

YOUNG RILKE

AND HIS TIME



GEORGE C. SCHOOLFIELD

Young Rilke and His Time

Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture

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George C. Schoolfield

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Rochester, New York

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To the memory of Walter Silz (1894–1980)
and Karl Viëtor (1892–1951)

In his first collections (Leben und Lied [sic], Larenopfer), where he was still under the influence of Goethe and Heine, Rainer Maria Rilke already demonstrated independent traits and a distinct formal talent. Later, he fell completely under the spell of impressionism, and often ruined his best lyric effects for himself by intentional obscurity. His mannerism came to the light of day in a disturbing fashion in "Mir zur Feier!" and even more so in his latest collection, "Das Buch der Bilder." Nonetheless, in both these volumes, he also succeeded in creating pieces with a lush splendor of language and the purest poetic sentiment . . . [which] let his special quality, his striving to transform feelings into vibrations of expression, his power of imagery, and his mystical pathos emerge most clearly.

— Dr. B. [Walter Bläsing] in H. H. Ewers, *Führer durch die moderne Literatur: 300 Würdigungen der hervorragendsten Schriftsteller unserer Zeit*, 1906

In Goethe, too, and in Keats as well, alongside the poems which have made themselves, you will find poems that have been made . . . [Stefan] George, in whom the latter predominate, or Rilke, in whom the former simply do not exist.

— Rudolf Borchardt to Hugo von Hofmannsthal, 5 August 1912

What's important: Unsparingly, my relationship to Rilke. The first love on reading the Worpsswede book. The later indifference. Annoyance and love via Allesch [the psychologist and philosopher Johannes Gustav von Allesch]. The later indifference. Love after [Rilke's] death.

— Robert Musil, *Diaries*, 1928

I've just been reading Rilke-letters, unknown to me, from the years 1902 to 1907. For me, Rilke is always a mixture of male filth and lyric greatness, an unpleasant mixture. And those hundred counts and countesses, and from fifty castles — it's hard not to find it comical.

— Gottfried Benn to F. W. Oelze, 26 October 1936

The early Rilke is really more interesting for me than the late one with the rather mendacious God-dependence of his rhymes.

— Gottfried Benn to F. W. Oelze, 25 March 1941

. . . we came across several [scientists] who had read every thing that literary people talk about. But that's very rare. Most of the rest, when one tried to probe for what books they had read, would modestly confess, "Well, I've tried a bit of Dickens," rather as though Dickens were an extraordinarily esoteric, tangled and dubiously rewarding writer, something like Rainer Maria Rilke . . .

— C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 1957

Least of all could I have imagined Rainer Maria Rilke — of all people — as a member of a shooting party. But when my table companion tells me about his father and how, more than once, the latter had invited the poet to hunt on his land and how Rilke, furthermore, had contributed — under a pseudonym — to an outdoorsman's magazine the father edited, I simply have to believe my informant. Thus, in my mind's eye I behold Rilke, frail and shy, clad for the day in a mossgreen jacket, creeping with steps almost as soft as a spirit's along a ditch beside a field. He carries his hunting rifle in his hand. It is an especially light fowling-piece, and unusually small. The lead dog has started to sniff the air and just now is on point. Will Rilke, in a moment or two, have brought down a quail or perhaps a corncrake with a blast of birdshot? Or perhaps a partridge or even a pheasant?

— Johannes Edfelt, “Rilke jägaren,” *Spelrum*, 1990

Elizabeth! I slowly utter her name, the empress's, the most beautiful and saddest Europe has known in the course of its long history. . . . Where was I in that moment? In Italy, perhaps, the tenth of September, 1898, almost a year before leaving for Russia with Lou, just at the end of the century. . . . She turns toward the pier, to take the boat for Prégny, the assassin hides behind the trees, but where are the police and the ladies of her entourage, where are the Genevans, why does no one cast himself forward to take the blow in her place? I would have done it, I would be dead beneath the benediction of her breath, one of her tears upon my face.

