcend to the absolute is the initial focus and goal of the *Elegies*. But despite the strong yearning to find a possibility of this, the idea is quite immediately deemed as impossible. The very following lines of "The First Elegy" describe the absolute as something so much greater than our own existence that we could never take part in, nor even touch it.

> [...] und gesetzt selbst, es nähme
> einer mich plötzlich ans Herz: ich verginge von seinem
> stärkeren Dasein. [...] (7)

So the *Elegies* continue to esteem the absolute so highly and simultaneously praise and fear the angels. They shift and squirm as they attempt to find some resolve in the aspiration of our meager existence to the all-encompassing unity. The position of mankind on earth is conveyed with a negative attitude in the *Elegies* as insufficient in comparison to the unified, all-encompassing absolute realm, until "The Seventh Elegy" when a flip in focus occurs. Then the attention is suddenly turned earthwards.

Chapter 3: "Hiersein"

Rilke makes it immediately clear in "The Seventh Elegy" that his attitude toward the absolute realm has changed from what it was in the earlier *Elegies*. The very first words of the first line pronounce, "Werbung nicht mehr, nicht Werbung, entwachsene Stimme,/ sei deines Schreies Natur; [...]"(30), and if there were any doubt as to whom he will no longer woo, he clarifies this in the last stanza of this Elegy.

> Glaub nicht, daß ich werbe.
> Engel, und würb ich dich auch! Du kommst nicht. Denn mein
> Anruf ist immer voll Hinweg; wider so starke
> Strömung kannst du nicht schreiten. Wie ein gestreckter
> Arm ist mein Rufen. Und seine zum Greifen
> oben offene Hand bleibt vor dir
> offen, wie Abwehr und Warnung,
> Unfaßlicher, weitauf. (33)

As Komar puts it in her interpretation of this Elegy, "The poetic voice has literally outgrown the task it originally saw as its highest aim" (123). This "aim" being Rilke's attempts in the earlier *Elegies* to find some connecting bridge by which man might reach into the absolute. But to understand why the angels are no longer the enviable beings of the longed-for realm they were at the beginning of the elegiac cycle, one must take a

closer look at what follows the opening lines of "The Seventh Elegy". Beginning on the tenth line the poem speaks of the nature of the springtime.

> O und der Frühling begriffe --, da ist keine Stelle,
> die nicht trüge den Ton Verkündigung. Erst jenen kleinen
> fragenden Auflaut, den mit steigernder Stille
> weithin umschweigt ein reiner bejahender Tag.
> Dann die Stufen hinan, Ruf-Stufen hinan zum geträumten
> Tempel der Zukunft --; dann den Triller, Fontäne,
> die zu dem drängenden Strahl schon das Fallen zuvornimmt
> im versprechlichen Spiel... Und vor sich, den Sommer. (30)

The season that so fittingly serves as a metaphor for the early stages of life and new beginnings is portrayed here as some rising action climbing steps towards a yet uncertain aim. But only one thing can follow the spring and we come upon it at the end of the ellipsis seven lines later. The summer season is the pinnacle of life and growth on earth and Rilke finds much to praise in it.

> Nicht nur die Morgen alle des Sommers--, nicht nur
> wie sie sich wandeln in Tag und strahlen vor Anfang.
> Nicht nur die Tage, die zart sind um Blumen, und oben,
> um die gestalteten Bäume, stark und gewaltig.
> Nicht nur die Andacht dieser entfalteten Kräfte,

nicht nur die Wege, nicht nur die Wiesen im Abend,
nicht nur, nach spätem Gewitter, das atmende Klarsein,
nicht nur der nahende Schlaf und ein Ahnen, abends...
sondern die Nächte! Sondern die hohen, des Sommers,
Nächte, sondern die Sterne, die Sterne der Erde. (30-1)

By starting with the morning, a beginning, then moving on to the day and some of the glory of nature to be found in its sunlight, to sunset, to evening, and finally coming to an exclamation of the night, this part of the poem moves through the twenty-four hour cycle of the earth. Even in gradually proceeding from spring to summer it alludes to the cycle of the earth in the year. These cyclical characteristics solely belong to the earthly realm. They are evidence of the passage of time, of things being born, living and dying, and of the transitoriness of the earthly realm in general, none of which is to be found in the absolute realm. The rising and falling jets of the fountain mentioned in the preceding quote, too, is a reference to the cycles found on earth.

The build-up in this stanza emphasized by the repetitive "nicht nur... nicht nur..." makes the night also a climactic point here. That it is not only all those beautiful scenes the earth has to offer during the visible hours of daylight that are to be praised, but rather that which comes during the hours of darkness. This suggests that there is much worth in the world that is perhaps concealed from the naked eye. That Rilke should come to the conclusion of the night not only makes chronological sense, but it allows him to then arrive at what the night has to offer: the stars. The stars that once served as the visible connection on earth to the absolute realm (Boney 103) have now become "the stars of the

earth". In that we see how Rilke has taken the possession of admirability from the heavens of the absolute and brought it back to earth.

We are only made truly aware of Rilke's justification for transferring his praise from the absolute to the earthly realm ten lines into the next stanza with his short and sweet declaration that, "Hiersein ist herrlich" (31). It is not just the nature of the earth and the beauty it has to offer that can console man in his de-unified state, but it is his very presence in this world that is now regarded positively. "Hiersein" is a beautiful term coined in this Elegy by Rilke to describe something far and beyond "Dasein", a term commonly translated into English as "existence". The importance is not found in simply being alive and existing on this earth, rather, the "hier" in "Hiersein" relates to the "here and now". Komar defines "Hiersein" as "being totally involved in and absorbed by one's present location-- i.e., not being distracted by past or future, memory or expectation; it posits such a strong focus on the present situation that the present moment becomes all" (130).

