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Rainer Maria Rilke
Collected Works



Series Sixteen

The Collected Works of
RAINER MARIA RILKE

(1875-1926)



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The Delphi Classics Catalogue

Rainer Maria

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RAINER MARIA RILKE



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Collected Works of Rainer Maria Rilke



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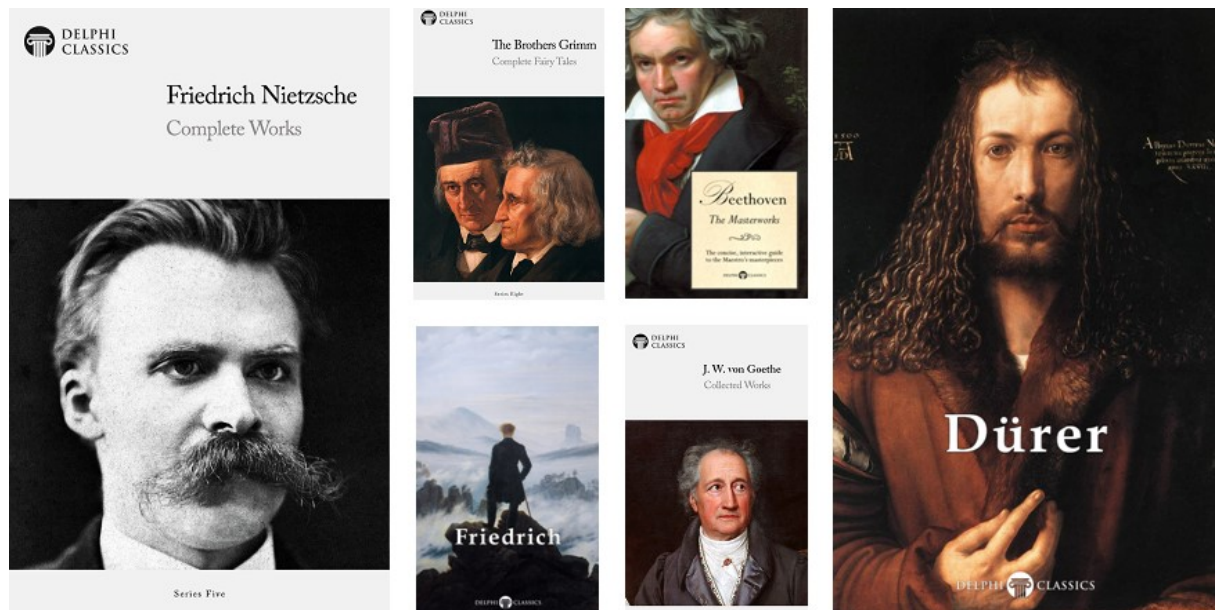
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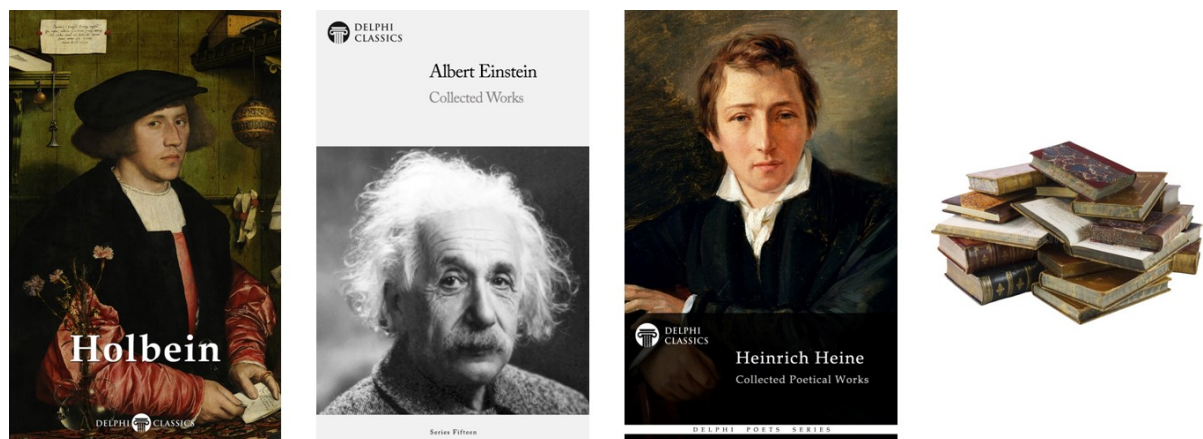
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The Novel



Panorama of Prague by Vincenc Morstadt, c. 1835. Rainer Maria Rilke was born in Prague, capital of the Kingdom of Bohemia.



