

RAINER MARIA RILKE AND MARINA TSVETAeva:

THE INTELLECTUAL PROFILE OF

A RELATIONSHIP

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

During the last eight months of Rilke's life an exchange of letters took place with a Russian poet, Marina Tsvetaeva. Only recently has this fact come to light. Tsvetaeva never met Rilke face to face but knowledge and appreciation of his works found expression in the eight intimate and extensive letters she wrote to the German poet. Tsvetaeva arranged for her letters to Rilke to be kept in Swiss archives for a period of fifty years. Rilke's seven letters to the Russian poet were presumed lost until discovered by chance in a Moscow archive in 1977. Because of these circumstances, their correspondence was unavailable to scholars, and interpretation was not possible until the 1980's. In recent years more of this material has been made public but it is still difficult to obtain the original texts of Rilke's letters to Tsvetaeva.<sup>1</sup>

My research has focused on the factors and influences that resulted in Tsvetaeva's fascination with the German culture and language, and her reverence for Rilke and his works. In order to find the root of Rilke's highly enthusiastic response to Tsvetaeva, I endeavored to

find out to what extent the two Russian journeys inspired his life and art, since some critics claim that Rilke's Russian experience was of minor significance.<sup>2</sup>

Many studies have been written about Rilke and Russia but none about Tsvetaeva and Germany. My thesis will correct this deficiency by analyzing both, Rilke's interest in Russia and Tsvetaeva's interest in Germany. Although they did not know each other personally, they moved toward each other spiritually and emotionally. Both poets translated their alienation from the real world around them into an idealized image of another culture, in Rilke's case, Russia, in Tsvetaeva's case, Germany. In this way they found inspiration and could nurture their creative impulses. When the opportunity finally arose, they wrote to each other, and their correspondence revealed kindred spirits.

To Tsvetaeva Germany was a country of magnificent poets and writers like Goethe, Heine, and Hölderlin, as well as a fairytale world of medieval chivalry, Gothic cathedrals and lofty, ivy-covered castles. Tsvetaeva's early musical training, combined with her poetic abilities, resulted in a fine ear for the sound of any language. Hearing German since early childhood, knowing German children's songs, games, and poems contributed to her love of that language. Thus German culture had a major impact on her art.

Rilke was only a young man of twenty-four, yet much older than the child Tsvetaeva, when he first attempted to study the Russian language and culture. On his trips to Russia, Rilke saw rural life, the cities, and the monuments, and met well-known people. Russia became an idealized image for the German poet as Germany did for Tsvetaeva. While Rilke became a wanderer of choice, who traveled extensively all over Western Europe, Tsvetaeva became an émigré poet because of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. In her youth she experienced quick acclaim in Tsarist Russia. Later, however, she became a poetic nonentity in her country because her creative period coincided with the turmoil that followed the revolution in Russia. As a consequence of the Stalinist era, Russia developed into a closed society where Tsvetaeva's work was no longer acceptable. In addition to her obvious disagreement with the Soviet system, her modernist style of writing and the unconventional subject matter of her poetry made her undesirable for the ruling socialist-realist literary elite.

At age thirty, she became an émigré poet when she followed her husband abroad, briefly to Berlin, then to Czechoslovakia and finally to Paris in 1925. There, Tsvetaeva experienced increasing isolation and poverty, having made enemies in émigré literary circles. She lived in Paris until 1939 at which time she returned to the

Soviet Union. Only misery, loneliness, and poverty awaited her in her homeland, and she committed suicide at the age of forty-nine.

When Rilke's correspondence with Tsvetaeva was initiated by Boris Pasternak in 1926, she was living in France with her two children and a mostly absent husband.<sup>3</sup> Rilke had established residence at the small chateau Muzot in Switzerland, cultivating a solitary lifestyle with interruptions for treatment at various sanatoriums. Despite his deteriorating health, Rilke entered the correspondence with Tsvetaeva with enthusiasm and devotion, and continued until the middle of August, about four months before his death.

In this project, then, I am going to trace the social, psychological and cultural roots that resulted in Rilke's and Tsvetaeva's affinity for each other, in order to interpret their correspondence. These letters serve also as an important link in the chain of German literary ties.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>There is considerable difficulty in obtaining the original German texts of Rilke's letters to Tsvetaeva. The German texts of her letters to Rilke were available to me, (see Works Cited: Rakusa and Ingold). However, I could only secure Rilke's letters to Tsvetaeva in English translation. Simon Karlinsky, in the "Appendix on Sources" of his 1985 book on Tsvetaeva, The Woman, her World and her Poetry expresses his special thanks to the people who provided copies of original German texts for him, thus pointing to the problem of obtaining these materials.

<sup>2</sup>Siegfried Mandel wrote in Rainer Maria Rilke: The Poetic Instinct, that little remained of Rilke's enthusiasm for Russia after he had translated The Lay of the Band of Igor (Mandel, 33).

Another biographer, Frank Wood, declared in his book, Rainer Maria Rilke: The Ring of Forms, that "It has been customary to exaggerate . . . the part played by Russia in Rilke's life. . . ." (Wood, 38).

<sup>3</sup>During the years of exile in France Sergei Efron was involved in undercover work for Stalin's secret service. Having been a White Army Officer in the Civil War, he changed colors. When he worked for the Soviets in France he was frequently away from home because of these clandestine activities which culminated in evidence that Efron was also involved in an assassination plot. Tsvetaeva knew nothing of this and refused to believe that her adored husband had ever been a Soviet agent (Hingley, 228).

## CHAPTER II

### TSVETAeva AND GERMANY

Although Marina Tsvetaeva can be judged as being ahead of her time in her poetry, life style, convictions and actions, her romantic attachment to the fairytale world of yesteryear shows a yearning for the past. In this love, Tsvetaeva focused on the German folktale and combined her childhood memories with an evolving lifelong fascination with German poets and German literature.

Marina Tsvetaeva's first contact with German poets began with Augusta Ivanovna from Riga, her Baltic German nanny. Her maternal grandfather, Aleksandr Danilovic Mejn, likewise, a Baltic German, introduced Marina Tsvetaeva to German poetry, while the little girl listened attentively, sitting on her grandfather's knees (Karlinsky, 1966, 19). Tsvetaeva was entertained at an early age, not only by German poetry but also by simple card games. In explaining the game called Schwarzer Peter in her autobiographical prose piece "The Devil," Tsvetaeva reveals her lyrical sensitivity. She perceives clearly the tenseness of the participants and the significance of controlling one's breathing and facial expressions. Her

word choice brings excitement and suspense to this simple description of a child's card game. Grasping the reader's attention, she draws us in to experience with her the magic of faking possession of the most valuable card. She learned early in life, through the card game, how to keep secrets. Tsvetaeva declares that,

The point of the game was to foist off on another person the Jack of Spades, the Schwarze Peter, the way in old times you passed on a fever to a neighbor and even now you pass on a cold: you pass it on and by bestowing it, you get rid of it. At first, when there were lots of cards and players, there wasn't any game at all, properly speaking; the whole thing amounted to the circular manipulation of a fan of cards--and Peter too. But when, in the gradual progression of fate and chance, the table got rid of the players and the players of Black Peter and there remained--two--, oh, only then did the game get started, for then the whole thing was in the face, in the degree of its stoney immobility. Before all else it was the discipline of breathing: without shuddering to endure every decision and redecision of your opponent's hand, now grabbing hold, now pulling up short, and again waving it off to take, of the giver--to give it away. Of the taker--to smell it out, of the giver--to get rid of it, to rid the other person of his homing instinct, to suggest to him with your whole being, lying in its every pore, exactly the opposite; that black is red, and red is black to hold the Schwarze Peter with all the innocence of the Six of Diamonds. Oh what a wonderful, magical, incorporeal game: of spirit with spirit, hand with hand, face with face, of everything--only not of card with card. And of course in that game, trained from early childhood to swallow the red hot coals of a secret, I was a master. (Tsvetaeva, 1980, 305)

In addition, German nursery rhymes were also practiced in the Tsvetaeva household. With her two young daughters Marina and Asja (Asya) at her side Mme. Cvetaev<sup>1</sup> explained to the children the kind of dress a hunter wears. Asya "sang out with eager readiness," writes Tsvetaeva,

Fuchs du hast die Gans gestohlen,  
Gieb sie wieder her!  
Gieb sie wieder her!  
Sonst wird dich der Jäger holen  
Mit dem Schiess--ge--we--ehr!  
(Tsvetaeva, 1980, 302-3)

A gun was not held to little Marina's head, but almost as much pressure was applied (or fear instilled) by her frustrated pianist mother to make a musician of her daughter. Marina obliged and endless hours were spent practicing the piano. "By the time she was six years old, Marina became proficient enough at the piano to enter the Moscow music School of Mme. Zoograf-plaksima, where she soon appeared in an open recital playing four hand piano duets" (Kalinsky, 1966, 23). Tsvetaeva herself writes in her prose piece "Mother and Music" that,

Mother deluged us with all the bitterness of her own unrealized vocation, . . . she deluged us with music as if with blood. . . . I can say that I was born not ins Leben, but in die Musik hinein. (Tsvetaeva, 1980, 283)

Again Tsvetaeva chooses German words to express profound childhood experiences.

Although music--or rather the study of piano--was initially forced upon her, Tsvetaeva later stated, "from my

mother I inherited music, Romanticism and Germany; and to me Germany is simply music" (Tsvetaeva, 1979, 125).<sup>2</sup> This triple inheritance was to influence Tsvetaeva's lifelong poetic responses. On summer evening walks along the Oka river she enjoyed listening to her mother and sister while they sang German folk songs (Tsvetaeva, 1980, 311). Marina pondered the lyrics of a song about secret love,

Kein Feuer keine Kohle  
 Kann brennen so heiss  
 Als wie heimliche Liebe  
 Von der niemand was weiss . . .  
 (Tsvetaeva, 1980, 311)

And she believed that from those words:

Feuer--Kohle--heiss--heimlich (fire--coal--hotly--secretly) a fire really did start up in my breast, as if I were not hearing those words, but swallowing them down. They were burning coals and I swallowed them down through my throat. (Tsvetaeva, 1980, 312)

In this way Tsvetaeva explains the feelings the song evoked in her. She did not quite understand the meaning of the second stanza, which reads,

Keine Rose, Keine Nelke  
 Kann blühen so schön,  
 Als wenn zwei verliebte Seelen  
 Zu einander thun stehn. (Tsvetaeva, 1980, 312)

but reveals her perception and sensitivity to words of the German language with the following interpretation,

And that is where the spell came over me: verliebte-Seelen! Well, it could have been, say, Herzen! And it would all have been quite ordinary. But no, what in earliest childhood is made your own--is

your own once and for all: verliebte means Seelen. And Seelen--that must be See (the Baltic die See--the sea!) and then too--sehen (to see), and then--sich sehnen (languish, long for), . . . . To Languish . . . for some particular sea which you have never seen--that is the soul and that is love. And no Rosen or Nelken can help you. (Tsvetaeva, 1980, 312)

The above lines expose a great deal about Tsvetaeva, and how the German songs of her youth touched her and found a response in her poetry. That she reacted to meaningful phrases such as "souls in love," and that she, in a childlike fashion, debated whether Seelen were hearts or the sea, shows the extensive influence that German lyrics had on her. Close to Seelen in sound are also the words sehen (to see) and sehnen (to long for), the latter denoting intense feelings.

The child Marina experienced an intensity of emotion through exposure to German poetry and song. Her intense love for all things German was then further nurtured by actually seeing the German landscape, culture, and architecture. Her mother's need for treatment of tuberculosis first brought Tsvetaeva to Lausanne, Switzerland, and then to Freiburg, in the Black Forest, to attend private boarding schools with her sister Asja (Karlinsky, 1966, 24-5). The twelve-year-old, impressionable girl, infatuated with this medieval, romantic city of steeped towers, cobblestone streets, colorful Fachwerkhäuser, and the fairytale-like beauty of the surrounding countryside, would later make the statement, "I loved Schwarzwald to insanity" (Tsvetaeva,

1979, 127). The remark is taken from Tsvetaeva's O Germanii. In this essay, she also exhibits her sense of humor when she explains how she would name a German restaurant, if she owned one. Above the inns in Germany hang these wrought iron signs bearing names such as Zum Adler, Zum Löwen, etc. Tsvetaeva said in her piece on Germany, "I would name mine Zum Kuckuck" (Tsvetaeva, 1979, 127).

Germany, and particularly a city like Freiburg,<sup>3</sup> were very different indeed from the Russian landscape, not to mention the city of Moscow, where Tsvetaeva was born and spent her childhood. The Gothic splendor of the cathedral in Freiburg overwhelmed her. Russia has no Gothic architecture, and the countryside is not dotted with small towns and villages which date back to the Middle Ages, and display a singular beauty and charm in their buildings and churches. The Russians were still fighting the Tartar hordes when Germany and central Europe produced much of the Gothic monuments built during the Middle Ages.

The Russian landscape is vast, often bare and desolate. Since Russia developed historically, economically, and, therefore, architecturally much more slowly than Western and Central Europe, one finds mostly country estates with surrounding villages, but rarely towns and small cities created to house a rising and increasingly powerful middle class so prevalent in Germany. It is well known that "the social and economic gulf which separated Russia

from the more developed parts of Western Europe . . . [was clearly evident] in the weakness and unimportance of its towns. Less than a twentieth of the population was urban" (Anderson, 12-3).