— Rilke's reverie in Vintilá Horia's novel, *Les clefs du crépuscule*, 1990

For some time I wanted to believe that my words would form a part of my technique of seduction, my ars amandi. I spoke of my sadness, of my death, but it was to make her have pity on me and to earn a kiss at the end of my litany. But it was more than that: my technique of seduction found itself surpassed by the song of love and death of the events that already dwelt within me; the birds had not yet arrived but their nests awaited them there when seasons passed. I had no choice.

— Rilke in Vintilá Horia's novel, *Les clefs du crépuscule*, 1990

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Preface

THE IDEA FOR *YOUNG RILKE AND HIS TIME* came to the author more than a quarter of a century ago, as he was translating Henning Fenger's *Kierkegaard-Myter og Kierkegaard-Kilder* (1976, *Kierkegaard, The Myths and Their Origins*, 1980). There Fenger wrote that he was most fascinated by great men when they were young: "They are most exciting in their youthful years, the formative period in which they absorb impressions and impulses, and when their taste and view of life are being formed." The author did not turn directly to the daunting and diffuse project, although he made feints toward it in articles and contributions to *Festschriften* (a few of which are resuscitated, greatly emended, in these pages). Instead, he wandered afield to Fennica and to the Décadence. When James Hardin, the founder of Camden House, proposed a book on Rilke, a study of René Maria Caesar Rilke, shortly to become Rainer Maria, seemed an appropriate reply.

Young Rilke and His Time does not pretend to be systematic or exhaustive. It consists of eighteen chapters (1–5, 8–20) on Rilke's life and creative work from circa 1892 to 1900, together with a single-poem pendant from 1904; two chapters (6 and 7) are given over to his reviewing activity, which ended the same year. The loose form was suggested by Olle Holmberg's *Six kapitel om Stagnelius* (Six Chapters about Stagnelius, 1941), the Swedish romantic poet (1793–1823). In an effort to live up to the title's second half, "His Time," space has been devoted to various figures (but scarcely all) who crossed his horizon, and to cultural currents (and fads) and political-social developments of which he must have been aware.

Surely future and more serious scholars, having newly discovered sources and more time at their disposal, will want to continue the investigation into the makeup, or brew, of the youth who became one of the greatest German-language poets. The book is not a biography; however, even at the risk of monotony, it is sprinkled with dates and places meant to serve as biographical signposts. As the music critic Peter Williams says about books on Brahms: "Biography will just not stay out of things."

User-friendliness demands that translations of all passages from Rilke be supplied; for the verse, the author has provided fairly literal renderings, ponies or trots, so that the reader with a modicum of German (and, in the instances of Stendhal and Verlaine, French) can follow along. (The reader is directed to other and more respectable English versions when such

exist.) Quotations from writers other than Rilke are given, for the most part, only in the author's translation, not in the original. When entire books have been translated into English, the title of the translation follows in italics, for example, Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem* (*The Golem*). Otherwise, the translated title is not italicized, for example, Egon Erwin Kisch's *Aus Prager Gassen und Nächten* (From Prague Streets and Nights).

Not in a wish to become all too intimate with his subject, but rather to give a supplementary chronological guide, the author calls RMR "René" up until the great change wrought by Lou Andreas-Salomé in the summer of 1897; thereafter RMR is "Rilke." The new name, "Rainer," would cause some difficulty, three decades later in another land. Margareta Høyer's extensive presentation in the major Norwegian publication, *Edda: Tidsskrift for litteraturforskning*, 1930, 281–88, bears the title "Reiner Maria Rilke," not the punning homophone that Lou herself intended ("Pure Maria Rilke"), but perhaps a typesetter's error. Reading proof, Høyer presumably did not catch the slip as she rode off into the sunset: "In his innermost self with its vast spaces, so vast that aeons could not make them overfull, Rilke could capture the human soul's light and dark streams and, as it were, crystallize them in his works of art." Høyer belonged to the hagiographic school of writing on Rilke, prevalent in those distant days, and still strangely flourishing in some American circles where Rainer Maria is venerated like an upscale Khalil Gibran.