Following this proclamation Rilke promptly picks up the theme of the young girls from the preceding stanza again. These young girls who died too early and were buried in shallow graves now appear to have led only a pitiful existence "in den ärgsten/ Gassen der Städte, oder dem Abfall/ Offene" (Rilke, 31). But even they knew that "Hiersein ist herrlich", because they had all that was necessary to do so.

> [...] Denn eine Stunde war jeder, vielleicht nicht
> ganz eine Stunde, ein mit den Maßen der Zeit kaum
> Meßliches zwischen zwei Weilen, da sie ein Dasein

> hatte. Alles. Die Adern voll Dasein. (31)

In her analysis of this very part of the Elegy, Boney writes that, "[...] these seemingly deprived ones experience moments of intensity which make even lives such as theirs meaningful" (104). It is not living a long, full life that gives our existence on this earth significance. All that is required is the experience of one instant, one tiny moment of overflowing intensity during which our place and our existence in the world is genuinely felt. During these moments there is a sensation of connection with the outer world. Only in these instances does man finally find what has been so painfully absent all along. Finally we have the unity man so longed for and admired in the absolute, and what we possess in our earthly being is worthy of praise.

> Only in moments of greatest intensity can an understanding be reached which transcends the level of factual knowledge to find unity of man's inner and outer worlds which beyond childhood is his sole contact in life with the angel realm. [...] The true value of human life is the inner, intangible realm of intensity where in momentary self-transcendence the individual senses a harmonious universe wherein he himself plays a meaningful role. (Boney 104-5)

Having these intense moments when one really experiences the "Hiersein" Rilke so highly praises in this Elegy has become the very thing that gives man's life and existence true significance and worth. Man's place here in the earthly realm is no longer an

unfortunate circumstance that he wishes to somehow overcome or transcend to something better. Rather, man's "being here" is a unique opportunity to experience the world through an inner consciousness as only man can.

Chapter 4: "Gute Augenblicke"

Rilke is in no way the first to have put into words the notion of the separation between the physical world and man's inner consciousness. Both this theme of the duality of man's nature and the acknowledgement of the transitoriness of the natural world had been long discussed in literature before his time. Particularly interesting, however, is finding within such texts a correlating conception of these significant moments of intense experience, which Rilke relates in his idea of "Hiersein" in the *Duino Elegies*.

Published years before Rilke was even born, the conclusion of Walter Pater's *The Renaissance* is one such text, which concentrates on similar issues to those addressed in Rilke's *Elegies*. Pater, like Rilke, finds a separation between the physical world and what he calls "the inward world of thought" (Pater 195). In his description of the physical world, he too chose to focus on its fleeting nature, though in a more scientifically inclined way. Pater elaborates on the natural elements that make up both the bodies of nature that surround us and our own corporeal presence, and how these elements interact in the constant changing that takes place in our realm of linear time.

> Our physical life is a perpetual motion of them-- the passage of blood, the waste and repairing of the lenses of the eye, the modification of the tissues of the brain under every ray of light and sound-- processes which science reduces to simpler and more elementary forces. Like the elements of which we are composed, the action of these forces extends beyond us: it rusts iron and ripens corn. Far out on every side of us those elements are

> broadcast, driven in many currents; and birth and gesture and death and the springing of violets from the grave are but a few out of ten thousand resultant combinations. [...] This at least of flame-like our life has [sic], that it is but the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces parting sooner or later on their ways. (Pater 194-5)

What is especially fascinating in Pater's account of the inner world of human consciousness that follows, is his recognition of the transitoriness of the mind, and that the mind moves along at a pace far faster than any ebb and flow found in the external world. In a matter of seconds the mind can jump to a number of different visible impressions, emotions and thoughts. In this constant flow of the stream of mind, even the thoughts and impressions of the past that can be recalled and revisited will not be exactly as they once were, since the succeeding perceptions are always altering the cognitive platform on which they would be brought forward.

There is so much out there in the world to be seen and experienced that the mind cannot keep up to take in and maintain it all. When man then goes on to reflect upon the impressions he receives from the outer world, even more is lost as the mind works to categorize and compartmentalize all that is impressed upon it according to how different things relate to each other, whether it be by colour, shape, or any other commonality. As Pater describes it:

> [...] each object is loosed into a group of impressions-- colour, odour, texture-- in the mind of the observer. And if we continue to dwell in

> thought on this world [...] of impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them, it contracts still further: the whole scope of observation is dwarfed into the narrow chamber of the individual mind. (195-6)

And so what we come to realize is that the individual has an inevitable effect on the world as he perceives it by the very act of perceiving it. Therefore, his experience of the world around him is uniquely his. This, however, brings us back again to the isolation of the individual from the outer world. "Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world" (Pater 196). With the awareness that all that surrounds him in nature is known to him only as it is filtered through the screen of the workings of his own consciousness, it is no wonder that man should feel alienated from everything outside of it.

Pater then goes on to apply the concept that the unique impressions man gains through his experience in the world are also subjected to the fleeting nature the mind shares with all that exists within time.

> [...] those impressions of the individual mind to which, for each one of us, experience dwindles down, are in perpetual flight; that each of them is limited by time, and that as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is infinitely divisible also; all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may ever be more truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is. To such a tremulous wisp constantly re-

> forming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression, with a sense in it, a relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by, what is real in our life fines itself down. (196)

Whilst we attempt to acquire some firmer, clearer grasp of the outer world through exercising our understanding, even with the acceptance and acknowledgement of how set back we are by our alienated condition, more and more of the true world outside appears and then disappears around us. In other words, the tighter we try to grasp, the more it all just slips through our fingers. This is what brings Pater to his pinnacle conclusion: "Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end" (197). Again, we are reminded of Rilke's notion in his *Elegies*, specifically his very own climactic statement in "The Seventh Elegy" that "Hiersein ist herrlich." Once again all the importance is placed on man's being present in the moment; the here and now. Yet, Pater finds a challenge in acting upon his own realization. He poses questions as to how, in the finite number of moments given to us in this life, might we "see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses?", and how might we "be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?" (197). He explains that the importance lies in preserving "this sense of the splendour of our experience and its awful brevity", and that "[t]o burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life" (197).