The above factors, therefore, explain why the German countryside attracted the Russian girl. Yet Russia and Russian literature were also of great interest to the budding poet. To Tsvetaeva Pushkin was "the forbidden fruit," that is "a huge blue-lilac volume with a gold inscription slantwise: Collected Works of A. S. Pushkin" (Tsvetaeva, 1980, 329) which she was dying to read but found quite difficult to accomplish. She tells in "My Pushkin" how she was able, nevertheless, to do just that,

Pushkin lives in the cabinet in my older sister Valeria's room, that same Negro with the curls and the flashing white of his eyes. But before his eyes there was another flashing: of my own green eyes in the mirror, because the cabinet is deceptive, mirrored, with two panels, in each one there I am. . . . I read the fat Pushkin in the cabinet, with my nose in the book and on the shelf, almost in darkness and almost right up against it and even a little bit suffocated by his weight that came right into the throat, and almost blinded by the nearness of the tiny letters. I read Pushkin right into the chest and right into the brain. (Tsvetaeva, 1980, 329)

Thus Pushkin became part of Tsvetaeva's being. She identified with his rejection of mediocrity and superficiality. As much as Tsvetaeva tended to idealize all things German, she did at the same time detest the

superficiality and lack of spirituality exhibited by the economically successful Germany of the industrial age. Pushkin, a hundred years earlier, did likewise but could also masterfully sketch a character which demonstrated not only the singleminded pursuit of material gain but also the trait of imagination, and fantasy. In Pushkin's short story "The Queen of Spades," Hermann, a German-Russian, wants to get the secret about a set of winning cards from an old countess so he can make a fortune. He goes to all lengths to acquire the secret, and gets what he wants only to fail in the end. He is endowed with near limitless imagination but,

neither the tears of an unfortunate young woman nor the amazing charm of her grief troubled his stern soul. He felt no pangs of conscience. . . .One thing [however], horrified him: the irreparable loss of the secret from which he expected enrichment. (Pushkin, 96)

It is significant, that a Russian poet of the stature of Alexander Pushkin portrayed what he perceived to be a typical St. Petersburg German. What sort of personality traits formed this type for 19th century Russian literary imagination which exerted such a powerful influence on Tsvetaeva?

To answer this question it is advisable to go back in time to the seventeenth century and Peter the Great. Before this Russian tsar invited foreign--mainly German and Dutch--doctors, engineers, merchants, and craftsmen to his

country in an effort to create a Russian middle class, the country was technologically and scientifically very backward. It remained that way for two more centuries in the vast, sparsely populated countryside where the subjugated and illiterate serfs constituted most of the population. It has been established that,

To some extent this was a matter of geography. Great distances and an extreme climate, with severe winters, burning summers, and a shorter growing season for crops than in Western Europe, were in themselves barriers to economic progress. For each grain of wheat or rye sown only three or four were harvested; this was far lower than the standard yield in the more advanced areas of Western Europe. Such a scanty yield meant that the overwhelming majority of the population had to till the ground if any kind of organized society were to survive. These natural obstacles, however, were reinforced by man-made ones. The rulers of Russia had forged a form of government more completely autocratic, in both form and substance, than any to be found elsewhere in Europe. (Anderson, 10)

Despite this agrarian situation, which was to persist, the direction in the few big cities, mainly Moscow, changed considerably because of Peter the Great's desire to modernize and westernize his country. He saw to it that "technology, new industrial methods and techniques . . . came from Western Europe, above all from the Dutch Republic and Germany" (Anderson, 21). Peter built ships and a new city modeled after Amsterdam. St. Petersburg became the essence of a pervading paradox of Russia on the whole. The

tsar wanted reforms and democratic ideas but he forced a great number of his subjects to build a city, in the course of which thousands perished. Other reforms and modern ideas, which the tsar initiated were severely resented and boycotted by the nobility and the clergy. Revolts ensued and had to be put down.

. . . [Peter's] desire to build a navy, his friendship with foreigners, . . . his European dress, the journey to the West, in a word his wholesale and brutal rejection of the traditional behavior proper to an orthodox tsar, aroused the deepest misgivings. . . . (Anderson, 44)

Similarly, the immigration of considerable numbers of Germans, who settled in the big cities, mainly Moscow and St. Petersburg, were not welcome either by the opponents of Peter.. Tüchtigkeit, Sauberkeit, Fleiss und Ordnung, all of these attributes, which made the German merchants and artisans flourish in Russia, were resented by many Russians, whose spiritual basis in patriarchal Orthodox values could not be brought into harmony with the foreign mentality. Many conservative Russians believed that Germans were lacking in "soul" and "feeling" and therefore judged them to be superficial.

As the German presence in Moscow increased and the Romanovs married German princesses, another facet of the German character emerged. Fantasy, dreaming, the love of

fairytale, and composing ethereal music and song also appeared to be incarnate in the German personality.

This latter part of the image of Germany appealed to Marina Tsvetaeva. She passionately fell in love with everything German.

In her 1919 essay 'On Germany' (O Germanii), she pointed out that her affinity with German literature, music and landscape was the exterior expression of two psychological qualities which were part of her innermost core and which could be expressed or described only in German. These are Übermass, which denotes excess and extravagance, and Schwärmerei, a state of being either ecstatic or gushing. (Karlinsky, 1985, 19-20)

Both these concepts link Tsvetaeva to Romanticism because of her clear preference of emotion over reason and because of her emphasis on imagination and intuition.

To the exclusion of all practical needs of everyday life, Tsvetaeva wanted to experience daily the utmost depth of her emotions. The memoirist and wife of the Russian poet, Osip Mandelstam, Nadezhda says in her book Hope Abandoned about Tsvetaeva,

Reading Tsvetaeva's verse and letters nowadays I realize that what she always needed was to experience every emotion to the very utmost, seeking ecstasy not only in love, but also in abandonment, loneliness, and disaster. (Mandelstam, 462)

This endless, eternal longing, the never fulfilled desire for an unattainable state of being were an integral part of Tsvetaeva's poetic existence. She expressed it

often and in many different forms. Though we cannot consider Tsvetaeva a romantic poet, there is romantic longing in her art as in

"The Poet (3)"

Now what shall I do here, blind and  
fatherless?  
Everyone else can see and has a father.  
Passion in this world has to leap anathema  
as it might be over the walls of a trench  
and weeping is called a cold in the  
head.

What shall I do, by nature and trade a  
singing creature (like a wire-sunburn!  
Siberia!)  
As I go over the bridge of my exchanged  
visions, that cannot be weighted in a  
world that deals only in weights and  
measures?

What shall I do, singer and first-born,  
in a world where the deepest black is  
grey, and inspiration is kept in a  
thermos?  
With all this immensity in a measured  
world? (Tsvetaeva, 1981, 37)

In the "measured world" of Tsvetaeva's everyday existence, she found--because of her inclination towards Übermass and Schwärmerei--many human beings of both sexes who became the objects of her passion. As in the German fairytale, for which Tsvetaeva had a particular devotion, "she fell profoundly in love with the romantic image [of a person], created by herself, only to be cruelly disappointed" when the people she was enraptured with rejected her (Hingley, 124). Tsvetaeva's sex life was complicated and wrought with contradictions. She was

simultaneously obsessed with sensuality and the rejection of sex. This attitude is illustrated in the following poem when Tsvetaeva sees her daughter Alya as saving grace,

O my golden Age!  
 O swarm of fabulous transgressions  
 All brushed away  
 By Consuela, my consolation . . .!  
 I could meet death this instant.  
 No amorous speck is left. (Hingley, 88)

Devoted to her student husband Sergey Efron, she nevertheless openly engaged in a tumultuous lesbian affair with Sophia Parnok,<sup>4</sup> a literary critic and later poet of renown, after only a few years of marriage (Karlinsky, 1985, 51). In her poetry "sensual and ascetic urges . . . [alternate but] . . . the theme of sexual renunciation [is] to become prominent [later] in her work" (Hingley, 89). Keeping in mind the drastic changes in life style, surroundings, and politics Tsvetaeva was to undergo in the course of her life, it is totally plausible to see the poet as an accumulation of paradoxes.

Her poetic urges and her childhood influences and experiences directed Tsvetaeva toward a romantic, idealized Germany where the poet's soul could luxuriate in Elysian Fields of poetic abundance and freedom. She explains that her eternal Schwärmen is totally in the order of things. "There (in Germany) I am a white raven among white ravens. I am an 'any,' an 'average,' I am not unusual, indeed, I fit in perfectly" (Tsvetaeva, 1979, 129).

She believed that Germany was the continuation of the tradition of classical Greece, "ancient and youthful," a place where poets were nourished--like the muses--by Ambrosia and Nectar. "From no one else's hands nor anyone else's lips would I take the poetic nourishment Germany can provide for me," declares Tsvetaeva in O Germanii (Tsvetaeva, 1979, 130).

Even as Tsvetaeva saw in Germany a fabulously nourishing ground for poetic creativity, she also realized the problematic nature of Bürgerlichkeit. In Germany this word represented a particular state of the citizenry which, with the advent of the Industrial Age, became even more prominent. Bürgerlichkeit, that is bourgeoisie can have positive or negative connotations. This depends on the language and context in which the term is used. For Tsvetaeva Bürgerlichkeit comes from the word Burg, something that is confining and rigid in its structure. This then leads to Kleinbürgerlichkeit, a concept which is definitely not conducive to spirituality. Thus Germany incorporated for Tsvetaeva the duality of Schraubstock for the body and "Elysian Fields" for the mind. She felt that the vise of German Kleinbürgerlichkeit was a necessary tool to keep her passionate Masslosigkeit in check (Tsvetaeva, 1979, 129-30).

Tsvetaeva's favorite German poets--mainly Goethe, Heine, Hölderlin did not notice their prison (the vise of

"Bürgerlichkeit"), because their spirit soared into the freedom of the "Elysian Fields" Germany also provided for its poets. Die Seele fliegt declares Tsvetaeva in German in the fragmented, modernist prose of the essay "O Germanii." That was of immense concern to her, and she felt it the duty of each poet to give in to the soul's desire to fly sky--or heavenward (Tsvetaeva, 1979, 124).

If identification with Germany's great poets made Tsvetaeva a conservative and a romantic, early contacts with young revolutionaries, the Bolshevik Revolution itself, and ensuing poverty, misery, and exile made her a twentieth century Bohemian.

She smoked, cropped her hair and dressed casually, if not sloppily, and asserted her own independence in an age of growing submissiveness, as the following lines indicate:<sup>5</sup>

Placing hand on heart,  
I'm no lady of quality  
But a rebel in head and womb.  
(Hingley, 117)

Tsvetaeva appeared at a poetry recital in "Moscow's Polytechnic Museum early in 1921 . . . grotesquely garbed in an old green dress cut like a cassock. Her slender waist was girt with a military belt as worn by officer cadets, and she had a brown leather pouch slung over one shoulder" (Hingley, 116). In this manner Tsvetaeva liked to provoke her audience or the people around her to emphasize her

resentment of convention, mediocrity and anything "petty bourgeois."

At this recital Tsvetaeva read several of her own monarchist and pro-white Army and anti-Bolshevik lyrics and received thundering applause from an audience, largely composed of Red Army Cadets and Communist Party members. She attributed their reaction to her belief that when people hear poetry for the first time, they do not understand any of it, and come to the poetry recital only because their attendance is expected (Hingley, 117). Tsvetaeva's reason for such boldness was partly the fact, that her husband was an officer in the White Army and she believed in their cause, as demonstrated in this poem from the collection "The Demesne of the Swans",

White Guard, your path is set noble and  
high:  
Black muzzles--your breast and temple defy.

Godly and white is the cause you fight  
for:  
White is your body--in sands to lie.

That is no flock of swans in the sky there:  
Saintly the White Guard host sails by there,  
White as a vision, to fade and die  
there . . .

One last glimpse of a world that's gone:  
Manliness--Daring--Vendee--Don  
(Tsvetaeva, 1980, Demesne, 63)

This poem was written in early March of 1918. Two years earlier, at the height of the war against Germany, Tsvetaeva had also read poetry that should have incensed

loyal Russians. At the home of a well-known naval architect, Akim Kannegiser, she "recited her pacifist and pro-German poetry, . . . marvelling that no one made objections to her themes" (Karlinsky, 1985, 56). The tolerance and generosity of her audience among them her fellow poets Esenin, Mandelstam, and Kuzmin were probably the reason (Karlinsky, 1985, 56). As she wondered, however, whether these poems were offensive to her listeners, Tsvetaeva admitted that she was aware of the discrepancy between her idealized notion of a Germany that was "the cradle of my soul" (Tsvetaeva, 1979, 127) and the real Germany of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

Neither the Reich nor the Kaiser were strong and stable enough to prevent the disastrous Versailles peace treaty which brought Germany to its knees at the end of World War One. The economically ruined country, nevertheless, became a haven for poets, writers, and many Russian émigrés who had fled the Bolshevik Revolution, persecution, and resulting famine in their homeland. Tsvetaeva, after having found out that her husband had survived the civil war and was in the West, made plans to meet him there. "In May 1922 she emigrated, heading for Prague by way of Berlin. Literary life was extremely active in Germany (there were over seventy Russian publishing houses) and many literary plans were made by Tsvetaeva" (Tsvetaeva, 1980, 3). She was still

able to publish on both sides in those first years as an emigre, since early Bolshevik literary policy was rather liberal. "Her most famous collection 'Mileposts I' was published [in Russian] in 1922 (Tsvetaeva, 1980, 3).

With her love for Germany, it is surprising that Tsvetaeva did not try to move her family there. She knew Berlin from a 1910 trip with her father and sister Asya (Tsvetaeva, 1980, 191), and to establish residence in the German capital is unlikely to have posed a problem at that time. Tsvetaeva presumably chose to avoid the chance to live in Germany in order to keep her romantic images intact and not to be forced to give up her dream in exchange for a more realistic conception of that country.