The book's first part is devoted to young Rilke, René, in "golden Prague." The existence of his letters (as "Hidigeigei") to Valerie von David-Rhonfeld ("Vally") has been known for many years; their publication, at long last, in 2003, has offered Rilke-adepts an unsettling view of the poet as adolescent, overworked, depressive, and on occasion hysterical. Vally was the first of the legions of girls and women to whom, for the rest of his life, he would pour out impressions, plans, adjurations, and complaints. (No *billets-doux* to the nanny, Olga Blumauer, with whom he ran away from Linz to Vienna, in May 1892 survive.) Other figures are also included: witnesses to the linguistic-social-political strains in the nervous city. The Prague poems, *Larenopfer*, provide the stuff of the second chapter. These "sacrifices to household gods" have never quite gotten their due from scholarship, either as often-clever verse exercises, which they are, or as biographical sources, and they deserve a new look.

Part 2 (chapters 3 through 5) deals with the diaries thus far accessible in print: the triad of journals written for Lou Andreas-Salomé and published in 1942 by Rilke's daughter, Ruth, and her husband Carl Sieber (with the editors' scanty commentary); the diary kept by Lou during the lovers' second Russian trip of 1900; and the "pocket notebooks" desultorily scribbled down in the short-lived home maintained by the poet and his wife, the sculptress Clara Westhoff-Rilke, at Westerwede, in Janu-

ary and February 1902 and then, more important, in Paris during October and November of the same year, when Rilke, very hard up, was both appalled and excited by his initial experience of the metropolis. (Clara was also present, working in Rodin's studio.)

Part 3 (chapters 6 and 7) ventures into a corner of Rilke's activity that has received short shrift from commentators, largely because he himself denigrated it as a way to make much-needed money. His career as a literary reviewer, begun in Prague in 1895, ended in Sweden in 1904, and he was glad to abandon it. All the same, he could be an extremely perceptive critic — witness his words on Hermann Hesse's *Eine Stunde hinter Mitternacht* and Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* — and, now and then, slyly destructive. He was wholeheartedly enthusiastic, though, about the translations of Nordic literature that fell into his hands; this was the age of Ibsen, when authors from the North were a constituent force in German letters.

Part 4 (chapters 8 through 20) indulges in comments, chronologically, on a baker's dozen of poems, or poem clusters, from about 1892 through 1900, with a postscript from 1904, poems mostly (but not entirely) passed over by Rilke scholarship. Their quality is not always high, but they show, variously, a good deal about young Rilke's familial-patriotic baggage, his awareness of emigration, his training in traditional prosody, and his reactions to a number of settings, currents, and fads popular as the nineteenth century came to its close — the *fin de siècle*.

Acknowledgments

THE AUTHOR IS OVERFULL OF GRATITUDE, to be sent off in many directions. Valiantly, Kathy Saranpa of Eugene, Oregon (chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8–20) and Jennifer Colosimo of Virginia Tech (chapters 5 and 6), both holders of Yale doctorates, have deciphered the typed and scrawlingly corrected sheets churned out by the technically challenged author, putting them neatly onto the computer. Dr. Liselotte Davis has been forever encouraging, has untangled such puzzles as Schaukal's Rilke parody, and has further served as a lynx-eyed reader of the finished text. Dr. David Schafer, a learned Internet virtuoso, discovered answers to seemingly unanswerable questions. Mary Jo Amatruda, docent at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, provided information about the painter Vasnyetsov and a handsome reproduction of his "After the Battle." At Yale's Sterling Library, the author has tried, without success, to wear out his welcome with the reference department's head, Alan Solomon, and Anne Oechtering, responsible for the German world. (Her predecessor, Dale Askey, now of Kansas State University, was instrumental in getting the project underway.) Professor Thomas Kerth of SUNY, Stony Brook, was exceptionally helpful with information on Middle High German lexicography and on roses. As on many previous occasions, Sterling's interlibrary loan staff, Maureen M. Jones, Elizabeth P. Johnson, Vinita Lovett, and May E. Robertson, rose to every request; their good nature equaled that of Christa Sammons, curator of German literature at the Beinecke Library, with its collection of Rilke first editions. At the Yale Music Library, the obliging spirit of the reference librarian, Suzanne Eggleston Lovejoy, never flagged; neither did the willingness of Karl Schrom to provide recordings of an odd company, Sinding and the Austrian march kings, nor Kathy Manzi's willingness to find scores in the maze of the stacks. At Harvard's Widener and Houghton Libraries, Charles S. Fineman has been gracious in pursuing Nathan Sulzberger. On the Yale faculty, Paul Buskovitch, professor of history, initiated the author, a *tabula rasa*, into nineteenth-century Russian art; William C. Summers, professor of therapeutic radiology, provided C. P. Snow's forgivable statement about Rilke. In the German department, Jeffrey Sammons, Leavenworth professor emeritus, came up with answers to pressing questions at the drop of a telephone call; Howard Stern, senior lecturer, opened the author's eyes to a possible intent of the Platen sonnet. Long, long ago, Peter Demetz, now Sterling