Rilke, no doubt, would agree with this conclusion of Walter Pater. It complements perfectly his image of the girls in "The Seventh Elegy" who, though dead at a young age, still had a time that they were alive in the world existing to experience it. However, Rilke

might have been aware of the difficulty, perhaps even impossibility, of constantly maintaining this intensified state. It is perhaps because of this that Rilke finds success in even just one moment of true interactive existence. For, "[...] ein hiesig/ einmal ergriffenes Ding gälte für viele" (Rilke, 31).

Another significant literary figure, especially in the German-speaking world, who wrote about themes related to those in Rilke's *Elegies* is Hugo von Hofmannsthal. In 1902, during the same time Rilke himself was writing, Hofmannsthal wrote a text titled *Ein Brief*, which is known today as a key piece of German literature from the period around the turn of the century. This text was written as a fictional letter dated from 1603, and in spite of it being set three hundred years earlier, it summarizes many of the common thoughts and themes of the modern age. It is, therefore, not entirely surprising that one will find some parallels between the content of this text and that of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*. But it is Hofmannsthal's description of these so-called "gute Augenblicke" (Hofmannsthal, 14) that may bring us to an even better understanding of the "Hiersein" Rilke first brings to light in "The Seventh Elegy".

To begin with, Hofmannsthal too, or rather his deemed author of the letter, Lord Chandos, faces the separation from the outside world we found in both the *Duino Elegies* and in the conclusion by Walter Pater in *The Renaissance*. However, instead of this being a fact to be taken without question, Chandos lived his earlier life before composing this letter with the belief, or rather the feeling, that there was no such separation. "Mir erschien damals in einer Art von andauernder Trunkenheit das ganze Dasein als eine große Einheit: geistige und körperliche Welt schien mir keinen Gegensatz zu bilden [...]" (Hofmannsthal, 10). The fact is, however, that he has lost this sense of unity, and it is to

explain to a friend how this happened and what consequences it has had for him that is his reasoning for writing this letter.

Having lost his sense of place in the world, Hofmannsthal's character Chandos is left in a distressed state in which no part of his former, simpler life seems to fit or make sense. "Es zerfiel mir alles in Teile, die Teile wieder in Teile [...]" (13). His life as he knew it has fallen to pieces. And yet, he concedes to there being a few exceptions to his otherwise unfortunate circumstance; that this new existence he has found himself leading is "nicht ganz ohne freudige und belebende Augenblicke" (14). He describes these moments in the following words:

> [...] in solchen Augenblicken, irgendeine Erscheinung meiner alltäglichen Umgebung mit einer überschwellenden Flut höheren Lebens wie ein Gefäß erfüllend, mir sich ankündet [...]. Eine Gießkanne, eine auf dem Felde verlassene Egge, ein Hund in der Sonne, ein ärmlicher Kirchhof, ein Krüppel, ein kleines Bauernhaus, alles dies kann das Gefäß meiner Offenbarung werden. (14)

The glue that had apparently held all the different aspects of his life together has dissolved and everything has fallen away in individual pieces, but this breaking apart has left him with the ability to see individual objects or scenes with a new perspective. The very essence of these everyday things, which are commonly overlooked in life, appear to him in such a clear way. It seems he sees in them their true existence.

In these moments of intensity Chandos experiences a connection with the external world and the objects included in it. As he describes it, it is "ein ungeheures Anteilnehmen, ein Hinüberfließen in jene Geschöpfe oder ein Fühlen, daß ein Fluidum des Lebens und Todes, des Traumes und Wachens für einen Augenblick in sie hinüber geflossen ist.", and even more to the point, "es war Gegenwart; die vollste erhabenste Gegenwart" (15). This all-encompassing unity in the present moment with the external world is precisely the desired result of Rilke's "Hiersein". Aside from these moments he claims to live a life of a barely believable emptiness. Particularly in the alienated state he has succumbed to, Chandos sincerely appreciates these moments of feeling an intense connection with the external world. As he spends a great deal of his letter attempting to put into words the effect these moments have on him in a number of different examples and situations, he clearly holds them to be of the upmost importance. He also seems to ponder on how life would change if everyone were to experience such moments of clarity and unity as he. "Es ist mir dann, [...] als könnten wir in ein neues, ahnungsvolles Verhältnis zum ganzen Dasein treten, wenn wir anfingen, mit dem Herzen zu denken" (17). In thinking with the heart, he suggests something so far beyond the functioning of the brain that moves us about in our daily lives. This line implies a deeper, more inner understanding of the physical world. He emphasizes this once more in his letter. "Und das ganze ist eine Art fieberisches Denken, aber Denken in einem Material, das unmittelbarer, flüssiger, glühender ist als Worte. Es sind gleichfalls Wirbel, aber solche, die [...] irgendwie in mich selber und in den tiefsten Schoß des Friedens [zu führen scheinen]" (19).

Chapter 5: "Dinge" and the Task of "Verinnern"

In attempting to relate in his letter his "gute Augenblicke", Hofmannsthal's fictional author, Lord Chandos, describes them in connection with some object in the physical world. Whether it was a watering can or a dog lying in the sun, these external entities were the provocation by which Chandos experienced these moments of intensity. Such an interaction with an object is an important part of Rilke's concept of "Hiersein" as well.