Often Tsvetaeva was not absorbed with the necessary and practical aspects of life. Rather, she was devoted to her emotion-laden existence which brought her poetic riches but also heartache and suffering. It was quite natural that emigration was not without pain, which is expressed in the following lines:

My native land did not sustain me  
 Enough so that on all my soul  
 Even the most thorough detective  
 could find a birthmark or a mole.  
 (Markov, 449)

Thus Tsvetaeva stated the rejection she felt, a consequence of the political turmoil that caused her to leave her homeland. As these developments in Russia had an impact on Tsvetaeva's poetry, a definite move away from the style of

earlier works is evident. "Tsvetaeva [had] used a late-Victorian, upper class diction that was not always free of self-conscious artificiality" (Karlinsky, 1985, 62). Now her style changed; her diction and word choice became purer and more direct. Her later and more mature style also included the use of archaic forms. The years passed, and Tsvetaeva became more and more a poet who absorbed and used the different methods of the emerging symbolists and Acmeists. She capably incorporated in her poetry,

uneducated and peasant speech, regional expressions, formulae from folklore and, where appropriate, deliberately coarse language. She was not a pioneer in any of these areas [but] . . . by 1916, . . . [had] mastered the entire range of innovations introduced by the symbolists, the peasant poets, the Acmeists and, to a minor extent, even the Futurists and in doing so achieved a striking originality of her own. (Karlinsky, 1985, 63)

Proof of Tsvetaeva's "striking originality" is her long verse poem Krysolov (The Rat-Catcher). Begun during her years in Czechoslovakia, the verse poem exhibits her remarkable sense of humor. All the troubles Tsvetaeva faced in her life did not distort her poetic vision and awareness of the ambiguities and paradoxes of the human condition. This is superbly evident in Krysolov.

Again Germany offered the subject matter for her most powerful statement on the impact of mediocrity in life. She was phonetically enchanted by the sound of the German language, and therefore inserted numerous German

phrases, words, and whole sentences into the satirical epic poem. Krysolov was initially to be dedicated to the German poet Heinrich Heine (Wytrzens, 116), whose poem Die Wanderratten is distantly related to the old German legend Der Rattenfänger von Hameln.<sup>6</sup> Heine's poem is a satire about rats, representing the satiated, placid citizens on the one hand and the hungry, wandering, pillaging hordes of people--who own nothing--on the other. This Heine poem was most likely the sole model for Tsvetaeva's Krysolov.

#### Die Wanderratten

Es gibt zwei Sorten Ratten:  
Die hungrigen und satten.  
Die satten bleiben vergnügt zu Haus,  
Die hungrigen aber wandern aus.

Sie wandern viel tausend Meilen,  
Ganz ohne Rasten und Weilen,  
Gradaus in ihrem grimmigen Lauf,  
Nicht Wind noch Wetter hält sie auf.

Sie klimmen wohl über die Höhen,  
Sie schwimmen wohl durch die Seen;  
Gar manche ersäuft oder bricht das Genick,  
Die lebenden lassen die toten zurück.

Es haben diese Käuze  
Gar fürchterliche Schnäuze;  
Sie tragen die Köpfe geschoren egal,  
Ganz radikal, ganz rattenkahl.

Der sinnliche Rattenhaufen,  
Er will nur fressen und saufen,  
Er denkt nicht, während er säuft and frisst,  
Dass unsre Seele unsterblich ist.

So eine wilde Ratze,  
Die fürchtet nicht Hölle, nicht Katze;  
Sie hat kein Gut, sie hat kein Geld  
Und wünscht aufs neue zu teilen die Welt.

Die Wanderratten, o wehe!  
 Sie sind schon in der Nähe.  
 Sie rücken heran, ich höre schon  
 Ihr Pfeifen, die Zahl ist Legion.

O wehe! wir sind verloren,  
 sie sind schon vor den Toren!  
 Der Bürgermeister und Senat,  
 Sie schütteln die Köpfe, und keiner weiss Rat.

Die Bürgerschaft greift zu den Waffen,  
 Die Glocken läuten die Pfaffen.  
 Gefährdet ist das Palladium  
 Des sittlichen Staats, das Eigentum.

Nicht Glockengeläute, nicht Pfaffengebete,  
 Nicht hochwohlweise Senatsdekrete,  
 Auch nicht Kanonen, viel Hundertpfünder,  
 Sie helfen euch heute, ihr lieben Kinder!

Heut' helfen euch nicht die Wortgespinste  
 Der abgelebten Redekünste.  
 Man fängt nicht Ratten mit Syllogismen,  
 Sie springen über die feinsten Sophismen.

Im hungrigen Magen Eingang finden  
 Nur Suppenlogik mit Knodelgründen,  
 Nur Argumente von Rinderbraten,  
 Begleitet mit Göttinger Wurstzitatzen.

Ein schweigender Stockfisch in Butter gesotten,  
 Behaget den radikalen Rotten  
 Viel besser, als ein Mirabeau  
 Und alle Redner seit Cicero. (Heine, 192-4)

The well known medieval legend alleges that in 1284 an adventurer abducted 130 children from the German town of Hameln. In a later version the townspeople failed to pay the pied piper, who managed to rid the town of an abundant number of pillaging rats. The piper then lured the children away by playing his flute, the same instrument that had moved the rats to follow him out of town and to their deaths by drowning.

Marina Tsvetaeva's long epic poem Krysolov (The Rat-Catcher), is often deemed to be her best work;

Die Dichterin bezeichnete ihr auf den ersten Blick episches Werk im Untertitel gleichwohl als lyrische Satire. Die Zielrichtung dieser Satire spricht sie in einem Brief aus der Entstehungszeit offen aus, es geht um eine Satire na byt, auf den Alltagstrott. Diesen von der Autorin verachteten Alltag repräsentieren vom Kern der Handlung, der bekannten und literarisch so oft verwerteten Rattenfängersage her, die Bewohner der Stadt Hameln im Mittelalter. (Wytrzens, 112)

The theme of the empty, hollow and artless citizen whose sole purpose in life was to improve on already existing riches without any desire to further his spiritual and intellectual abilities, intrigued writers and composers of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Evidently, large segments of the German middle class exhibited these traits.

Krysolov was completed between March and November of 1925 while Tsvetaeva was living in Paris and her personal circumstances were becoming miserable. The last lines of a poem,

I have two enemies in this world,  
Twins, inextricably interrelated;  
Ache of the hungry--and glut of the sated.  
(Tsvetaeva, 1980, Demesne, 101)

seem to indicate where Tsvetaeva's sympathies are not directed. Similarly, in Krysolov, the poet loves neither the "capitalist burghers nor the revolutionary rats--both

are equally philistine and devoid of spirituality" (Karlinsky, 1985, 145).

Tsvetaeva's Krysolov is a critical as well as humorous piece, the various elements of which represent her lyric ability, as well as her desire to create new words and word forms;

Untersucht man den Wortschatz des 'Krysolov' auf die vorhandenen Stilschichten hin, so findet man

1. dass alle Ebenen vertreten sind--es gibt krasse Archaismen wie esm', ušesa, miroderžatel', die auf das 18. Jahrhundert, ja in die altrussische Zeit zurückverweisen;
2. dass das mehr oder minderlebendige kirchenslawische Wortgut reichlich ausgenutzt wurde;
3. dass die Zahl der Fremdwörter, besonders der aus dem Deutschen, ausserordentlich hoch ist.

(Wytrzens, 115)

Krysolov represents Tsvetaeva's attitudes and convictions regarding Kleinbürgerlichkeit--the Weltanschauung of the narrowminded, petty bourgeoisie;

The targets of Tsvetaeva's satire are both social and political. From her romantic literary roots, especially from Pushkin and Heine, Tsvetaeva inherited the nineteenth century notion that the enemy of the poet and artist is the faceless philistine, preoccupied with materialistic values only and hostile to the life of the spirit. This concept is conveyed in German by the noun Spießbürger and the adjective borniert. (Karlinsky, 1985, 144)

The citizens of Hamelin in their Alltagstrott are perfectly described in Chapter One of the six canto verse epic,

How God must love  
 these sensible  
 townspeople. Everyone  
 is righteous:

Goody-goody, always-right, always-provided-for,  
 stocked-up-in-time. It's Paradise town

Here are no riddles.  
 All is smooth and peaceable.  
 Only good habits in Paradise Town.  
 (Tsvetaeva, 1981, 74)

Tsvetaeva used words from more than one language. Since the scenery of Krysolov is Germany, German words, and especially clichés create the mood and the milieu in the Russian poem uncannily.

Take your servants out of harness  
 Shake your pipe--you've time for that--  
 But leave your work bench now because  
 'Morgen ist auch ein tag'

. . . Shopkeeper, leave your chalk,  
 Housewife, your mending.  
 Look to your feather bed:  
 'Morgen ist auch ein tag'  
 (Tsvetaeva, 1981, 75)<sup>7</sup>

In the course of the poem a food market is described in cynical terms and the great abundance in Hamelin is perceived as a form of moral decay, which in turn causes the rat plague. Just like Heine's Wanderratten comprised a revolutionary force, so do the Krysolov rats act rebelliously and invade the city;

The main weapon of the rats is their irreverence and lack of respect for the conventions which the burghers assume to be eternal and sacrosanct. But once the rats are victorious they become victims of overfeeding and of creeping embourgeoisement. (Karlinsky, 1985, 145)

But the "Rat-Catcher's" intent seems to be going beyond a satire of German Spiessbürgertum and in the following lines sounds like a vision satire of the Soviet revolution of 1917 hinting at the futility of achieving progress through proletarian (or any other) revolution. The moving force of the oppressed dies with the success of the revolution, and those in charge now imitate the worst qualities of those overthrown.

Here are eternal dreams, woods without  
 pathways.  
 The flute grows sweeter, hearts more quiet.  
 Follow without thinking. Listen. No need  
 for thought!  
 The flute becomes sweeter still, hearts  
 even quieter.

--Mutter. Don't call me in for supper . . .  
 Bu-u-bbles.

(Tsvetaeva, 1981, 80)

If Tsvetaeva's Krysolov proves her interest in German folkloric themes, then her comparison and literary criticism of Goethe's famous ballad Erlkönig reveals her true romantic involvement with the world of the German fairytale. The Russian poet Zhukovsky translated and introduced poems by Goethe, as well as many other European poets into Russian. His version of Erlkönig is not a mere translation but rather a new version of an old theme (Tsvetaeva, 1980, 475). Tsvetaeva compared and elaborated on both, Goethe's and Zhukovsky's ballads. She translated Goethe's poem literally and acknowledged Zhukovsky's accomplishment. She took pains in her usual way to

elaborate and succinctly explain certain words, which she felt were impossible to translate;

Let us begin with the first: 'tail.'  
 'Tail' in German is both Schwanz and Schweif: for example, Schwanz belongs to a dog and Schweif to a lion, a devil, a comet--and to the Erlkönig. Therefore the Erlkönig is lowered, belittled by my 'tailed' and 'with his tail.' The second word is fein, which I have translated 'gentle' and translated poorly because first and foremost the word designates a lofty quality: the uniqueness, genuineness, exquisiteness, nobility and gentility of a thing or a person. Here it means 'noble,' and 'well-born,' and 'gentle,' and 'rare.' The third word is the verb reizt, reizen 'to provoke,' 'to rile up,' 'to stir,' 'to incite to' (invariably something bad: anger, disaster and so on) in its primary meaning, and only in a secondary meaning to 'charm.' Here the word can be translated neither fully nor in its primary meaning. Closer in its root than the other words would be: I am provoked by your beauty, in the sense: 'stung.'  
 (Tsvetaeva, 1980, 365-6)

Tsvetaeva continues in a thorough and capable fashion, revealing again her exquisite knowledge of the German language. She elaborates on Gestalt and scheinen, and tells us how both, Goethe, on the one hand, and Zhukovsky on the other, saw the father-child situation in Erlkönig.

The father's action is correspondingly altered: in Goethe the father holds the child firmly and warm; in Zhukovsky he warms him in response to the shuddering.  
 (Tsvetaeva, 1980, 366)

In this essay which Tsvetaeva wrote in Paris in November of 1933, she gives a scholarly comparison of the two Erlkönig ballads, declaring,

The works are equally great. It would be impossible to translate the Erlkönig better than Zhukovsky. And we ought not to try. With its hundred years of history it is no longer a translation but an original. It is simply another Erlkönig, the Russian Forest King from our anthologies and the bad dreams of our childhood. . . . Each author saw the things with his own eyes. Goethe from the blackness of his fiery eyes--saw it, and we saw it with him. . . . Zhukovsky. . . . believed in the fog and the willows. . . . In Zhukovsky it is fear the child perishes from. In Goethe it is the Erlkönig. (Tsvetaeva, 1980, 360-370)

For Tsvetaeva Germany meant an unattainable, romantic dream world. It represented an idealized fairytale land, far removed from reality, where the poet's longing for an otherworldly plane could be directed.

Another poet of renown, Rainer Maria Rilke, with whose works Tsvetaeva was thoroughly familiar, shared the same Sehnsucht for a magical place where his poetic longings could find inspiration. Like Marina Tsvetaeva, Rilke was a poet of ideals, but one who could choose a lifestyle devoid of concerns for materialistic endeavors. Tsvetaeva did not have the benefit of that choice, but the reader finds in both poets a complete division between the world of mundane needs and a world of Romantic yearnings.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>Marina Tsvetaeva's mother was a determined woman, who grew up without a mother and who was forced by her father to give up a concert career and the young man she loved. Instead she married a much older man, Prof. Cvetaev, a widower with two children (Karlinsky, 1966, 21-2).

<sup>2</sup>All Russian quotations from Tsvetaeva's O Germanii have been translated orally by Peter I. Barta. Because of the lack of availability of source material, some German quotes are in English. The Russian primary sources have been translated orally or are quoted in English translation, as will be indicated.