professor emeritus, had quite unwittingly excited the Rilke-tracker by means of *René Rilkes Prager Jahre*, spied in a Göttingen bookshop, purchased, and devoured. Dr. Vasily Rudich, classicist and polymath, has been a valued conversational partner and provider of salient information on topics too numerous to list. Professor Roger Holmström of the Department of Comparative Literature, Åbo Akademi University (Turku), offered unsuspected and novel insights for chapters 6 and 7 with his works on literary reviewing. James Mangino of Lyman Hall not only fished out dependable statistics on sailings from the port of Naples but kindly gave practical aid whenever and wherever needed; Joseph Mangino provided vital computer aid in the manuscript's final stages.

The forbearance of Gloria Della Selva Schoolfield, putting up with Rilke through the decades, was heroic; she also fed an insatiable appetite for antiquarian Baedekers and was always prepared to answer the baffled queries of Susan R. Schoolfield and Dr. Marguerite Compton about their father's arcane activities. Speaking of forbearance and patience: Jim Walker of Camden House deserves a special crown.

Finally, the author is grateful to Adam Dalglish, P. D. James's immortal detective, for his comforting defense of "elaborate and ever-so-sophisticated edifice[s] of conjecture."

This book is dedicated to the memory of Walter Silz (1894–1980), the author's doctor-father at Princeton, and Karl Viëtor (1892–1951), all too briefly a generous mentor at Harvard, who first set the apprentice's course toward Rilke.

George C. Schoolfield
September 2008

Abbreviations

- AJ* Rilke. *Briefe an Axel Juncker*. Edited by Renate Scharffenberg. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1979.
- ASchn* Heinrich Schnitzler. "Rainer Maria Rilke und Arthur Schnitzler: Ein Briefwechsel." *Wort und Wahrheit* 13 (1958): 283–98.
- B 99–02* Rilke. *Briefe und Tagebücher aus der Frühzeit 1899–1902*. Edited by Ruth Sieber-Rilke and Carl Sieber. Leipzig: Insel, 1931.
- B 02–06* Rilke. *Briefe aus den Jahren 1902 bis 1906*. Edited by Ruth Sieber-Rilke and Carl Sieber. Leipzig: Insel, 1930.
- B 06–07* Rilke. *Briefe aus den Jahren 1906 bis 1907*. Edited by Ruth Sieber-Rilke and Carl Sieber. Leipzig: Insel, 1930.
- B 07–14* Rilke. *Briefe aus den Jahren 1907 bis 1914*. Edited by Ruth Sieber-Rilke and Carl Sieber. Leipzig: Insel, 1933.
- B 14–21* Rilke. *Briefe aus den Jahren 1914 bis 1921*. Edited by Ruth Sieber-Rilke and Carl Sieber. Leipzig: Insel, 1937.
- B 21–26* Rilke. *Briefe aus den Jahren 1921 bis 1926*. Edited by Ruth Sieber-Rilke and Carl Sieber. Leipzig: Insel, 1935.
- Ben* Rilke. *Briefwechsel mit Magda von Hattingberg ("Benvenuta")*. Edited by Ingeborg Schnack and Renate Scharffenberg. Frankfurt am Main & Leipzig: Insel, 2000.
- BIRG* Rilke. *Blätter der Rilke-Gesellschaft*
- BP* Rilke. *Briefe zur Politik*. Edited by Joachim W. Storck. Frankfurt am Main & Leipzig: Insel, 1992.
- BR* Rilke. *Briefwechsel mit den Brüdern Reinhart*. Edited by Rätus Luck. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1988.
- BSF* Rilke. *Briefe an Schweizer Freunde*. Edited by Rätus Luck. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990.
- BVP* Rilke. *Briefe, Verse und Prosa aus dem Jahre 1896*. Edited by Richard von Mises. New York: Johannespresse, 1946.