For Rilke, "being here" is man's opportunity to reunify the external world and our inner consciousness. The bond between the external object and the inner consciousness is created through our observation of the object. We recall the previously mentioned excerpt from "The Seventh Elegy", "[...]ein hiesig/ einmal ergriffenes Ding gälte für viele" (Rilke, 31). If one were able to truly grasp even just one thing in this earthly dominion it would make our presence here worthwhile.

This idea is the basis for Rilke's *Neue Gedichte* published in 1907 and 1908 (von Pape). Commonly referred to as his "Dinggedichte", poems such as *Der Panther* and *Archaïscher Torso Apollos* each focus on one particular, inspiring object. As one can infer from these examples, the object that is the focus of observation does not necessarily have to be an inanimate object, but can be a living thing such as a plant or animal as well. As mentioned before, all of these things fall under the same category; they are all entities of the physical world that maintain a unity with nature as they lack a self-reflective consciousness.

The objects brought into focus in "The Seventh Elegy", however, are not any animals or plants, but manmade structures. He first mentions temples, then pillars, pylons, the Sphinx, a cathedral and, towards the end, a tower (Rilke, 32-3). He chooses to concentrate here on objects of reverence that also lend a justification of our presence on this earth. "Was Rilke unter Ding verstand, das waren beseelte, belebte, erlebte, mit dem Leben des Menschen und der Menschheit gewachsene Dinge[...]" (Hamburger, 142). These things are praiseworthy in their existence, but also in their creation, use and being experienced by mankind. As products of humanity, these structures possess a quality that differs and separates them from other objects in the world. That man has the ability to create and interact with such things gives his existence a quality praiseworthy even to the angels. "O staune, Engel, denn wir sinds,/ wir, o du Großer, erzähls, daß wir solches vermochten" (Rilke, 33).

The opportunity to observe and interact with these external entities is the key reasoning behind Rilke's concept of "Hiersein". Our "Dasein", our existence, can be thought of in terms separate from the external world, but "Hiersein" anchors us to a *here*, a position on earth, infinitely in contact with everything that surrounds us. But the type of interaction with objects of the physical world that Rilke is trying to impart on us through his Elegies is something beyond what the word "observe" might imply. It is not simply a matter of seeing the object from the perspective of our own eyes (though this would be equally important as it is an experience unique to us in that one particular, fleeting moment), rather, it is a matter of seeing and understanding the object in its own existence. Rather than observing the object from our perspective, we ought to strive to see it almost as it would see itself. The goal is to take in the object as it is in its own situation in the

world, and in so doing, recognize and understand the true magnificence of what might be regarded as a simple existence.

It is this very "taking in" that is a hugely important theme in "The Seventh Elegy". In interacting with and grasping objects of the physical world we create them again within ourselves; we literally take them into our consciousness. In so doing, these objects gain a new existence safe from the constant, destructive erosion of the physical world caused by the passage of time. "Nirgends, Geliebte, wird Welt sein, als innen. Unser/ Leben geht hin mit Verwandlung" (Rilke 32). This transformation of the physical world into the inner world of human consciousness is what Rilke alluded to in his "Dinggedichte" and what he declares here to be our task, the very reason for our "being here" on this earth. Through this process we are taking physical, visible pieces of the earthly realm and transforming them into something invisible. This brings us back to Rilke's exaltation of the night earlier in the Elegy. It was not the day or anything it had to offer in its sunlight, but the night, the realm in which things go unseen, which is the focus of his praise. This is perhaps an allusion to the importance he places on the invisible world of the consciousness. The contrast between the visible and invisible is touched upon more than once in this Elegy. "Sichtbar/ wollen wirs heben, wo doch das sichtbarste Glück uns/ erst zu erkennen sich gibt, wenn wir es innen verwandeln" (31)

Once we have taken in the objects around us, once we've transformed them within ourselves and given them a new existence immune to the effects of time in this transient world, we have achieved a level of transcendence. Within our consciousness we find a way to reunify ourselves to the external world and extend beyond the limits of time. With this achieved, humanity has something worthy of showing the angel;

something so incredible even the beings of the absolute realm must recognize and admire it.

> Engel,
> dir noch zeig ich es, da! in deinem Anschaun
> steh es gerettet zuletzt, nun endlich aufrecht.
> Säulen, Pylone, der Sphinx, das strebende Stemmen,
> grau aus vergehender Stadt oder aus fremder, des Doms. (32)

In presenting the angel with these objects as we interact with them, as they are in us, the process of transformation is completed. In the angel's seeing and beholding the objects in this form these things gain an eternal form and are therefore saved. For, even these inanimate things are subjected to the same limits of time, will persevere on this earth for only a certain period of time, and so they, like us, seek salvation in some form of eternal existence.

These objects, particularly those created by mankind, are given their due significance in this Elegy. Having been created by man, these things belong to us and to the earthly realm, but in their significance to us, as accomplishments of humanity, they are worthy of the admiration of the angel.

> Aber ein Turm war groß, nicht wahr? O Engel, er war es, ---
> groß, auch noch neben dir? Chartres war groß -- und Musik
> reichte noch weiter hinan und überstieg uns. Doch selbst nur

eine Liebende, oh, allein am nächtlichen Fenster ....

reichte sie dir nicht ans Knie --? (33)

Just as one single, tiny instance of "Hiersein", of being totally present and aware of the world, and that one's own existence is a part of it, is enough to give all the significance to a life it could hope for, so too does a simple girl in love possess enough significance to reach the attention of the angel. Between every seemingly insignificant entity and those more obviously great this earth is overflowing with objects of amazement.

The task of internalizing the objects of the world has reassured man in his position in the earthly realm. By recognizing that only through his consciousness can the physical world in which we live find some form of preservation, he not only comes to terms with his finite circumstance, but also has found his place in this fleeting world. "So haben wir dennoch/ nicht die Räume versäumt, diese gewährenden, diese/ unseren Räume" (Rilke 33). No longer are we "nicht sehr verläßlich zu Haus" in this world as "The First Elegy" stated. With the realization of the importance of "Hiersein" these earthly spaces have become *ours*. These spaces and all they contain are here for mankind to experience, possess and transform.