<sup>3</sup>Particularly enchanting for Tsvetaeva while in boarding school in Freiburg was an afternoon tea invitation to the fairytale castle of a real princess, Fürstin von Thurn und Taxis. Many years later, after the death of Rilke, and after reading his letters, published at that time, Tsvetaeva realized that the princess who had entertained her and her sister for tea was also a close friend and correspondent of the German poet she adored (Karlinsky, 1966, 25).

<sup>4</sup>Compared to Western societies, pre-revolutionary Russia was non-incriminating when it came to the "subject of love between members of the same sex. While the press in English-speaking countries wrote of Oscar Wilde with horror and revulsion at the time of his trial and conviction in 1895, most Russian writers, . . . saw in his trial the persecution of a gifted man by the hypocritical British authorities" (Karlinsky, 1985, 152).

<sup>5</sup>These lines are taken from Ronald Hingley's book Nightingale Fever, Part 2, Chapter 7, "Rebel in Head and Womb."

<sup>6</sup>The legend has been adopted by many writers throughout the centuries. Goethe wrote a Rattenfängerlied which begins with "Ich bin der wohlbekannte Sänger, der vielgereiste Rattenfänger. . . ." (Hugo Wolf wrote the music for it). The old German songbook Des Knaben Wunderhorn contains a version of "The Pied Piper." A ballad was written by K. Simrock, an opera by Friedrich Hoffman (1879) and a rhymed story by Julius Wolff (1876).

<sup>7</sup>In Russian the word Tag would rhyme with the line above it, but in English translation this would be difficult to achieve.

Muž, nadevaj kolpak,--  
'Morgen ist auch ein Tag'

### CHAPTER III

#### RILKE AND RUSSIA

Rainer Maria Rilke became associated with Russia because of his relationship with a mature woman of high intellect and sensibilities. Lou Andreas-Salomé was the instigator who suggested a trip to Russia, her country of birth.<sup>1</sup> She was the daughter of a Russian General and a German woman, and had met Rilke because of an essay she had written in which Rilke took an interest. He wrote her a letter and thus began a love affair which later deepened into a life-long friendship.

The twenty-four year old Rilke's developing deep devotion to the thirty-six year old woman is expressed in a diary note, ". . . you took my soul into your arms and cradled it. . . ." (Leppmann, 79). Lou Andreas-Salomé influenced the poet emotionally, spiritually and intellectually. Rilke wrote many poems for her and kept a journal solely for their communication (Prater, 48). Many of the love poems he wrote to Lou Salomé were destroyed by mutual consent to prevent embarrassment to Professor Friedrich Carl Andreas, Salomé's husband.<sup>2</sup> Of those poems that survived, the most beautiful ones were incorporated in

the second section of the Stundenbuch upon Salomé's suggestion.

She was also instrumental in getting Rilke started with Russian language studies and acquainted him with the latest critical thought on Russian literature, and taught him a great deal about Russian history and culture (Brodsky, 1984, 18). Other preparations for the Russian journey continued and on April 25, 1899 Rilke, accompanied by Lou Andreas-Salomé and her husband, Professor Andreas, left Berlin and arrived in Russia at Easter time. When they reached Moscow, it was Maundy (Holy) Thursday according to the Orthodox calendar. The three of them took part in the Easter night celebrations at the Kremlin.

The poet was impressed by the ancient splendor of Orthodox religious traditions and the fervor and spirituality of the Russian people. Easter is the major holiday of the Russian Orthodox church. With its icons, hundreds of burning candles, and rich silver and gold ornamentation, the immense cathedral with its throngs of singing celebrants moved Rilke, evoking in him strong, lasting emotions. Even after five years, Rilke still remembered vividly that particular Russian experience;

Das war mein Ostern, und ich glaube es  
reicht für ein ganzes Leben aus; Die  
Botschaft ist mir in jener Moskauer Nacht  
seltsam gross geworden, ist mir ins Blut  
gegeben worden, und ins Herz. (Holthusen,  
38)

This initial impact on Rilke was to remain and influence his convictions, attitudes, and poetic creativity from then on. He wrote to Gräfin Franziska Reventlow in early May of 1899, from St. Petersburg,

Ich bin seit drei Wochen in Russland, habe die Osterglocken in Moskau gehört und empfinde den ersten Frühling aus dem Blinken der Birkenhaine und dem Rauschen der breiten Neva. Es ist ein tägliches seltsames Erleben unter diesem Volke voll Ehrfurcht und Frömmigkeit, und ich freue mich tief dieser neuen Erfahrung. (Rilke, 1931, 14)

Rilke even voiced a desire to settle in Russia in the fall of 1900 "because for him this country and its people stood directly under God" (Pachmuss, 392).

Although Rilke himself did not stay, he nevertheless formed a bond to everything that represented Russia to him.

. . . [Rilke] preferred to minimize Western influences in Russian culture while emphasizing native elements. His Russia was a vast country full of religious peasants, bound to the land by patience and tradition. Russia was a mystical and messianic force, an exotic contrast to the familiar, highly developed, and less spiritually oriented culture of the West. He demanded that Russian art be rooted in Russian history and myth, and that it must express national strivings and a deeply religious optimism, principles that were alien to his discussions of Western art. Finally, Russia was for him a place that was relatively unspoiled by progress, ambition and other failings which he considered to be peculiarly Western. (Brodsky, 1978, 412)

He particularly saw in the Russian people and their Orthodox religion an adherence to basic values that differed considerably from the solely materialistic orientation Germany and Western Europe had developed at the end of the 19th century. Rilke's disdain for the pursuit of materialistic achievements is stated in an argument against taking a banking position his father was offering,

. . . das aber heisst alles aufgeben, ein Ende machen, verzichten, in Verhältnisse zurückkehren, vor deren Nähe ich schon als Knabe angstvoll geflohen bin. Allein seelisch ist das eine solche Resignation, ein Frost, in dem alles sterben müsste. (Rilke, 1931, 142)

Rilke believed that materialism undermined spirituality and took away mystic qualities that existed in mankind.

Rilke was particularly drawn to the simple life style of the Russian peasant. He felt that the Russian people were "living in spiritual and warm brotherhood [and] did not idolize emancipated individuals, as . . . was done in the Western world" (Pachmuss, 393). The poet found a unique and naive simplicity in the Russian peasant void of the overly analytical thought processes characteristic of the positivist West European frame of mind. Accepting without challenge the patriarchal way of life, the Russian peasant and his "singing heart" impressed the German poet deeply;

Rilke was emotionally overpowered by the elemental and passionate devotion of the

patiently enduring Russian peasant, . . .  
his primitive frugality, and the  
simplicity of his needs. (Mandel, 33)

Yet, Rilke's image of Russia and her people was heavily idealized since he saw Russia in emotional and poetic terms, often losing sight of the manifestation of concrete, everyday life.

The supposed spirituality of the Russian people is a result of a combination of ancient religious traditions and a heartfelt closeness to nature and the earth. Centuries of servitude kept them poor and ignorant about technology and the world of business which flourished in the West. "The landowners treated them without any ceremonies: in poor years many of them drove their serfs out to beg" (Kornilov, 176). Their only hope was a better tomorrow which their Orthodox faith promised them.

Until 1861 the Russian peasant was a feudal serf;

But even after the liquidation of bondage . . . their allotments were equal approximately to one half of the amount of their earning capacity, for in the best cases they received only that land which they possessed under bondage and which required only three days of work in a week. . . . In order to utilize their labor power, the peasants had either to rent the other half of the land from the landowner, or to hire themselves to the landowner, or to look for some side work which would enable them to pay the taxes . . . and to buy such necessities as their own property could not supply them with. With the growing density of the population the dearth of land was felt more and more, rent rose higher and

higher, and the peasant grew poorer and poorer. (Kornilov, 259)

When the tight rules of dogmatic Christianity were loosened in Western Europe during the time of the Renaissance and the Reformation, the Russians were still fighting the Mongols. In addition, the Russian Orthodox church rejected the sixteenth century Reformation movement and, therefore, took a completely different course from the religious development in central and Western Europe.

The result of the above historical occurrences is deep religiosity among simple people rooted in their sense of tradition. To adhere to established values, the Russian people have endured severe hardships throughout history. Emigres from Russia have often returned because they could not live without these traditional values which sustained generations before them. Life away from their homeland resulted in a feeling of being lost and uprooted.

Rilke himself had similar experiences in Paris. Although his yearning was not for Germany, his feeling of being lost and alienated in the large city was more related to a general feeling of not having a home anywhere in the world. His autobiographical narrator expresses it clearly in Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge. Therefore, Rilke could well identify with what is often called the "Russian Soul." Many a Russian's suffering when forced to abandon his homeland is evidenced in the Russian emigre

literature of the 1920's. Malte Laurids Brigge suffered the isolation and alienation as a result of being away from his childhood home, from family, and his native Denmark. In the large city his sense of tradition was to haunt him rather than support and comfort him.

Similarly, Rilke felt this alienation from a materialistic world and was, therefore, attracted by Russia, and particularly by its rural inhabitants who seemed to live contentedly without the trappings and problems of the industrialized society of Western Europe. Rilke saw the Western world as made up of decaying, industrialized societies in which people were alienated from each other. This Malte Laurids Brigge expresses when,

he enters in his notebook, 'Ich sitze hier in meiner kleinen Stube, ich, Brigge, der achtundzwanzig Jahre alt geworden ist und von dem niemand weiss. Ich sitze hier und bin nichts.' He is, thus, merely a 'nothing,' and the world around him assumes a revolting and sinister reflection of his inner self. Objects become animated and even endanger his existence. 'Elektrische Bahnen rasen läutend durch meine Stube. Automobile gehen über mich hin. Eine Tür fällt zu. Irgendwo klirrt eine Scheibe herunter, ich höre ihre grossen Scherben lachen, ihre kleinen Splitter kichern. (Pachmuss, 396)

A remarkable similarity can be discerned between Dostoevski's principal figure, Raskolnikov, in Crime and Punishment and Rilke's Malte Laurids Brigge. To counteract these neuroses and modern alienation, both writers agree

that "an individual sensation of totality" is necessary (Pachmuss, 396). To achieve the needed inner harmony, Dostoevski believes that "man can partake of the harmonious totality of all when he returns to the Russian soil, and through it, to the Russian belief in God" (Pachmuss, 396). Rilke wholeheartedly endorsed this concept and although his poetic impulses differed considerably from those of the Russian writer, "the influence of Dostoevskii's ideas and narrative technique is evident" in Rilke's prose works (Pachmuss, 400).

Tolstoy also had an impact on Rilke. Rilke met the Russian writer twice, first in Moscow and a year later on Tolstoy's country estate, Iasnaia Poliana. Rilke was greatly taken with the "Eternal Russian," as he named Tolstoy. It can be assumed that on their first visit the German poet's understanding of the Russian language was limited, and Rilke, therefore, profited little from the conversation.<sup>3</sup>

Their second encounter was somewhat ill-fated since Lou Salomé and Rilke apparently arrived at Tolstoy's estate unannounced and were extended very little traditional Russian hospitality. They took a long walk, however, with Tolstoy, about which Rilke wrote, as follows,

We slowly walked along the close-grown paths engaged in an easily flowing conversation which the Count directed, as he had done at our first meeting, with warmth and animation. He spoke in

Russian, and when the wind was not drowning out his words I understood every syllable. He kept his left hand thrust into his belt beneath his woolen jacket. His right rested on the crook of his cane, but he did not lean on it heavily, and from time to time he would bend down to pick some weed as though hoping to capture the flower together with the fragrance surrounding it. He would then drink in its perfume out of his open hand, talking all the while, before letting the empty blossom fall unheeded into the lushness of the wild spring, which was no poorer for the loss of it . . . .(Leppmann, 110)

Tolstoy shared Rilke's rejection of bourgeois values and a love for the Russian peasant. Yet Tolstoy's devotion to the muzhik was based less on illusion. He saw the situation and typical features of the Russian peasant more realistically than Rilke. The explosive conditions that already existed at the time of Rilke's Russian journeys could easily be ignored by the poet who was more concerned with his emotional experience and with Russia's past rather than her future. Rilke's image of Russia was made up of many separate illusions and perceptions resembling a mosaic of many shapes and colors that "created for [the poet] a distinctly personal concept of Russia" (Leppmann, 106).

This concept was further influenced and enhanced by Rilke's second Russian journey, during which he and Lou Salomé did not stay in the large Northern cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg but rather traveled south to Kiev;

[Rilke] visited the damp, dark underground catacombs in Kiev, saw the immense landscape of the steppes and breathed the breath of the gigantic land, which seemed so familiar and yet so darkly mysterious, so near yet so unattainable. (Kopelev, 116)

Both travelers experienced the ancient monasteries and spent time in museums and cathedrals. Then from Kiev, they journeyed up the Volga, most Russian of all Russian rivers, and went ashore at the site of a Russian village where the peasant poet Spiridon Droshin lived. Rilke had translated two of Droshin's poems. These were published in Prague and, as a result, Rilke was invited to visit Droshin. Gratefully acknowledging the invitation, Rilke wrote about the event,

We have taken a great step toward the heart of Russia to whose pulse we have been listening for a long time now in the belief that it will provide the right beat for our lives, too. (Leppmann, 114)

Living idyllically in Droshin's own log cabin, Rilke and Lou Salomé took barefoot, early morning walks in the dewy meadows along the shores of the Volga, met the local villagers and soaked up the atmosphere (Leppmann, 114). This episode contributed much to Rilke's feeling at home in the company of the Russian peasant. He expressed his sentiments years later in a letter to Lou Salomé, "dass Russland meine Heimat ist, . . . gehört zu jenen grossen und geheimnisvollen Sicherheiten, aus denen ich lebe" (Holthusen, 42).