- DIE* *Das literarische Echo.*
- EK* Rilke. *Rainer Maria Rilke-Ellen Key Briefwechsel: Mit Briefen von und an Clara Rilke-Westhoff.* Edited by Theodore Fiedler. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1994.
- EN* Rilke. *Briefe an Ernst Norlind.* Edited by Paul Åström. Partille, Sweden: Paul Åström, 1986.
- FXK* Rilke. *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* (Franz Xaver Kappus). Wiesbaden: Insel, 1954.
- GaS* Rilke. *Lettres milanaises, 1921–1926.* [Letters to Aurelia Gallarati-Scotti.] Edited by René Lang. Paris: Plon, 1956.
- GB* Rilke. *Gesammelte Briefe*, vols. 1–6. Edited by Ruth Sieber-Rilke and Carl Sieber. 6 vols. Leipzig: Insel, 1936–39.
- GS* Rilke. *Die Briefe an Gräfin Sizzo.* Edited by Ingeborg Schnack. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1977.
- HvH* RMR/Hugo von Hofmannsthal. *Briefwechsel, 1899–1925.* Edited by Rudolf Hirsch and Ingeborg Schnack. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1978.
- HW* S. Konovalov. “Letters of RMR to Helene *** [Helene Voronin].” *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 9 (1960): 129–64.
- IJ* RMR/Inga Junghanns. *Briefwechsel.* Edited by Wolfgang Herwig. Wiesbaden: Insel, 1959.
- KA* Rilke. *Werke: Kommentierte Ausgabe.* Edited by Manfred Engel, Ulrich Fülleborn, Horst Nalewski, and August Stahl. Frankfurt am Main & Leipzig: Insel, 1996.
- KEH* Rilke. *Die Briefe an Karl und Elisabeth von der Heydt, 1905–1922.* Edited by Ingeborg Schnack and Renate Scharffenberg. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1986.
- LAS* RMR/Lou Andreas-Salomé. *Briefwechsel.* Edited by Ernst Pfeiffer. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1975.
- LvO* Rilke. *Briefe an Baroness von Oe (Láska van Oestéren).* Edited by Richard von Mises. New York: Johannespresse, 1945.
- NWV* Rilke. *Briefe an Nanny Wunderly-Volkart.* Edited by Rätus Luck. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1977.
- PMB* Paula Modersohn-Becker. *Briefwechsel mit RMR.* Edited by Rainer Stamm. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 2003.

- RmR* Lou Andreas-Salomé. *Rußland mit Rainer: Tagebuch der Reise mit RMR. im Jahre 1900*. Edited by Stéphane Michaud with Dorothee Pfeiffer, foreword by Brigitte Kronauer. Marbach: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1999.
- SF* Rilke. *Briefe an das Ehepaar S. Fischer*. Edited by Hedwig Fischer. Zurich: Fischer, 1947.
- SNB* Rilke. *Briefe an Sidonie Nádherný von Borutin*. Edited by Bernhard Blume. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1973.
- SW* Rilke. *Sämtliche Werke*. Edited by by the Rilke-Archive, with Ruth Sieber-Rilke, under the care of Ernst Zinn. Vols. 1–3, Wiesbaden: Insel, 1955, 1956, 1959; 4–6, Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1961, 1965, 1966; vol. 7: *Die Übertragungen*. Edited by the Rilke Archive, with Hella Sieber-Rilke, under the care of Walter Simon, Karin Wais, and Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt am Main & Leipzig: Insel, 1997.
- Tb* Rilke. *Tagebuch Westerwede und Paris 1902: Taschenbuch I*. Edited by Hella Sieber-Rilke. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 2000.
- TF* Rilke. *Tagebücher aus der Frühzeit*. Edited by Ruth Sieber-Rilke & Carl Sieber. Leipzig: Insel, 1942. Reprint, edited by Ernst Zinn. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1973, with different pagination.
- TT* RMR/Marie von Thurn und Taxis. *Briefwechsel*. Edited by Ernst Zinn. Zurich: Nihans & Rokitansky; Wiesbaden: Insel, 1951.
- TVH* Rilke. *Briefe an Tora Vega Holmström*. Edited by Birgit Rausing and Paul Åström. Jonsered, Sweden: Paul Åström, 1989.
- VDR* Rilke. *Sieh dir die Liebenden an: Briefwechsel mit Valerie von David-Rhonfeld*. Edited by Renate Scharffenberg and August Stahl. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 2003.