Prague today



Rilke as a child, c. 1880



Rilke as a young man

The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge (1910)



Original German Title: 'Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge'

Translated by John Linton, 1930

A foundational text of literary modernism, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* is Rilke's only major prose work. It abandons traditional plot for a fragmented, stream-of-consciousness exploration of existential angst, memory and the modern human condition. Rilke conceived and wrote the novel while living in Paris, beginning in c. 1904. Having moved to the French capital to write a monograph on the sculptor Auguste Rodin, Rilke was deeply unsettled by the relentless, anonymous, and mechanised reality of the sprawling metropolis. Rather than celebrating *La Belle Époque*, the sensitive poet experienced Paris as a chaotic, alienating environment characterised by poverty, disease and the looming threat of insanity. This profound sense of alienation, combined with memories of his youth and reflections on death, formed the emotional and psychological framework for the novel.

The narrative is presented as a collection of seventy-one disparate notebook entries and prose sketches. It follows the life of Malte Laurids Brigge, a twenty-eight-year-old Danish aristocrat and aspiring poet, living in a low-priced Parisian garret. The plot shifts quickly between two primary modes. Firstly, the urban present, where Malte observes the underbelly of Paris — the sick, the destitute and the dying. He becomes acutely aware of mortality, realising that death is an inescapable element of the modern, crowded city. Secondly, it deals with the memories of the past, as Malte, trying to counteract the horrors of city life, retreats into his childhood memories of Denmark. These entries deal with gothic mansions, eccentric relatives and hauntings, blending the historical with the fantastical. Overall, it is the story of a young artist teaching himself "how to see" the world and translate his internal experiences into language. The text asks profound questions about identity, the nature of love and the individual's desperate search for meaning in an increasingly godless and isolating world.

Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge fundamentally altered the trajectory of Austrian and German-language literature. Prior to its publication, literary realism and highly polished, musical lyricism were the dominant forms. Rilke's novel was a daring rejection of nineteenth-century conventions, marking the arrival of psychological modernism. By dissolving time, space and linear narrative, Rilke anticipated the fragmented, subjective storytelling later perfected by writers like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. For Austrian literature, the novel represents a pivotal shift away from external, descriptive storytelling toward intense and inward psychological exploration. It laid the philosophical and stylistic groundwork that would later be explored by subsequent generations of Austrian modernists, securing the theme of the existential crisis as a cornerstone of the literary tradition.