Rilke's emphatic concern with the Russian peasant, his religion, and his tradition is given expression in his collection of poems, Das Stundenbuch. The first part, Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben contains many poems in which an abstract divine figure is addressed. This God is talked to, "Wenn ich dich male, Gott, du merkst es kaum . . ." and perceived, "Ich fühle dich. An meiner Sinne Saum beginnst du zögernd, wie mit vielen Inseln, und deinen Augen, welche niemals blinselfn, bin ich der Raum" (Rilke, 1982, I, 19). He is also asked, "Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?" (Rilke, 1982, I, 31), and even admired, "Du bist der Tiefste . . ., der Taucher und der Türme Neid" (Rilke, 1982, I, 39). Rilke scholars have interpreted these poems as an expression of an aesthetic substitute religion (Rilke, 1982, I, XII)<sup>4</sup> or ". . . a metaphoric statement which unites two of Rilke's major concerns: the nature of the creative process and the nature of God" (Brodsky, 1984, 59). But at the same time it is difficult to overlook the highly personal nature of the poem cycle. An early biographer (Mövius, 1947)<sup>5</sup> observed that "Rilke vertieft sich so ganz in diesen Mönch, dass er sich schliesslich in ihn verwandelt" (Rothe, 149).

Why did Rilke choose the persona of a young Russian monk? It seems plausible that he would select a young monk because this person could represent,

Rilke's sense of his own apprenticeship and [search] for the God who he felt was only just coming into being. Russian because it was on this trip, in the immense open spaces of the Russian countryside and in the bell-ringing churches of old Moscow, that Rilke first discovered a landscape which he felt corresponded to the size and terror and hushed stillnesses of his own inner life. (Rilke, 1982, Poetry, XVII)

Rilke was still quite young at the time of the Russian journey and more impressionable perhaps than an older man would have been. Since it is well documented that Rilke enthusiastically endorsed the religious expression of the Russian people, a search for a personal God might well have been incorporated in the musings of the young monk who speaks for Rilke. The poems of Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben, which were first called Gebete, can be seen as having autobiographical elements. These demonstrate appropriately the concerns of "the protagonist, who is at once poet, icon painter, devout monk, and doubting wanderer" (Brodsky, 1984, 59).

Rilke was indeed a doubting wanderer all of his life; he never lived anywhere for too long.<sup>6</sup> Rilke studied Icon painting, this unique Russian art form, in preparation for his second Russian journey. Orthodox religion and the icon are inseparable;

The icon is an integral part of all Byzantine Rite churches. These sacred paintings of the Blessed Mother, Christ, the evangelists, angels and saints of the

church came to prominence under Justinian, ruler of the early Byzantine empire. The figures assumed proportions differing from those in western art: the figures were extraordinarily tall and slim with tiny feet, small almond-shaped faces and huge staring eyes. There was no hint of movement or interaction in the solemn frontal images. The faces were differentiated somewhat but had a certain sameness--the dark eyes, the curved brows, small mouths, and long narrow, aquiline noses. Because there were many miracles and much mystery associated with these paintings, the church set up strict formal rules or rubrics for their production. For this reason this is the only art form that has not changed through the centuries. (Sherbine, 20)

Rilke was fascinated with the signs of devotion the Russian people showed to icons. He felt that prayer and icon were equally important and declared that the icon was "the quintessential expression" of that country's traditional art (Brodsky, 1978, 412). Rilke took on a strong Slavophile direction during and after his Russian journeys.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it was not astonishing that he moved toward spiritual identification with the traditions of Russian art and Russian Orthodox religion.

In Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben<sup>8</sup> the monk who paints, expresses Rilke's view of Russian art, especially in the difference between Russian iconography and Italian Renaissance painting. While the monk paints in the customary Eastern style, he is nevertheless aware of other styles of painting which are considerably different,

'Doch manchmal sah ich Bücher mit  
Geschichten Madonnen, die die Abendländer  
dichten, und schlanke Bilder ihres  
Kirchenbaus; nun bin ich nicht gelehrt  
genug, daraus aus ihrer Sehnsucht Sinn  
und Ziel zu schliessen, aber vor einem,  
den sie Göttlich hiessen (und ein  
Erzengel heisst wie er) da fiel mir ein,  
dass jene Gott geniessen wie einen  
Festtag, einen Sommer, der  
vorüberfliesst, wie alle Dinge fliessen.'  
(Rothe, 150)

For the monk Apostol, a persona for Rilke, Western artists view their God in a frivolous and wasteful manner, lightly, casually, and "like a holiday that is fleeting and insubstantial" (Brodsky, 1984, 67). In his essay Russische Kunst Rilke, likewise, wrote,

'Ein grosses Vergeuden ist der Sinn  
unseres westlichen Lebens, während im  
flachen Nachbarlande alle Kräfte sich  
aufzusparen scheinen für irgend einen  
Beginn, der noch nicht ist, gerade als  
sollten dort einmal die Kornkammern sein,  
wenn die anderen, in wachsender  
Verschwendung verarmten Völker mit  
hungernden Herzen ihre Heimat verlassen.'  
(Rothe, 151, V, 494)

Rilke suggests there is an earthbound strength in the Russian people, and in the connection between art and God which is far more healthy and productive than the wastefulness of Western art, culture, and society. Rilke also considers the Western influence on the Russian artist as a danger which will form a gulf between the artist's work and the people" (Rothe, 153). When the monk in the previous lines appears to have little true veneration für die Kunst des Abendlandes, he exposes Rilke's belief that

Western art was executed and used in a manner that removed it from the people. He felt that although artistic and material values in Western art may have been substantial, they became empty and hollow because they had lost their true purpose: to relate the religious message to the common believer and to inspire him. Rilke wrote in his essay, Russische Kunst,

'Atemlos kam die Renaissance auf den Gipfeln ihrer Entwicklung an, verstiegen in den steilen Einsamkeiten ihrer Ziele, wie jener Kaiser auf der Martinswand, den nur ein Engel wieder zurück zum Volke führen kann. Der Renaissance kam kein solcher Engel. Mühsam schmiedet die Zeit noch an einem Geschlecht, welches Zeitgenosse jener ungeheueren Werke werden soll, die eine halb hoffnungslose, half übermütige Kraft aufgetürmt hat an den Grenzen des Lebens.' (Rothe, 152, V, 496)

Thus, Rilke sees the artistic accomplishments of the Renaissance as residing in the lofty heights of abstract ethereal existence while Russian art has been able to stay concretely in touch with the people and give them the desired inspiration. In an effort to show the difference in the styles of artistic expression of the West and the East, the monk, who speaks on the writer's behalf, declares,

'Denn sagt mir, Vater, was sie auch erreichen in ihrer Kunst und klugen Wissenschaft, es ist nicht Gott, es ist nicht Seinesgleichen, es ist nur Frucht. Er aber ist die Kraft. Nun ist die Frucht ja von der Kraft das Zeichen, und alle Schönheit, welche einer schafft bedeutet Ewigkeiten, die entweichen, vor dem Verrat, der sie zusammenrafft. Gott

flüchtet sich vor allem Dargestellten,  
 das in der Zeit sich seine Farben fand,  
 in allen Bildern bleibt nur das Gewand,  
 mit dem die Ungeduldigen ihn umhellen;  
 Gott dunkelt hinter seinen Welten, und  
 einsam irrt des Malers Hand.' (Rothe,  
 152, III. 363)

Much has been written about Rilke's beliefs or the absence of these. Rilke's concept of God may have been personal or solely rooted in the creative instincts of the poet. But Rilke considered the "Russian God" as quite a different entity from the God image of Western Christianity. In Russia,

God is vague and unpretentious, a deity still evolving and residing mainly in peasants and beggars, in children, animals, and objects: in everything as yet unafflicted by the schism of consciousness, the disintegration into self and world. His realm encompasses all that is naive and non-analytical, all that is at home in nature and willingly subject to its laws--especially the law of humility, a kind of gravity of the soul that causes all things to plunge into God as into the center of creation. He is a God of instinct and feeling, as it were, not of the intellect, and least of all, of theology. (Leppmann, 112)

Thus, a distinctly different God emerges who fits well into the concept of traditional Orthodox faith practiced for centuries without foreign influence in Russia. Rilke's monk in his letter to the Metropolitan stresses the destiny of his people from the time of the coming of the Mongols, when he says,

'und alles Schicksal, das uns seither  
 bückte, verpflichtete uns zur  
 Verschwiegenheit. Wir waren niemals ganz  
 in einer Zeit. Wir blieben immer  
 irgendwo, in Massen die breiter sind.  
 Wir sassen und viele Völker standen auf  
 den Zehen, um in das immer Künftige zu  
 sehen. Wir haben immer eine Gegenwart,  
 der wir gehören. Manchmal war sie hart,  
 aber wir wollten dennoch nicht uns  
 flüchten und blieben stehen, so schienen  
 wir erstarrt. Wir glänzten nie von  
 Seligkeit und Süchten und die Antike  
 wurde bei uns welk, aber wir dauerten wie  
 ein Gebälk . . .' (Rothe, 156, III,  
 364-5)

Stressing the isolation and distinct difference of the Orthodox faith, the monk points, nevertheless, to the durability of the Russian religion. It is a historical fact that there were numerous attempts to unite Rome and the Orthodox church until the fifteenth century, but after Constantinople had fallen to Mohammed II in 1453, Moscow inherited the legacy of the Orthodox metropolis and from then on remained the center of Russian Orthodox religion (Rothe, 155).

Rilke had studied Russian history and folklore during the interval between his two trips to Russia. The country's past was of greater interest to him and he idealized its ancient traditions rather than seeing turn-of-the-century Russia with its numerous social and political problems. It was natural, therefore, that the topics Rilke chose to write about when he wanted to recreate his Russia would focus on historical or

folkloristic themes. The prose cycle Geschichten vom lieben Gott contains a story called Wie der Verrat nach Russland kam (Rilke, 1982, III, 71).

This brief story is built around an anecdote which an unnamed frame narrator, who has just returned from Russia, relates to a young, wheelchair-bound neighbor. Both talk about "such subjects as the vastness of Russia, the piety and humility of its people, and the topography of that country, which borders above and below on a nation called 'God'" (Brodsky, 1979, 72). When the lame neighbor asks, "Ist denn Gott ein Land?" he receives the answer from his traveller friend,

Ich glaube nicht, . . . aber in den primitiven Sprachen haben viele Dinge denselben Namen. . Es ist da wohl ein Reich das heisst Gott, und der es beherrscht heisst auch Gott. Einfache Völker können ihr Land und ihren Kaiser oft nicht unterscheiden; beide sind gross und gütig, furchtbar und gross. (Rilke, 1982, III, 72)

Rilke's explanation has the quality of a fairytale in its simplicity and in the manner in which he defines peoples' attitudes toward God and country. His last argument reveals his feelings about Russia when the narrator in his story elaborates,

Man merkt . . . [diese Nachbarschaft] bei allen Gelegenheiten. Der Einfluss Gottes ist sehr mächtig. Wieviel man auch aus Europa bringen mag, die Dinge aus dem Westen sind Steine, sobald sie über die Grenze sind. (Rilke, 1982, III, 72)

Clearly, Rilke disdains the products of Western culture and sees little value in them. In fact, he goes as far as claiming that these imports from the West lose their lifelike, artistic qualities and become as inanimate as stones.

Regarding the god-like status of the Russian tsar, Rilke points again to the distinction between East and West;

Man spricht zu den Zaren ähnlich wie zu  
Gott . . . man nennt beide Väterchen . . .  
und wirft sich vor beiden nieder, fühlt  
mit der Stirn den Boden und weint und  
sagt: 'Ich bin sündig, verzeih mir  
Väterchen.' Die Deutschen, welche das  
sehen, behaupten: eine ganz unwürdige  
Sklaverei. Ich denke anders darüber.  
Was soll das Knien bedeuten? Es hat den  
Sinn zu erklären: Ich habe Ehrfurcht.  
(Rilke, 1982, III, 73)

Before the narrator proceeds to the actual account of the story of Tsar Ivan's treachery, he almost frightens his listener with the assertion,

in Russland kommt auch vieles andere von  
Gott. Man hat das Gefühl, jedes Neue  
wird von ihm eingeführt, jedes Kleid,  
jede Speise, jede Tugend und sogar jede  
Sünde muss erst von ihm bewilligt werden,  
ehe sie in Gebrauch kommt. (Rilke, 1982,  
III, 73-4)

These remarks lead to the story Wie der Verrat nach  
Russland kam. This anecdote goes back to the historical  
song of Ivan the Terrible. There are two prose renditions;  
one comes from a collection of folk literature published by  
a prominent ethnographer. The other story is condensed

but from the same source, and both had been read by Rilke (Brodsky, 1979, 72).

On an overland journey Tsar Ivan meets an old, bearded peasant who is building a church and who offers the long sought answers to three riddles to the Tsar. Happily the ruler insists on giving the man a reward. Reluctantly the peasant agrees. "Nun Väterchen, wenn du befiehlst, gib mir eine von den zwölf Tonnen Goldes, welche du von den Fürsten im Orient erhalten wirst" (Rilke, 1982, III, 76). The peasant knew where the Tsar was going. He also knew later when his reward, the barrel of gold arrived, that the tsar had filled it three-fourths full of sand and had left only a thin layer of gold. The old, wise man returned the barrel to the tsar with this message,

Ich brauche sie nicht. Sage deinem Herrn, bisher hat es keinen Verrat in Russland gegeben. Er aber ist selbst daran schuld, wenn er bemerken sollte, dass er sich auf keinen Menschen verlassen kann; denn er hat nunmehr gezeigt, wie man verrät, und von Jahrhundert zu Jahrhundert wird sein Beispiel in ganz Russland viele Nachahmer finden. Ich brauche nicht das Gold, ich kann ohne Gold leben. Ich erwartete nicht Gold von ihm, sondern Wahrheit und Rechtlichkeit. Er aber hat mich getäuscht. Sage das deinem Herrn, dem schrecklichen Zaren Ivan Wassiljewitsch, der in seiner weissen Stadt Moskau sitzt mit seinem bösen Gewissen und in einem goldenen Kleid. (Rilke, 1982, III, 77)

The tsar's messenger is shocked to find the place where the old peasant had been busy building a church deserted

without a trace of either man or building. The messenger's reaction to all this was that "der vermeintliche Bauer niemand anders gewesen sei, als Gott selbst" (Rilke, 1982, III, 77).