Chronology

- 1875 Born 4 December, Prague, Heinrichsgasse (Jindřišská) 17.
 Baptized 19 December, St. Heinrichs Kirche, René Karl Wilhelm
 Johann Josef Maria.
- 1882–86 Deutsche Volksschule (Piaristenschule), Prague, Am Graben
 (Na příkopě) & Herrengasse (Panská).
- 1884 Parents, Josef Rilke and Sophie (Phia) Entz Rilke, separate.
- 1885 Summer: Canale on the Isonzo, near Görz (Gorizia), with mother.
 Writes to father that he practices the writing of poetry
 “industriously.”
- 1886 Summer: Bad Wartenberg (Stráž pod Ralskem), with mother.
 One castle in the neighborhood, Groß-Rohosetz (Hrubý
 Rohozec), would be the scene of the story “Teufelsspuk”
 (1898–99, published 1899), and another, Groß-Skal (Hrubá
 Skála), figures in the background of “Die Letzten” (1898–99,
 published 1901).
- 1886–90 Militär-Unterrealschule, St. Pölten (Lower Austria).
- 1890–91 Militär-Oberrealschule, Mährisch-Weißkirchen (Hranice,
 Moravia).
- 1891 Summer: Prague-Smichov, Villa Excelsior.
- 1891–92 Handelsakademie, Linz (Upper Austria).
 22 May: Flight to Vienna with Olga Blumauer, a nanny.
- 1892 July–September: Schönfeld (Krásno, Northern Bohemia):
 Preparatory tutorials.
- 1892–95 Private tutorials, Prague, residence Wassergasse (Vodičkova)
 15 B/1, with paternal aunt, Gabriele von Kutschera-Woborsky.
 Stipend from uncle, Jaroslav Rilke, Ritter von Rüliken.
 12 December 1892: Death of Jaroslav Rilke; his daughters, Paula
 and Irene, continue the stipend.

- 1893 9 January: Correspondence and friendship with Valerie von David-Rhonfeld begins.
- 1894 Before 6 July: “Pierre Dumont,” story, St. Pölten setting.
 July: Lautschin (Loučeň), with Valerie and her parents.
 15–17 August: Munich, with Josef Rilke.
 4 December: Autobiographical birthday letter to Valerie.
 Second half of year: “Die Näherin,” intended for planned story collection, *Was toben die Heiden* (never completed).
- 1895 *Leben und Lieder: Bilder und Tagebuchblätter*. (Strassburg & Leipzig: Kattentidt). Dedicated to “Vally.”
 9 July: Passes “Matura” with distinction.
 August: Misdroy, Pommerania (now Międzyzdroje, Poland), beach vacation with father. Meets Ella Glässner, daughter of his father’s physician; calls himself “René Maria Caesar Rilke” in a dedication to her.
 15 September: Prague, begins “winter term” at the German Carl-Ferdinands-University, art history; philosophy; history of literature. (His teacher, Professor August Sauer, the founder and editor of the Prague journal *Deutsche Arbeit*, interests himself in Rilke’s career, as does his wife, the poet Hedwig Sauer.) Rilke is active in German-language organizations: Professor Alfred Klaar’s “Concordia,” the “Verein Deutscher Bildender Künstler in Böhmen” (where he meets the artists Emil Orlik and Hugo Steiner), and the “Deutscher Dilettantenverein.”
 October: meets Czech author Julius Zeyer at the David-Rhonfelds.
 28 December: End of “engagement” to Vally.
 30 December: Begins correspondence with Láska van Oestéren.
- 1896 *Larenopfer* (H. Dominicus, Prague).
Wegwarten I: Lieder dem Volke geschenkt (Selbstverlag, Prague).
Wegwarten II: Szene: Jetzt und in der Stunde unseres Absterbens (Selbstverlag, Prague).
Wegwarten III: Deutsch-moderne Dichtungen (with Bodo Wildberg) (Wegwarten-Verlag, Munich/Dresden).
 February: “Summer term,” transfers to the Faculty of Law and Political Science.
 End of May–13 June: Budapest, Hungarian Millenium Celebration.
 June–July: Villa Gröbe, Prague-Weinberge (Vinohrady).