Through our success in this task we have found, not only a way to bind and reunify ourselves with the external world, but also a justification for our alienated circumstance. Without our separated, inner consciousness we would not have the ability to bestow the objects of our world with an unseeable, eternal existence. In finding

meaning to our life through saving these objects from their impermanence, we have found our own salvation.

Chapter 6: From the “Unsichtbare” to the “Unsägliche”

“The Ninth Elegy” is closely related to the seventh as it readdresses some of the same themes. It opens with the question we were finally finding an answer to in “The Seventh Elegy”.

> WARUM, wenn es angeht, also die Frist des Daseins
> hinzubringen, als Lorbeer, ein wenig dunkler als alles
> andere Grün, mit kleinen Wellen an jedem
> Blattrand (wie eines Windes Lächeln) --: warum dann
> Menschliches müssen -- und, Schicksal vermeidend,
> sich sehnen nach Schicksal?... (38)

We are brought back to the issue that started it all. Why is it that we cannot exist as other life on earth does, maintaining a contented unity with the world that surrounds us? As the wind envelops the laurel it seems to leave it with a smile upon its leaves. Such an entity as that knows no worry. Being an evergreen, the laurel even escapes the cyclical traits, to which most life on earth is subjected. So why the necessity for mankind to possess and struggle with the duality of his external, physical nature and his inner, self-reflective consciousness? This question, handling a difficult concept, is posed rather concisely, and the answer follows quickly and is quite succinct as well. Again Rilke exercises a sort of escalation before getting to the gist of his argument.

Oh, nicht, weil Glück ist,

dieser voreilige Vorteil eines nahen Verlusts.

Nicht aus Neugier, oder zur Übung des Herzens,

das auch im Lorbeer wäre.....

Aber weil Hiersein viel ist, und weil uns scheinbar

alles das Hiesige braucht, dieses Schwindende, das

seltsam uns angeht. Uns, die Schwindendsten. (38)

Again it is the "Hiersein" that is important. It is no longer simply declared as a glorious thing, rather it is the very reason why mankind possesses a consciousness that alienates him from the external world. It is so we have the capacity to truly recognize, not only our own presence on this earth and that we only have so much time here, but also that everything around us is fleeting as well. As discussed in "The Seventh Elegy", everything around us, "das Hiesige", relies on us for some form of salvation from this transitory realm. In the following lines Rilke emphasizes the temporariness of our life and everything on this earth.

Einmal

jedes, nur einmal. Einmal und nichtmehr. Und wir auch

einmal. Nie wieder. Aber dieses

einmal gewesen zu sein, wenn auch nur einmal:

irdisch gewesen zu sein, scheint nicht widerrufbar. (38)

In both this excerpt and the preceding, Rilke prefaces his positive point with an "aber": "Aber weil Hiersein viel ist..." and "[a]ber dieses/ einmal gewesen zu sein...". This seems to suggest that in spite of what seems to us an unfortunate circumstance, there is this wonderful silver lining to be remembered and taken into account. This "once... only once... once and no more..." alludes also to the impermanence of every tiny passing moment of our existence, every single opportunity given to us in this life to take advantage and truly "be here" and be "irdisch". We are reminded of the girls in "The Seventh Elegy" who lived in the festering city streets. All they needed was a single instant "zwischen zwei Weilen" (31) in which they had a "Dasein", because that they had one at all, even for that brief moment, means everything. In this stanza, Rilke has affirmed the significance and importance of our earthly existence and its fleeting nature. What was once regarded as a negative limitation against which we could only struggle in vain, is now viewed in a positive light as successive opportunities.

> Und so drängen wir uns und wollen es leisten,
> wollens enthalten in unseren einfachen Händen,
> im überfüllteren Blick und im sprachlosen Herzen.
> Wollen es werden. Wem es geben? Am liebsten
> alles behalten für immer .... Ach, in den andern Bezug,
> wehe, was nimmt man hinüber? Nicht das Anschaun, das hier
> langsam erlernte, und kein hier Ereignetes. Keins.
> Also die Schmerzen. Also vor allem das Schwersein,

also der Liebe lange Erfahrung, -- also
lauter Unsägliches. Aber später,
unter den Sternen, was solls: die sind besser unsäglich. (38-9)

Having recognized how momentous our existence on this earth is and the significance it has in our ability to reflect upon it, we strive to find some grasp on it all. However the world to us is a constant flood of innumerable impressions. Our hands are too small a vessel to hold enough and our gaze overflows with what it can see. So we "[w]ollen es werden", make it a part of ourselves, internalize it and unify ourselves with it, and if we could we would keep it that way forever. This, however, is not possible. The things of the earth, seen, touched and experienced here, cannot transcend "in den andern Bezug". We understand this to be the absolute realm. Just as Rilke described the angelic realm as being too great for our earthly being to know or touch, what that realm can possess is "unsäglich"; it cannot be translated into our human words. What belongs to the absolute is too great to be contained in mere articulation. The image of our "sprachlosen Herzen" alludes to the task of internalizing the external world. Our hearts are speechless because that inner part of us, the destination of the transformed world, is the only place where things gain an absolute existence.

Language belongs to humanity and its place is here on earth. "Hier ist des Säglichen Zeit, hier seine Heimat" (39). It may have its limitations, but it is a part of our being here and also worthy of praise.