By identifying God "with a Russian peasant, a figure rooted in the land," (Brodsky, 1979, 76) the Russian peasant is presented as having a particular connection to his God and his religion. "The peasant God is saddened by the tsar's deception but he also accepts it with all its ramification for the future" (Brodsky, 1979, 76). This story clearly reveals Rilke's fascination with Russian folktales. Rilke found the interconnection between Russian myth, legend, and folktale so stimulating that he proceeded to translate the Russian epic The Lay of Igor's Raid into German.

In March of 1904 Rilke mentioned to his friend Lou Salomé that "Slovo ist fertig übersetzt" (Emerson, 220). The Lay of Igor's Raid "ist das einzige erhaltene Denkmal altrussischer Heldenepik: eine Dichtung hohen Ranges" (Laaths, 130). It is obvious, why Rilke wanted to translate this piece of Russian literature.<sup>9</sup>

Since Rilke romanticized his Russian experiences, "mir ist ja Russland doch . . . Heimat und Himmel geworden" (Rilke, 1931, 52), it becomes clear that the task of translating the Igor Tale proved to be a true inspiration for the poet. The main impulses in Slovo are not of a

political nature but rather focus on animals and landscape. "The falcons, cuckoos, ravens, eagles and wolves which inhabit its steppes are untamed equivalents of the dogs, panthers and gazelles which function so prominently in Rilke's later poetry" (Emerson, 222). Rilke translates, "Da hört man die Stimme der Jaroslawnas. Einem einsamen Kuckuck gleich klagt sie seit Morgengraun" (Emerson, 231). Thus, Rilke proves his lyric ability, and how well he could immerse himself into the subject matter of this ancient Russian heroic epic.

"Die Klagen Jaroslawnas, der Gattin Igors [werden allgemein als] der höchste Aufschwung des Liedes [betrachtet]" (Laaths, 131). Rilke found these laments equally beautiful. Igor's wife addresses "wind, water, and sun to protect her husband from harm. . . . Jaroslawnas Lament is but the final and greatest of the female laments which permeate the Slovo" (Emerson, 226). Although in the end the defeated Igor is united with his Jaroslawnas, a sense of tragedy remains. This can be seen as somewhat of a parallel to Rilke's Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke. The Cornet dies--this is different since Igor survives--but when the Cornet is "speeding to his death with the tardy banner and Igor is madly pursuing his retreating troupes into Polovtsian captivity" (Emerson, 223), we see a similarity of purpose. Both, Igor and Cornet Rilke can be seen as the hero who is

well-intentioned but nevertheless "a confused victim, a man with a sense of duty but overwhelmed by events. His is a battle story that is two-thirds lament and reminiscence" (Emerson, 223).

Clearly, Rilke's interest in Russian folklore and ancient Russian legends stemmed from a desire to create an alternative reality which he fashioned for himself from the fabric of the idealized past of an idealized culture. The Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva was similarly attracted to Germany's history and civilization which she cherished in order to mold a poet's reality for herself. Like Tsvetaeva, who did not wish to acquire too realistic an image of Germany, Rilke, too, chose not to see the real Russia of unrest and poverty. Although they never met, both poets were involved in a spiritual kinship which was validated at the end of Rilke's life through their correspondence. To Rilke the Russian poetess was an exotic figure because of her origins and attitudes while Rilke represented poetic universality to Tsvetaeva.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Lou was born into a German-speaking family of Huguenots in St. Petersburg in 1861. Her father was a general in the Tsarist army, and she spent her childhood in the upper reaches of Russian society. Thus her knowledge of Russia was shaped by her class origins and the strong Germanic element in her family. . . . From her earliest days, her outstanding characteristics were an independent spirit, a passion for knowledge, and an almost total disregard for convention" (Brodsky, 1984, 18).

<sup>2</sup>The relationship Lou Andreas-Salomé maintained during a 43-year marriage was rather unconventional. Her husband had actually blackmailed her into marrying him by stabbing himself. Allegedly the marriage was never consummated and Salome had a succession of young lovers, Rilke being one of them (Leppmann, 74-75).

<sup>3</sup>Count Tolstoy was at this time "in his early seventies, and over tea, he engaged Lou and her husband in a lively conversation. . . . Rilke was by far the youngest of the group and at that time barely capable of following a conversation in Russian. Most likely he only listened during this first meeting with the Count, as he persisted in calling his host in letters to German friends-- as though Tolstoy's title (which the bearer himself considered a burden) was the most significant thing about him" (Leppmann, 108).

<sup>4</sup>Translated by Heidi Goebel.

<sup>5</sup>Ruth Mövius' study R.M. Rilkes Stundenbuch was written at a time when manuscript "A" was still in the personal possession of Lou Andreas-Salomé, who allowed Mövius to make use of it. . . . There are great differences between manuscript "A" and the later manuscripts "B" and "C" on which the published version of the Stundenbuch is based. Yet that fact remained unknown until 1936. This information was not available for the non-specialized reader until 1963 when the original version of Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben appeared in volume III of R.M. Rilke - Sämtliche Werke. It differs from the later versions in three ways: first, it contains many prose inserts which greatly facilitate the reading of the poems. Second, manuscript "A" also differs from later versions in that it contains poems omitted in the published version of Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben. Third, it contains a long letter written by the monk to the Metropolitan which provides a wealth of information very important to the understanding of the whole cycle of poems. This letter is

also missing in the later versions of Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben (Rothe, 147-8).

6 Rilke traveled extensively all across Germany, France Italy, and Switzerland. But the last years of his life were spent in the small chalet Muzot in Switzerland. Holthusen says of Rilke's last abode, "Weltweiter Ruhm hat sich seither um jenen schlichten Walliser Turmblock Muzot gebildet, er ist heute das Herzstück der Lebensmythe, die unter dem Namen Rilke verbreitet ist" (Holthusen, 149).

7 The German poet was of Slavic extraction himself. He was born in Prague in 1875. Therefore, it was not difficult for Rilke to arrive at identification with another slavic tradition.

8 In 1963 the original version of Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben was published in volume II of R.M. Rilke's Sämtliche Werke. This version contains "many prose inserts which greatly facilitate the reading of the poems" (Rothe, 147). There are also more poems which later publications left out.

9 "The Slovo exists only in reconstructed texts. The anonymous original manuscript--or rather, a 14th or 15th century copy of the original--was evidently acquired by Count Musin-Pushkin in 1791 from the Archimandrite of Spaso-Yaroslavsky Monastery. It was a mass of 2850 fused, often abbreviated words in Old Russian with Slavonic admixtures. A copy was made, with apparently arbitrary word divisions and completions, in 1797, and this text was published in Moscow in 1800. The original perished in the great Moscow fire of 1812, and this text--supplemented by a handwritten copy made for the Empress Catherine and discovered half a century later--were all that survived. To this day scholars dispute certain passages . . . and dozens of competing versions in contemporary Russian now exist (Emerson, 220). Rilke could not translate from a single authentic version of the Slovo but rather a conglomerate of texts. Was he qualified to translate this epic poem? He had studied Russian concentratedly before his first Russian journey and again, along with Lou Andreas Salomé, "had plunged once more into the study of Russian culture [and language]" (Brodsky, 1984, 17) upon their return from Russia. In fact, Rilke and Lou worked and studied so hard that their host, "Frieda von Bülow, complained, that she rarely saw her guests and that, when she did, they were too exhausted to keep up a conversation" (Brodsky, 1984, 17). This was during the summer of 1899 when another Russian trip was planned and later executed.

But it was not until 1902 that Rilke undertook the translation of The Lay of Igor's Raid, which he called 'Aus den Übersetzungen des Igor-Liedes'. Thus he "consciously acknowledged his debt to [the] multiplicity of translations

. . . [and], in this light the precise status of Rilke's Russian seems less significant" (Emerson, 221). Accuracy and a broad and thorough knowledge of the language should only be weighed heavily were we to ignore Rilke's poetic sensibilities and his acknowledged capacity to "enter into the spirit of a work, [and to] mould the German language [in order] to render a version which makes us virtually oblivious of the intermediators . . ." (Emerson, 221). It is not known how Rilke approached the translation of the Slovo but he claimed "a mystical affinity for the sounds of Russian speech" (Emerson, 221). This is certainly believable since his innate feeling for expression in his own language (and French also) was astounding. A historical event provided the material for the epic,

Im Jahre 1185 scheiterte ein Feldzug des Fürsten Igor von Kiev gegen die Polowzer. Schon zwei Jahre später formte ein unbekannter Autor daraus seine an Umfang schmale, an poetischer Gewalt grossartige Verserzählung. Gleich dem Inhalt des altfranzösischen Rolandliedes wurde also ein politisch-nationales Unheil zum schöpferischen Anlass. . . . Die volkstümliche Darstellungsart hat sich, wie das Epos zeigt, in eine kunsthafte, ja stilisierte Form verwandelt: die Sprache ist mit reichen Metaphern beladen. . . . Man kann zum Vergleich die Balladen der Edda heranziehen, die ja auch einen hoch-, wenn nicht überkultivierten Stil der übertragenen Ausdrucksweise pflegen. Und dennoch ging, wie hier, so bei dem russischen Klein-epos, der volkhafte Gehalt nicht verloren; er fand vielmehr eine vollendete dichterische Gestalt (Laaths, 131).

Set in the twelfth century, the Igor Tale was initially considered a pre-Christian work, but it evolved into "a document of dvoeverie (dual faith)" (Emerson, 222). It is not akin to the classic Greek epics of the Iliad and The Odyssey but can more easily be compared to the medieval epics of Western Europe.

However, many pagan deities are invoked in the Slovo, but there is no specific Russian God of war, and nowhere is there any killing for the joy of it. The tragic effect of the Slovo is achieved not by a struggling and doomed hero (A Roland or a Siegfried) but by the general suffering and humiliation of the Russian land, whose grasses droop with sorrow (Emerson 222).

CHAPTER IV  
RILKE'S AND TSVETAEVA'S RELATIONSHIP

Marina Tsvetaeva's correspondence with Rainer Maria Rilke became a milestone in her life. Although the two of them never met, their letters to each other influenced both creatively. For Tsvetaeva, the impact of the correspondence did not cease with Rilke's death on December 29th, 1926. Tsvetaeva wrote the long poem "New Year's" as a memorial to Rilke late in February 1927. She was not aware that Rilke had already been gravely ill with leukemia at the time he wrote his first letter to her in May, 1926.

Rilke was important to Tsvetaeva because she knew and loved his poetry, and as a correspondent he would become a considerable poetic force to which Tsvetaeva could relate and respond. The often self-imposed isolation a poet experiences, was thus bridged by their written exchanges.

The two writers--the young woman frustrated by overwork, loneliness and public hostility, and the sick man, increasingly frightened by his own physical deterioration--found in one another great depths of understanding and similarities of vision. (Brodsky, 1983, 389)

Their letters formed a poetic dialogue which was interspersed with personal revelations written in the short time span from May through early November 1926 (Rakusa-Ingold, 146).

Tsvetaeva had seen to it that her letters to Rilke were locked up for a period of fifty years after his death. They were kept in the Rilke Archives of the Landesbibliothek in Bern, and, consequently, were unavailable for study until 1976-77 (Hasty, VI). The seven letters Rilke wrote to Tsvetaeva were for a long time thought to be lost. They were found in the Boris Pasternak Archive in Moscow in 1977 (Brodsky, 1983, 261).

Boris Pasternak played an important part in the correspondence between Rilke and Tsvetaeva. He was closely associated with Tsvetaeva because of their similar background and poetic interests; both depended on each others' evaluation, and Tsvetaeva stated in her letters to Pasternak how much she loved him.<sup>1</sup> Then, in the spring of 1926, Pasternak became the instigator who initiated the exchange of letters between Rilke and Tsvetaeva.<sup>2</sup> In a long and explicit letter, Pasternak expressed his admiration of Rilke and his gratefulness for the poet's support and esteem. He also asked Rilke to send a poetry collection such as the Duineser Elegien with a note of dedication to a friend, a poetess, by the name of Marina Tsvetaeva (Barnes, 70). Rilke almost instantly responded and mailed the

Elegien as well as Sonette an Orpheus to Tsvetaeva along with a brief letter to be sent on to Pasternak (Barnes, 71).

Thus began the correspondence between Rilke and Tsvetaeva;

Nie erreichte die Freundschaft mit Rilke eine Exklusivität, aus der Pasternak ausgeschlossen gewesen wäre--er nahm als der rechtmässige Eingeweihte an allen Peripetien dieser kurzen Beziehung teil. (Rakusa-Ingold, 128)

In her first letter to Rilke Tsvetaeva explained that she went to Prague because of the Bolshevik Revolution, and,

your books went with me. In Prague I read for the first time the Early Poems. Thus did Prague become dear to me--on the first day--because of your having been a student there. (Pasternak, 83)

In the same letter, Tsvetaeva alludes to the fact that her three year old daughter Ariadna was already accustomed to having Rilke read to her.<sup>3</sup> Tsvetaeva was thoroughly familiar with Rilke's works, and, as we know from her own statements, was totally devoted to the German poet;

For Tsvetaeva, Rilke was a poet of the first order, an artist creating things immortal. In her first words to Rilke she hastened to distinguish him from the contemporary world she hated ('your name does not rhyme with our time--stems from earlier or later--has always been'). (Pasternak, 25)

Both poets shared an inner direction which recreated a special world for them. Tsvetaeva's infatuation with her self-created romantic image of Germany, which she did

not relinquish until Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia, made it easy for her to idolize a poet like Rilke who had also nurtured throughout his life the idealized image of a country--Russia.