Rainer Maria Rilke
Die Aufzeichnungen des
Malte Laurids Brigge

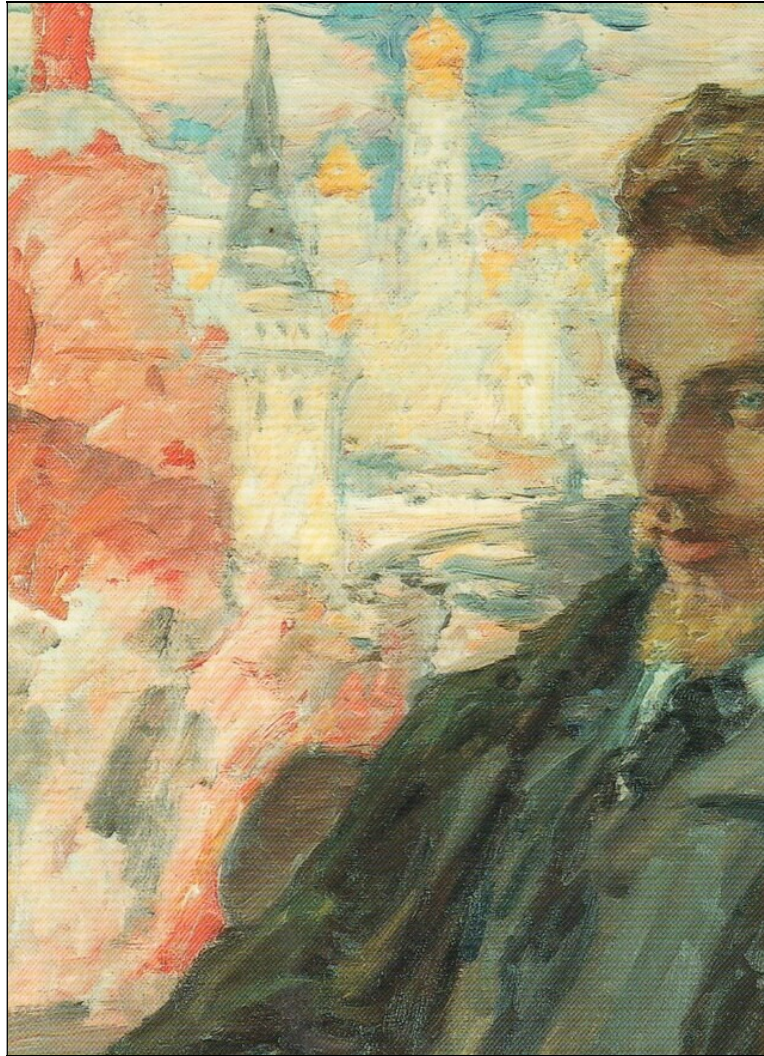
Erstes Bändchen

Leipzig · Im Insel-Verlag · 1910

The first edition's title page

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Leonid Pasternak's Portrait of Rilke, completed close to the time of publication

PART ONE



11 SEPTEMBER, RUE TOULLIER

PEOPLE come here, then, to live? I should rather have thought that they came here to die. I have been out, and I saw hospitals. I saw a poor fellow stagger and fall. People gathered round him: so I was spared the rest. I saw a pregnant woman. She dragged herself heavily along a high, warm wall, now and again groping for it as if to assure herself it was still there. Yes, it was still there; and behind it —? I looked for it on my map of the city: Maison d'Accouchement. Right. They will deliver her; they can do that. Further on, in the rue Saint-Jacques, an immense building with a cupola. My map said: Val de Grâce, hôpital militaire. I really did not need this information, but that does not matter. On every side an odour began to rise from the street. It was, so far as one could distinguish, a smell of iodoform, the grease of pommes frites, and fear. Every city has its summer smell. Then I saw a house curiously blind as if with cataract. It was not to be found on my map; but above the door there stood an inscription still fairly readable: *Asile de nuit*. Beside the entrance was the list of charges, I read it. The place was not dear.

And what else? A baby in a perambulator standing on the pavement. The child was stout, of a greenish complexion, and it had a noticeable eruption on its forehead. This was evidently healing and not causing any pain. The child was sleeping with open mouth, breathing iodoform, pommes frites, and fear. This, then, is what it came to. The chief thing was to keep on living. That was the chief thing.

* * *

To think that I cannot give up the habit of sleeping with an open window! The electric street-cars rage through my room with ringing fury. Automobiles race over me. A door slams. Somewhere a window-pane falls clattering. I can hear the big splinters laughing and the smaller ones sniggering. Then suddenly from the other side, within the house, a dull, muffled noise. Someone is coming up the stairs: is drawing nearer and nearer, interminably: is there, there for a long while, then passes. And once more the street. A girl screams: "*Ah! tais-toi, je ne veux plus?*" An electric car rushes up excitedly, then away overhead, away over everything. Someone is calling. People are running, overtaking each other. A dog barks. What a relief: a dog! Towards morning even a cock crows; and that brings immeasurable solace. Then all at once I fall asleep.

* * *

THESE are the noises. But there is something here that is more terrible: the silence. I believe that in the course of great conflagrations there sometimes occurs a moment of extreme tension: the jets of water fall back; the firemen no longer mount their ladders; no one stirs. Noiselessly a black cornice thrusts itself forward overhead, and a high wall, behind which the flames shoot up, leans forward, noiselessly. All stand motionless and await, with shoulders raised and brows contracted, the awful crash. The silence here is like that.

* * *

I AM learning to see. I do not know why it is, but everything penetrates more deeply within me and no longer stops at the place, where until now, it always used to finish. I possess an inner self of which I was ignorant. Everything now passes in thither. What happens there I know not.

Today while writing a letter I was struck by the fact that I had been here only three weeks. Three weeks elsewhere — in the country, for example — would be like a day; here they seem like years. And I mean to write no more letters. What would be the good of telling anyone that I am changing? If I am changing, then surely I am no longer the person I was, and if I am someone else than heretofore, then it is clear that I have no acquaintances. And to strangers, to people who do not know me, it is impossible for me to write.



End of Sample