Bringt doch der Wanderer auch vom Hange des Bergrands

nicht eine Hand voll Erde ins Tal, die allen unsägliche, sondern
ein erworbenes Wort, reines, den gelben und blaun
Enzian. Sind wir vielleicht hier, um zu sagen: Haus,
Brücke, Brunnen, Tor, Krug, Obstbaum, Fenster, --
höchstens: Säule, Turm .... aber zu sagen, verstehs,
oh zu sagen so, wie selber die Dinge niemals
innig meinten zu sein. Ist nicht die heimliche List
dieser verschwiegenen Erde, wenn sie die Liebenden drängt,
daß sich in ihrem Gefühl jedes und jedes entzückt? (39)

Rilke exemplifies the gentian as the word man would choose to relate to the valley, or rather, those residing there, their experience on the mountain side. Humans can only communicate to one another through language, and so the unsayable handful of earth would have done the wanderer no good. Our saying the things of the world is a uniquely human feature, and in giving them names we, again, give them another form of existence.

The subject of language is one especially important to Rilke. As he saw it, his life's purpose was to translate the world into words. Be it as it may that the earthly realm is the home of the sayable, this is no simple task. If one were to look back to Hofmannsthal's *Ein Brief*, one would recall that this very difficulty was the subject matter of Lord Chandos' letter. The problem for Chandos, however, is that he seems to have lost the very connection between object and name that Rilke deems worthy of praise in "The Ninth Elegy". Being a writer himself, Chandos' loss of the ability to connect an object or thought to its designated word is a crisis that shook his career (though,

ironically, the letter is very articulate) as well as his life. Though the separation of word and object is necessary in order to internalize an object in its true existence, maintaining the connection is indispensable to Rilke. It may be mankind's deemed task to transform the external world into ourselves, but it is Rilke's poetic task to demonstrate this transformation through language. As mentioned before, this is especially true of his "Dinggedichte". Rilke's poetics function as a didactic example of how one ought to look at and experience the world.

The words Rilke chooses as our task to say in "The Ninth Elegy" are closely related to the objects he chose to be internalized and presented to the angel in the seventh. Again he gives us primarily manmade objects: "Haus", "Brücke", "Krug", "Fenster", etc. Yet, "höchstens" would we say the words "Säule" or "Turm". The latter objects are more refined constructions of man and, in comparison to the preceding, represent a higher class of human capability and achievement. That is perhaps why they would be said at the uppermost. For a change, Rilke also includes some objects of nature as well. The inclusion of the word "Obstbaum" seems to remind us that the objects created by man are not the only ones worthy of praise, and that the glory cultivated nature has to offer must not be forgotten.

Towards the end of this Elegy Rilke revisits the theme of the "Dinge" that appeared earlier in the seventh. Again, Rilke raises the point that these things look to us for rescue from their transitory existence, though we ourselves are only transitory beings as well. In order to give them a lasting existence we must show these things to the angel for what they truly are here on earth. Though they may seem simple compared to the

unsayable magnificence of the absolute realm, these objects are also impressive. It is worthwhile to praise to the angel what he cannot know of the earth.

> Preise dem Engel die Welt, nicht die unsägliche, ihm
> kannst du nicht großtun mit herrlich Erfühltem; im Weltall,
> wo er fühlender fühlt, bist du ein Neuling. Drum zeig
> ihm das Einfache, das, von Geschlecht zu Geschlechtern gestaltet,
> als ein Unsriges lebt neben der Hand und im Blick.
> Sag ihm die Dinge. Er wird staunender stehn; wie du standest
> bei dem Seiler in Rom, oder beim Töpfer am Nil.
> Zeig ihm, wie glücklich ein Ding sein kann, wie schuldlos und unser,
> wie selbst das klagende Leid rein zur Gestalt sich entschließt,
> dient als ein Ding, oder stirbt in ein Ding --, und jenseits
> selig der Geige entgeht. Und diese, von Hingang
> lebenden Dinge verstehn, daß du sie rühmst; vergänglich,
> traun sie ein Rettendes uns, den Vergänglichsten, zu.
> Wollen, wir sollen sie ganz im unsichtbarn Herzen verwandeln
> in -- o unendlich -- in uns! wer wir am Ende auch seien. (40)

Once more, Rilke chooses to focus on objects that were created by humanity, but here he goes into greater detail of our interaction with these objects and how we even pour ourselves into them. The “Seiler in Rom” and the “Töpfer am Nil” are carefully chosen examples of creators of such objects. Both belong to renowned societies in the history of

humanity that made huge advances in the civilization of mankind. Yet, the rope maker and the potter are also both simple, working men located rather low in the hierarchies of their cultures. In choosing these examples, Rilke is again emphasizing the significance of things that are often so easily over looked. A simple rope or pot created and used by man possesses just as much "Dasein" as the columns and pyramids that overshadow them.

Rilke then communicates more straightforwardly than before the desire of these objects to be rescued from their imminent demise. They want to be transformed in us, this time "unendlich" in our "unsichtbarn Herzen". Our heart is now the designated vessel of eternal existence; "das wahre Dasein [...], das nicht [...] sichtbar ist" (Hamburger, 141). What we can hold in our hearts is invisible and transcends the limits of time. There we have found our path of transcendence; in preserving the contents of this fleeting world and, in so doing, fulfilling our task here on earth.

> Erde, ist es nicht dies, was du willst: unsichtbar
> in uns erstehn? -- Ist es dein Traum nicht,
> einmal unsichtbar zu sein? -- Erde! unsichtbar!
> Was, wenn Verwandlung nicht, ist dein drängender Auftrag?
> (Rilke, 40)

At the end, similar to his conclusion of "The Seventh Elegy", Rilke brings the Elegy back to a personal level by use of the first person "ich" and enthusiastically declaring his acceptance of the task he has come to regard as the purpose of our existence.