Dass Rilke für die Cvetaeva zu einer zentralen Erfahrung werden konnte, dürfte damit zusammenhängen, dass er--in psychologischen Termini gesprochen--ein ideales, weil durch zahlreiche Affinitäten prädisponiertes Objekt für Projektionen darstellte. Rilke war nicht nur der bewunderte und von Cvetaeva intuitiv erfasste Dichter der 'Duineser Elegien,' der 'Sonette des Orpheus'-- Rilke war auch der Deutsche, der sich zum Russischen hingezogen fühlte, so wie die Cvetaeva sich als Russin dem 'Germanischen' verpflichtet wusste. (Rakusa-Ingold, 139-40)

From the beginning of the correspondence, Tsvetaeva found strong expressions for the admiration and the enthusiasm she felt for Rilke. He was to her "the embodiment of poetry, its source, its creation--the beginning and the end in . . . [her] near deification of him" (Hasty, 23). Tsvetaeva told Rilke in her first letter just how much he meant to her.

Sie sind nicht mein liebster Dichter ('liebster'--Stufe), Sie sind eine Naturerscheinung . . . oder (noch zu wenig!) das verkörperte fünfte Element: die Dichtung selbst, oder (noch zu wenig) das, woraus die Dichtung entsteht und das grösser ist als sie (Sie). (Hasty, 23)

When Tsvetaeva addressed Rilke as Naturerscheinung or even das verkörperte fünfte Element, it becomes obvious that she possessed not only an astonishing mastery of the

German language but that she was also capable of sublime poetic expression. Nine handwritten letters were preserved all of which were in German with infrequent Russian explanations in order to facilitate Rilke's understanding of her poetry (Rakusa-Ingold, 146).

Tsvetaeva began her first letter addressing Rilke in the formal German Sie Anrede, but by the time she finished the rather extensive epistle, she had moved to the informal Du Anrede. Consequently, a quick move on the part of Tsvetaeva to reach and influence the admired German poet is apparent,

Bereits die Annäherung an Rilke, im ersten Brief vom 9. Mai 1926, verrät Deziertheit und den Versuch, den Partner 'in den Griff' zu bekommen.  
 .(Rakusa-Ingold, 134)

There is a paradoxical side to Tsvetaeva which is evidenced by her desire, on the one hand, to enter into a close and intimately creative relationship with Rilke but, on the other hand, she wishes to remain distant and safe. When she explains in her first letter to Rilke that she refrained from seeking him out in Paris after she moved there in 1925, Tsvetaeva reveals two personality traits typical for her. One, she had a strong sense of her own identity, which she guarded jealously and, two, she was afraid of physical actuality. Thus, she had so far consciously and unconsciously avoided the chance to meet Rilke. Coming face to face with him could have taken away

from the ideal and highly intimate relationship that was now evolving. She knew his poetry and had built an image of him; but had he met her in Paris, she would have been a stranger to him, and her poetic existence initially might not have influenced him favorably (Hasty, 26). Tsvetaeva is admiring and at the same time honest, and bares her true feelings when she poses the question and then answers in the letter,

Warum ich nicht zu Ihnen kann? Weil Sie  
 mein Liebstes sind--in der ganzen Welt.  
 Ganz einfach. Und--weil Sie mich nicht  
 kennen. Aus leidendem Stolz, aus  
 Ehrfurcht vor dem Zufall (Schicksal,  
 eins). Aus--Feigheit, vielleicht, um  
 nicht Ihren fremden Blick bestehen zu  
 müssen--auf der Türschwelle ihres  
 Zimmers. (Rakusa-Ingold, 149)

Yet, in the same first letter, Tsvetaeva voices her intention of wanting to go to Switzerland along with Pasternak to meet Rilke; "Rainer Maria . . . im nächsten Jahr (1927) kommt Boris und wir besuchen Sie--wo Sie auch nur sein mögen" (Rakusa-Ingold, 149). Now Tsvetaeva looks forward to a future face-to-face encounter with Rilke, which apparently no longer presents a problem concerning her poetic identity. Both reactions, her fear to meet Rilke and her simultaneous desire to visit him prove that she was emotionally overwhelmed by Rilke's first letter written on May 3, 1926, and the questions it contained.

Rilke addressed her as "dear Poet," told her about his friendship with the Pasternaks and his stay in Paris

the previous year. He then posed the question that elicited Tsvetaeva's response regarding her fear to meet him.

But why, I must wonder now, why was it not vouchsafed me to meet you, Marina Ivanovna Tsvetaeva? After Boris Pasternak's letter I must believe that such a meeting would have resulted in the deepest innermost joy for both of us.  
(Pasternak, 80)

Rilke had enclosed the Duineser Elegien, and Sonette an Orpheus in his first letter. The former were inscribed with,

Für Marina Ivanovna Tsvetaeva  
Wir rühren uns, womit? Mit Flügelschlägen,  
mit Fernen selber rühren wir uns an.  
Ein Dichter einzig lebt, und dann und wann  
kommt, der ihn trägt, dem, der ihn  
trug entgegen. (Pasternak, Illustration  
#10 between pages 84-85)

With this glowing dedication to Tsvetaeva, it is not surprising that she reacted to Rilke's letter with such enthusiasm and praise. While his letter filled approximately one page, hers covered at least three-and-one-half pages and appeared to have been written at intervals. Rilke's next letter was somewhat longer but again Tsvetaeva's response far outdistanced his.

Now it is the German poet who is sublimely touched.

Today, Marina, I received you in my soul in my whole consciousness, which trembles before you, before your coming, as though your great fellow reader, the ocean, had come breaking over me with you, heart's flood. What to tell you?

You have held your hands, Marina, by turns extended and folded, in my heart as in the basin of a flowing well: now, as long as you hold them there, the displaced current goes over you . . . let it be. What to say: all my words (as though they have been in your letter, as if facing a staged scene), all my words want to go out to you at the same time; none of them lets another pass. (Pasternak, 87)

When Rilke thus emphasizes the significance of each single word, he strikes a common chord. Tsvetaeva, likewise, focuses on the tremendous importance she attaches to each word. "The touch of a word was for her as real as the touch of a hand" (Pasternak, 29). Both poets, used a particular and very personal language in their letters (and other writings) that draws attention to itself. Through repetition, increased rhythm (accumulation, commas), questions, and unfinished clauses, alliteration, assonance and enjambements their style became their very own. In this manner, both poets demonstrated their desire to change the world around them through their distinctly different word use. Since language is a convention, and both poets wished to change conventions, they endeavored to do so by their unusual, unconventional, and idiosyncratic use of language.

Tsvetaeva makes a clear distinction between the phrases, Russian Revolution and revolutionary Russia; the first expression is no more than an empty term to her, while the second one is different and holds specific

meaning, " . . . die Revolution ist ein Land mit seinen eigenen--und ewigen--Gesetzen" (Rakusa-Ingold, 149).

Not only did Tsvetaeva see in each word innumerable possibilities, meanings, connections, and directions but she also listened carefully, with a sharp ear, to the sound of each word. She states in "Poet on Criticism,"

All my writing is listening into. . . .  
 As if the entire work is given to me from  
 the very outset--some sort of melodic or  
 rhythmic image of it--as if the work is  
 being written at this moment. . . . To  
 hear correctly--this is my concern.  
 (Hasty, 4)

Consequently, when Tsvetaeva takes time in her correspondence to Rilke to elaborate and explain, "Von mir zu Dir darf nichts fließen. Fliegen--ja! Und wenn nicht,-- lieber stocken und stolpern," her purpose is indeed clear (Rakusa-Ingold, 153). She asked Rilke whether her German was acceptable, otherwise she would write in French, since "Französisch schreib ich fließender" (Rakusa-Ingold, 153).

Her poetic ear thrives on the alliteration and assonance of these words.

O Rainer ich will nicht wählen (wählen  
 ist wühlen und wüst sein!), ich kann  
 nicht wählen, ich nehm die ersten besten  
 Zeilen, die noch mein Ohr enthält. Ins  
 Ohr schreibst Du mir, mit dem Ohr bist Du  
 gelesen. (Rakusa-Ingold, 155)

The above quote is another example of Tsvetaeva's way with her auditory-visual perception of linguistic signifiers.

She exhibits a certain playfulness and this experimentation

with words points to a preoccupation with objects rather than ideas;

. . . da findest Du einen St. Georg, der fast Pferd ist und ein Pferd, das fast Reiter ist, ich trenn sie nicht und nenne keinen.  
 . . . Denn Reiter ist nicht der, der reitet, Reiter ist die beiden zusammen, eine neue Figur, etwas was früher nicht da war, nicht Ritter und Pferd:Reiter=Pferd und Pferd=Reiter: R e i t e r. (Rakusa-Ingold, 155)

The world of objects is closer to the imagist poet who seeks expression in concrete rather than abstract language. Although Tsvetaeva cannot be forced into any rigidly defined literary trend, she definitely had imagist leanings while Rilke's form of poetic expression was more symbolist-oriented. He was more preoccupied with conceptual metaphors than Tsvetaeva which is best revealed in his Duineser Elegien. Their brief but intense correspondence nevertheless proved that there was affinity in their poetic and aesthetic directions and that they could inspire each other. "Rilke glaubte unbeirrt an eine zunehmende Vergeistigung der Welt;" (Rilke, 1951, 148) and expressed this belief in his poetry;

[Dies wird] veranschaulicht auf wunderbare Weise [durch] den weitertreibenden Austausch der beständig zwischen Aussen- und Innenwelt stattfindet. Dann aber führt es, gerade wie Rilke es will, mit dem Begriff des Gesetzlichen in das Reich des Geistes und des Engels. Man könnte danach meinen, dass die Vergeistigung sich vollzieht, indem das Subjekt sich immer reicher und inniger vom unbekanntem Gesetzlichen durchbilden lässt. (Rilke, 1951, 148)

He could believe (in this) because he himself had achieved Vergeistigung to a high degree. Tsvetaeva aspired to the same high plane but because of the force of her emotions, Vergeistigung seemed to be more within the reach of Rilke than Tsvetaeva.

It was an emotional outburst that followed a letter Rilke had written on May 17, 1926. He had inadvertently aroused Tsvetaeva's ire. She had interpreted an innocent sentence in his letter as a rejection of her person. "And pardon . . ., if all of a sudden I should turn uncommunicative--which ought not to keep you from writing to me" (Pasternak, 99). To this statement Tsvetaeva overreacted. She believed Rilke had no further need for her. He had also mentioned in the letter that his facility to read Russian had diminished to the point where he had difficulty understanding her poetry. This, in addition, disappointed her very much, in spite of the fact that he expressed his regret (Hasty, 61). Tsvetaeva responded with silence.

Simon Karlinsky, who wrote extensively about her, felt that Tsvetaeva needed a strong connection between artistic creativity and a total union or fusion with another person (Hasty, 19). If she could not achieve this fusion, Tsvetaeva was likely to turn away from a relationship. "She was apt to invest so much emotion in her relationships with absent friends . . ." yet at the

same time she demanded total devotion and intimacy (Hingley, 233). Tsvetaeva did not need the physical closeness as long as she was assured of the other's emotional availability and "invest[ed] the friend or beloved with an array of imagined qualities" (Hingley, 124). The exchange of letters to this point had been intimate enough that Tsvetaeva felt a close communion with the poet, a state that she had always craved, but which now seemed threatened. Although his extremely long letter of more than four pages was kind, friendly, and no less intimate (Hasty, 60), he spoke more about himself, his health, and his need for solitude than in previous communication. "All this about me, dear Marina, pardon me" (Pasternak, 99)! Rilke had also answered her questions about his family, and thereby incurred her jealousy by mentioning his marriage (Hasty, 60). But Tsvetaeva did not turn away from Rilke. She only waited three weeks before she sent another letter to him, the beginning of which was actually written to Pasternak. Tsvetaeva omitted any direct address and began the letter simply with,

Vieles, ja, alles bleibt im Heft.  
Dir nur die Worte aus meinem Briefe an  
Boris Pasternak:

'Als ich Dich immer fragte, was wir  
denn zusammen treiben würden im Leben,  
antwortetest Du einmal: 'Wir gehen zu  
Rilke.' Und ich sag Dir, dass Rilke  
überbürdet ist, dass er nichts, niemanden  
braucht. Es geht von ihm die Kälte des  
Habendem, in dessen Eigenthum ich schon

eingeschlossen bin. Ich hab ihm nichts zu geben, alles vorweggenommen. Er braucht mich nicht und Dich auch nicht. Stärke, immer anziehend, lenkt ab. Etwas in ihm (wie es heisst, weisst Du) will nicht abgelenkt werden. Darf nicht.

Diese Begegnung ist mir ein Schlag ins Herz (Herz schlägt nicht nur, wird auch geschlagen,--so oft es nur höher schlägt!) (Rakusa-Ingold, 159)

Tsvetaeva expresses in her typical Sturm und Drang mode the strong feelings of rejection she felt as a result of Rilke's previous letter. In the following lines she addresses the issue at hand,

Meine Liebe zu Dir zerstückelte sich in Tage und Briefe, Stunden und Zeilen. Daher die Unruhe. (Daher batest Du um Ruhe!) Brief heute, Brief morgen. Du lebst, ich will Dich sehen. Einer Überpflanzung aus Immer ins Jetzt. Daher die Pein, das Tage-Zählen. . . .Jetzt ists vorbei. Mit dem Wollen bin ich schnell fertig. Was ich von Dir wollte? Nichts. . . . So bin ich. So ist die Liebe--in der Zeit. Undankbar und selbstvernichtend. (Rakusa-Ingold, 160)

Tsvetaeva's pain reverberates here. The extent of her disillusionment becomes clear when some lines from her first letter to Rilke are mentioned again. There, too, the question is posed but in the present tense. The answer is puzzling;

Was Alles. Dass Du mir es gönnst jeden Augenblick meines Lebens zu Dir aufblicken--wie auf einen Berg, der mich schützt (so ein steinerner Schutzengel!) Bis ich Dich nicht kannte, gings, jetzt, da ich Dich kenne--bedarf es einer Erlaubniss. Denn meine Seele ist gut erzogen. (Rakusa-Ingold, 150)

But Rilke responded quickly to Tsvetaeva's lament with his own elegy dedicated to the Russian poet. The letter that followed Tsvetaeva's outburst, written on June 8, 1926 can be seen as a peace proposal. Naturally, Rilke was shocked and upset by her reaction and wanted to make amends. He explained that his physical condition, his illness, had a great deal to do with his anxiety concerning other people's expectations of him. With the Elegie an Marina he wanted to reestablish his estimation of the Russian poet. He wanted to prove to her that he valued their poetic relationship and the responsibility that went with it (Hasty, 70).

The poem consists of fifty long lines and shows Rilke's Einfühlungsvermögen into the personality of Marina Tsvetaeva.

The basic thematic principle on which the "Marina Elegy" is based is the poet's role in the eternity and infinity of the complete, yet ever-changing universe. From his central position within this universe the poet has a privileged vantage point from which to attempt to grasp and convey the self-contained dynamic structure of existence as a comprehensible whole. The burden of this responsibility must be borne in solitude. (Hasty, 71)

Both poets, Tsvetaeva and Rilke, were well aware of this burden. Both carried it well and lived within its scope. They dealt with their individual responsibility, as they saw fit; but while Rilke would search for and achieve

solitude more effectively, Tsvetaeva, because she had children, an ailing husband and numerous daily chores to attend to, was often barred from achieving any solitude at all. As all elegies, this one also is a song of praise as well as a lament. The elegy laments the limits of human existence with which the poet must deal on a personal level;

O die Verluste ins All, Marina, die  
 stürzenden Sterne!  
 Wir vermehren es nicht, wohin wir uns  
 werfen, zu welchen Sternen hinzu!  
 Im Ganzen ist immer schon alles gezählt.  
 (Rilke, 1982, II, 217)

The magnitude of the universe compared to the insignificance of human existence is pointed out in these first few line of Rilke's lament. Tsvetaeva is addressed by name several times in the course of the elegy which makes the poem very personal and appealing. Its lines express the union of poet, nature, and universe;

Wellen, Marina, wir Meer! Tiefen,  
 Marina, wir Himmel.  
 Erde, Marina, wir Erde, wir tausendmal  
 Frühling, wie Lerchen,  
 die ein ausbrechendes Lied in die  
 Unsichtbarkeit wirft. (Rilke, 1982,  
 II, 217)

The joy of spring then turns to lament as downward metaphors dominate and the poet's responsibility begins to add weight to his existence;

Wir beginnen als Jubel, schon übertrifft  
 es uns völlig;  
 plötzlich, unser Gewicht dreht zur Klage  
 abwärts den Sang.

Aber auch so: Klage? War sie nicht:  
 jüngerer Jubel nach unten. (Rilke, II,  
 1982, 217)

The elegy then involves the Gods; they demand  
 praise like pupils in school and Rilke goes on to stress  
 the importance of praise,

Auch die unteren Götter wollen gelobt sein,  
 Marina.  
 So unschuldig sind Götter, sie warten auf  
 Lob wie die Schüler.  
 Loben, du Liebe, lass uns verschwenden mit  
 Lob. (Rilke, 1982, II, 217)

Just like the star image that begins this elegy, Rilke's  
 first Duineser Elegie also deals with a similar idea.

Es muteten manche Sterne dir zu,  
 dass du sie spürtest (Rilke,  
 1982, I, 442)

As the Elegie an Marina is a lament as well as a song of  
 praise, so does the first Duineser Elegie also reflect  
 that direction,

Freilich ist es seltsam die Erde nicht  
 mehr zu bewohnen.  
 Kaum erlernte Gebräuche nicht mehr zu  
 üben,  
 Rosen, und anderen eigens versprechenden  
 Dingen  
 nicht die Bedeutung menschlicher  
 Zukunft zu geben  
 das, was man war in unendlich ängstlichen  
 Händen,  
 nicht mehr zu sein, und selbst den  
 eigenen Namen wegzulassen wie ein  
 zerbrochenes Spielzeug. (Rilke, 1982,  
 I, 443-4)

Particularly stressing the impermanence of human  
 existence, the seventeenth line of the Elegie an Marina  
 begins with, "Nichts gehört uns. . . ." and then continues

lyrically, "Wir legen ein wenig die Hand um die Hälse ungebrochener Blumen" (Rilke, 1982, II, 217). With the words, "nothing belongs to us," Rilke expresses not only his personal lament about the lack of stability in life but also echoes humanity's cry and the Christian admonishment Memento mori. A wanderer for a brief moment in time, yet burdened with advancing age and illness, the poet clearly demonstrates his fear of death. How long might Rilke have worked on this elegy? His friendship with Tsvetaeva obviously meant a great deal to him, since he spent his poetic energy on this perfectly composed poem at a time when his terminal illness already made his days exceedingly painful and miserable. Neither poet knew how gravely ill Rilke was but in Elegie an Marina, the death motif is strongly present. There is mention of tödliche Macht and Grab, Kranz und Ruten. Rilke closes his elegy to the Russian poet with a loving address and pointed metaphors.

(O wie begreif ich dich, weibliche Blüte  
 am gleichen unvergänglichen Strauch.  
 Wie streu ich mich stark in die  
 Nachtluft,  
 die dich nächstens bestreift). (Rilke,  
 1982, II, 219)

Significant are Tsvetaeva's last words to Rilke.

They were on a postcard dated November 7, 1926.

Lieber Rainer. Hier leb ich.  
 --Ob Du mich noch liebst?  
 Marina

Tsvetaeva had moved back to Paris in the fall. Rilke's condition was getting worse and Tsvetaeva never heard from him again.

When the news of his death reached her, it was totally unexpected. She experienced profound grief which she expressed in a letter to Pasternak. Tsvetaeva thus explains that she, like Rilke, did not really belong to this world.

For you his death is not in the order of things, for me his life is not in order.  
(Hasty, 143)

Rilke's death inspired her poetically and her belief that the poet truly was of another planet than other earthlings was confirmed (Hasty, 143). Tsvetaeva began work on a long poem informed by all her feelings about Rilke. She had heard of his death from an acquaintance on New Year's Day (Rilke actually died on December 29) and therefore called her poem "New Year's." She completed the poem on February 7, 1927. This was a significant date for Tsvetaeva since Rilke had mentioned to her in one of his letters that seven was his sacred number (Hasty, 148).

Tsvetaeva in her poem writes directly to Rilke, addressing him in his new realm of existence.

The first letter to you . . . in a fertile--(Fertile-ruminant) sonorous place, resonating place like Aeolus' empty tower. The first letter to you from yesterday's in which I will pine away without you . . . (Hasty. 154)

Thus, she sees Rilke living in a vastness where sound-- (which is so important to Tsvetaeva) echoes. Star images again appear as they did in Rilke's elegies and Tsvetaeva's letter;

The stars . . . the law of departure and  
retreat,  
According to which the beloved becomes  
anyone  
And the unheard of becomes non-existent.  
(Hasty, 154)

Tsvetaeva here appears to be reflecting, and reminiscing upon the first lines of Rilke's elegy to her,

Judging from her poem to him, Tsvetaeva seems to have accepted Rilke's explanations of the impossibility of loss in a complete universe, as he had emphasized in the elegy written to her. Her mention of stars which occurs several times more in the course of the poem serves also as a subtle reminder of her regard for Rilke as an incarnation of Orpheus whose lyre is remembered among the constellations. (Hasty, 160)

The poem has long lines with numerous enjambements and is written in Tsvetaeva's typical style of many hyphens, exclamation, question marks and ellipses. Her mode of directly addressing the dead poet throughout the poem is reminiscent of the medieval Liebestod motif. Because of the lack of human capacity to endure such love, the lovers must reach beyond the grave for a fulfillment and continuation of their passion. There is always a tragic element in this motif and love always transcends life as in the epic poem Tristan and Isolde. Tsvetaeva most certainly fits into that category.

In her poetic world true lovers must always be apart; it is perhaps even better if they have never met in the first place, and better still if one of them is . . . already dead. (Hingley, 129)

Therefore, she could easily transcend her earthly existence in her poetic expression and move into an alternative realm. Since she experienced a complete poetic connection with Rilke, she wanted to continue feeling their closeness beyond death.

The elegy Rilke had written for Tsvetaeva had fortified her conviction that their "poetic bond" was strong, deep and unique (Hasty, 95). In her poem "New Year's" "Cvetaeva perceives Rilke's death as having distanced him from all things physical including his own body and the world it once inhabited" (Hasty, 180).

In life, Tsvetaeva always concentrated, like Rilke, on the emotional and spiritual part of human existence rather than the mere physical. Both poets were, in a sense, hostile to the aspect of everyday life, and found their creative forces enriched by their devotion to images they had formed of each other's countries. In addition,

Cvetaeva held the voice--poetic and therefore prophetic--in esteem above all else while struggling constantly against the physical presence she perceived as a burden. (Hasty, 160)

This contributed to their instant rapport and the closeness they felt during their correspondence.

Cvetaeva's view of the otherworldly realm as a supralinguistic phenomenon which the poet transcribes into his language, is restated in her 'letter' to Rilke. She explains that her change from German, which she had used in all their correspondence, to Russian was occasioned not by the fact that, being dead, he could not protest, but by her belief arrived at when she was only thirteen years old at her mother's funeral at the Novodevič'e Monastery, that the other world encompasses all languages. (Hasty, 172)

This linguistic and poetic universality transcends life and death for Tsvetaeva and contributed to her kinship with the German poet. The concepts of Übermass und Schwärmerei were for both a motto that channelled their emotions into poetic stimulation and creativity. The Liebestod motif rings true in the final lines of Tsvetaeva's farewell message,

Let's not miss each other--drop me a line  
 before hand  
 . . . Over the Rhône and over the Rarogne,  
 Over the obvious and total separation into  
 Rainer--Marina--Rilke's--hands.  
 (Hasty, 158)

And when she announces to Rilke, "we have a blood tie with the other world: You've been to Russia--, that world in this one ripened" (Hasty, 154), she not only expresses the bond she felt with the poet when he lived, but she also indicates the transcending tie that binds both together across the threshold of death.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>"In 1975, in the journal Zvezda, Tsvetaeva's daughter Ariadna Efron, wrote brilliantly and concisely about the friendship, collaboration, and genuine love between the two writers, as expressed in the poems, prose, and critical notes they sent to each other, and especially in their extraordinary letters. In her will she stipulated that most of this correspondence not be published until the next century. Its eventual publication will be an invaluable contribution to Russian literature and its history" (Pasternak, 22).

<sup>2</sup>It began with a letter Rilke wrote to Boris Pasternak's father Leonid who had earlier congratulated him on the occasion of his 50th birthday.

"In einem Brief an Leonid Pasternak . . . hatte sich Rilke, der die Familie seit seinen Russlandreisen von 1899 und 1900 kannte, lobend über Leonids Sohn Boris geäußert, von dem er einige Gedichte in französischer Übertragung . . . gelesen hatte. Der junge Pasternak--schon lange ein Bewunderer Rilkes--schätzte sich glücklich und gab seiner Dankbarkeit überschwenglichen Ausdruck in einem sehr persönlichen, in deutscher Sprache verfassten Brief an Rilke (12.4.1926)" (Rakusa-Ingold, 127).

<sup>3</sup>The child misunderstood the name, believing her mother was about to read to her from the fable of Reineke Fuchs (Pasternak, 85).

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

My intention in this thesis has been to demonstrate how much can be gained from studying the involvement of a major German poet and a major Russian poet with each other's cultures. Because of their correspondence and the appreciation and knowledge of each other's art, Rilke and Tsvetaeva contributed immensely to German Russian literary relations.

When Goethe spoke of Weltliteratur, he wished for the fruitful merging of European literature to achieve literary unity of Western civilization. It is doubtful that such a coming together, had it been accomplished, would have been truly desirable. National literature is important and valid because it reveals the individual traits, abilities, and characteristics of a particular country and its people.

Yet, much can be gained from a cosmopolitan approach to the literary phenomenon. Ancient Greek and Roman writers continually influenced the literature of Western Europe throughout the centuries, and thus provided an understanding of the common human traits, beyond

national or local issues. A clearer discernment of human matters is achievable when literature is written and studied from culturally different perspectives. Human issues cannot be confined to the borders of a certain country.

By reacting to their environment in their poetry, Rilke and Tsvetaeva demonstrated a similar view of the world. The reality which surrounded them presented both people with obstacles to which they reacted by finding another realm where their poetic and spiritual needs could be fulfilled. Tsvetaeva faced the rapidly changing world of revolutionary Russia with resulting famine, emigration, rejection, and poverty. In her dream world of a romantic Germany she could function and create. Rilke became a lonely and restless wanderer but could indulge his creative urges in this manner, and found stimulation in his idealized view of Russia. Letting each other's language and culture inspire them, Rilke and Tsvetaeva transcended the confines of one country and enriched their poetic horizons. Their correspondence and their art illuminate a Zeitgeist which appears to be far more valid when it is approached from a culturally heterogeneous rather than a homogeneous intellectual position.

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