Erde, du liebe, ich will. Oh glaub, es bedürfte
nicht deiner Frühlinge mehr, mich dir zu gewinnen, einer,
ach, ein einziger ist schon dem Blute zu viel.
Namenlos bin ich zu dir entschlossen, von weit her.
Immer warst du im Recht, und dein heiliger Einfall
ist der vertrauliche Tod. (40-1)

The springtimes from early in "The Seventh Elegy" have resurfaced here in all their glory that is "dem Blute zu viel." A single earthly spring is more than enough to prove to us how precious this earthly realm is, and how worthwhile it makes our presence here in it.

"Siehe, ich lebe. Woraus? Weder Kindheit noch Zukunft/ werden weniger ..... Überzähliges Dasein/ entspringt mir im Herzen" (41). These lines wrap up "The Ninth Elegy" and sum up the meaning of "Hiersein" as it is described here and in "The Seventh Elegy". In addressing the angel Rilke proclaims that he lives. So simple, yet a life is something the angel is incapable of possessing and therefore cannot truly understand. This life, finite as it may be, is what allows us the opportunity to experience "Hiersein". When one takes advantage and lives completely immersed in a single instant, the past and the future do not come into question. "Hiersein" requires no duration of time, it transcends time and, therefore, in the linear realm of time, it moves neither forward nor backward. Neither past nor future are becoming more distant or coming nearer. In the moment of "Hiersein" true, invisible existence, "überzählig" existence wells up in the eternal realm we contain in ourselves.

Chapter 7: Contradictions of "Hiersein"

Both "The Seventh Elegy" and "The Ninth Elegy" contain evidence of Rilke's critical view of the modern age. During the turn of the century much was changing in the western world. Cities and their populations expanded at an alarming rate as industrialization boomed. This development changed the lifestyles of the people from what was once more commonly a spacious, slower-paced existence closer to nature, to the racing, cramped, enclosed urban life. In addition to this, the occurrence of the First World War brought further changes to the world. With the world he had known earlier in his life quickly disappearing, it is not hard to understand how Rilke may have been unable to relate to the modern world (Boney, 105).

The mentality of the industrial era clashes harshly with Rilke's concept of internalizing the world. The earthly objects of his focus are primarily those belonging to past times. This is due to the fact that, before the onset of mass production brought by industrialization, an individual often forged the tools of his everyday use himself. This precisely is what allows an individual to achieve that connection and knowledge of an object that makes the process of inner transformation possible. "The world has not always been so limited. Once man related to his world differently. Beyond the involvement of his mind was the additional involvement of the second element of the inner world which Rilke calls 'heart'" (106).

Mass-produced objects are separated from the people who use them by a middle man, and this distance prevents the user from having the same appreciation for it as he might, had it been something he made himself or was passed down to him from a

previous generation. This holds true, not only for the smaller objects of our homes and livelihoods, but also for the greater structures such as the temple and cathedral that man created with deeper, more meaningful purpose. Modern man sees the things of the world only for their practical use, and these things are continually replaced by newer, more practical things. This constant replacing leaves no time for man to love and venerate an object as he once did. Since it is an interference with the task Rilke has deemed to be the purpose in our humanly existence, he addresses this problem in his poem.

> Weite Speicher der Kraft schafft sich der Zeitgeist, gestaltlos
> wie der spannende Drang, den er aus allem gewinnt.
> Tempel kennt er nicht mehr. Diese, des Herzens, Verschwendung
> sparen wir heimlicher ein. Ja, wo noch eins übersteht,
> ein einst gebetetes Ding, ein gedientes, geknietes --,
> hält es sich, so wie es ist, schon ins Unsichtbare hin.
> Viele gewahrens nicht mehr, doch ohne den Vorteil,
> daß sie's nun *innerlich* baun, mit Pfeilern und Statuen, größer! (32)

These lines of "The Seventh Elegy" are meant to inform us of the danger the mentality of the modern age poses to our earthly charge. These worldly objects, if not transformed eternally into our consciousness, once lost are lost irrevocably. This, however, should not deter us from our task, rather cause us to be more determined in it as we feel its significance all the more acutely.

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. Dies *stand* einmal unter Menschen,
mitten im Schicksal stands, im vernichtenden, mitten
im Nichtwissen-Wohin stand es, wie seiend, und bog
Sterne zu sich aus gesicherten Himmeln. (32)

The disinherited mentioned here are the men of Rilke's generation. During that time between the First and Second World War, the traditions of their European cultures as they knew them were disappearing. With all the changes taking place in the world one could not know what the future had in store for them (Komar, 133).

Yet, in his own words "jede dumpfe Umkehr der Welt" Rilke acknowledges that such transitions of the world are a natural and recurring part of it. Disinherited as the people of this time may feel, they still belong to a specific period equally important as the ages it spans. Such is the cyclical nature of the earth that all ages must have a beginning and an end. As much as man resents the fact that time subjects him and the world to a transitory existence, by this point in the *Elegies* Rilke has come to accept it and even rejoice in it. One can find little fault with preserving the past. It never becomes irrelevant as it is a part of the present. Everything that has existed and come to pass before has led the course of the earth to where it is now. But, to reject modernity, the very time Rilke comes to experience, contradicts his concept of "Hiersein."

Although the experience of "Hiersein" transcends time, it cannot completely escape it. Being entirely involved in the present moment and only the objects surrounding one in that "Augenblick", it is inevitable that evidence of time will be included in that experience. Part of having this finite existence means possessing a life during a certain period of this linear time on earth. We cannot choose during which era we are endowed with our existence. Therefore, if Rilke would have us believe "Hiersein" to be the highest experience of human existence, he ought to accept and include modernity rather than abhor it.

The sense of Rilke's nostalgia for the culturally rich eras of the past is suggested in "The Ninth Elegy" as well. For instance, the examples he chose to represent the creators of objects that may be transformed into the consciousness. Rilke goes back, not simply to a time before industry took over, but all the way back to two ancient civilizations. This is most likely to demonstrate a time when there was little to no complication to interfere with the bond between creator and object. But if someone today were to take up the task of making rope or pottery, would they not be able to pour themselves into and truly love their creation just as they did in Rome and Egypt? The real difficulty occurs when it comes to internalizing ancient structures such as the temples or the Sphinx included in "The Seventh Elegy". These and other such structures, magnificent and impressive as they are to this day, can never mean to an individual today, nor even of Rilke's time, what they meant to the people who built them. They have long since retired the functions for which they were built, and in so doing, one could believe, lost some of that deeper meaning that instilled love and reverie. Would this not mean that the opportunity to internalize and eternalize such an object was only possible in

the past? And why are the objects of today so unworthy of preserving? Though it may be less likely for an individual to create with their bare hands an object of frequent use, it is equally possible for the individual to value and cherish the object, for it to become a part of them, as was hundreds of years ago. Indeed, one might consider it more suitable for a person of a certain era to internalize the objects of that era since they are all the more present in the "here and now."

One more allusion is made to the modern age in "The Ninth Elegy". Again, it expresses an urgency for mankind to recognize his earthly task to save the objects of the world from the oblivion of linear time (Komar, 162).

Mehr als je
fallen die Dinge dahin, die erlebbaren, denn,
was sie verdrängend ersetzt, ist ein Tun ohne Bild.
Tun unter Krusten, die willig zerspringen, sobald
innen das Handeln entwächst und sich anders begrenzt.
Zwischen den Hämmern besteht
unser Herz, wie die Zunge
zwischen den Zähnen, die doch,
dennoch die preisende bleibt. (39-40)

As more and more of the things Rilke considers "experienceable" fall away into nothingness, all that takes their place is activity with no image and no constancy. All

there is to solidify it are crusts that routinely break apart to form a new temporary facade (Komar, 163). Such is how the structure of modernity is to be understood.

Our hearts, our inner domain of the absolute, is trapped between hammers, which, as parts of technology, are destructive representations of the industrial age. Yet, in spite of whatever destruction they cause, the heart, like the tongue between teeth, steadfastly persists. There is a contrast between the eternal quality of the heart and the hammers' destruction symbolic of the destructive nature of time (Komar, 133). The image of the heart and hammers embodies the essence of the two worlds, but in describing the character of the earthly realm what ought to be remembered is, though time is a destructive force, it possesses cyclical traits as well. For all that is lost to destruction and decay, things are reborn and new things spring up in their place.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

It has been shown that through the progression of his *Duino Elegies*, Rainer Maria Rilke succeeded in discovering the redeeming quality of human life that would give it worth in face of the perfect absolute. The very fact that we were given this human life, that we were stripped of our unity with nature by possessing a self-reflecting consciousness, is actually what enables us to achieve this fulfillment. In this earthly life, mankind can experience the world as only mankind is able, and through that we possess something even the angel cannot know. Our one requirement is to immerse ourselves in this world, to be totally and truly present in a moment of this life, to achieve the "Hiersein" of Rilke's seventh and ninth *Elegies*.

This earthly, human life endows us with these single, tiny moments, when one is able to experience the world with an intense recognition of its true being. By having a consciousness that divides us from our surrounding, external world, we have the opportunity afforded to us through this unique perspective to realize, not only the finiteness of our own existence and that of everything around us, but also to be aware of just how rare and incredible our existence in this world in each moment is. Texts by Walter Pater and Hugo von Hofmannsthal were discussed in this thesis, as these authors seem to have come to similar realizations and felt the need to express them in their own writings.

Another unique quality granted to us in the life of the self-conscious human being is the way by which we interact with the external world. Since we possess this inner world of thought, which the inanimate objects and animals of the world lack, we can

recognize their existence as they are not able to do themselves. We see them in their finite existence and in intense moments of "Hiersein" we can perceive their true being. During such opportunities we can take these objects as they are into our consciousness and transform their existence into something invisible and eternal within ourselves. Objects created, used and touched by humans are especially important to internalize and eternalize, for the angel cannot know an object as we know, use and love it. It has a deeper, more meaningful existence that can only occur through interaction with a human life. Through this process we save the objects of the world, helpless as they are on their own, from their imminent demise. Our ability to do this lends our unique existence a worth beyond our simple presence on this planet.

In the second mention of "Hiersein" in his *Elegies*, Rilke amplifies the importance of our "being-here" in this self-conscious life in this earthly world. Again, only one, single, tiny moment is needed to give our existence so much worth and meaning. He elaborates on this subject further in "The Ninth Elegy". He shifts from the existence of certain objects and our responsibility to transform them internally to the existence we give these objects by naming them. Importance is now stressed on our ability to say the world around us, to capture the existence of the objects of the world through words. In so doing, Rilke has moved from giving worth and reason to the general human life, to affirming his own life's work, what he considered to be his poetic task.

The concept of "Hiersein" and the meaning it gives our lives, as Rilke portrays it in the *Duino Elegies*, sheds an optimistic light on the human condition. Yet, his inability to come to terms with modernity and the changes it has brought in the world causes his justification to fall short in the eyes of today's audience. Mass-production has come to

dominate the greater part of the world. It is therefore unjust to suggest that our lives, surrounded by these one-of-a-million objects, are robbed of the things that would give them meaning and purpose. Some of the handmade objects passed down through generations, which Rilke so highly esteemed, have survived, though they are rare. This rarity is recognized, however, and they are cherished today all the more because of it. But, to truly "be-here", in our life in this realm ruled by time, means a presence that does not exclude elements of the age simply because they are undesirable. This leaves us to wonder whether Rilke would have been more successful in finding the reason and worth of human life in his *Elegies* had he not been so determinedly nostalgic.

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