- July: Visits Veleslavin, the Oestérens' chateau near Prague.
- 6 August: *Jetzt und in der Stunde unseres Absterbens* performed at the Summer Theater of the German People's Theater, Prague.
- 15 September: Dresden, art museums.
- End of September: Leaves Prague for Munich, Brienner Straße 48.
- University of Munich: History of the plastic arts in the age of the Renaissance; foundations of Esthetics; Darwinian theory.
- 1897 *Traumgekrönt* (Leipzig: P. Friesenhahn).
- 13 January: Prague, lecture on Liliencron at the "Deutscher Dilettantenverein."
- February: now at Blütenstraße 8. Meets Jakob Wassermann.
- 20–27 March: Arco (Austrian South Tyrol), visits mother.
- 28–31 March: Venice as guest of Nathan Sulzberger.
- 17–21 April: Constance, with Franziska von Reventlow.
- 12 May: Munich, meets Lou Andreas-Salomé.
- 14 June–8 September: Wolfratshausen.
- 20 July: *Im Frühfrost: Ein Stück Dämmerung*, performed by Albert Heine's Berlin Ensemble, Summer Theater of the Prague German People's Theater. Rilke was not present.
- 1 October: Berlin Wilmersdorf, Im Rheingau 8.
- 1898 *Advent* (Leipzig: P. Friesenhahn).
- Ohne Gegenwart: Drama in 2 Akten* (Berlin: Entsch).
- Am Leben hin: Novellen und Skizzen* (Stuttgart: Bonz).
- 5 March: Prague, lecture "Moderne Lyrik," at the "Deutscher Dilettantenverein."
- 1 April: Arco, visits mother.
- 8 April: Florence.
- 15 April: Begins "Florenzer Tagebuch" for Lou. Meets Stefan George and Heinrich Vogeler.
- 10/11 May: Leaves Florence.
- 11–30 May: Viareggio, meets Helene Voronin.
- 30 May: Vienna.
- 6 June: Prague.
- 8 June–23 July: Zoppot (Sopot) and Oliwa (Oliwa) with Lou.
- 6 July: End of "Florenzer Tagebuch."

- 1898 11 July: "Schmargendorfer Tagebuch" for Lou begins.
 31 July: Berlin-Schmargendorf, Villa Waldfrieden, Hundekehlstraße 11.
 End of 1898: "Die weiße Fürstin / Eine Szene am Meer" written (first version).
- 1899 *Zwei Prager Geschichten* (Stuttgart: Bonz).
 Mir zur Feier (Berlin: Georg Heinrich Meyer).
 18 February: Berlin, sees Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande*.
 February–March: Arco, two weeks with mother.
 18 March: Vienna, sees Hofmannsthal's *Die Hochzeit der Sobeide* and *Der Abenteurer und die Sängerin* with Arthur Schnitzler.
 Easter, 1899–August, 1900: University of Berlin, registered as student of art history.
 25 April–15 June: First Russian journey, with Lou and Professor Friedrich Carl Andreas.
 28 April: Moscow, visit to Tolstoy.
 2 May: To St. Petersburg.
 4–24 May: Rilke pays visit to Helene Voronin.
 26–29 May: Moscow.
 29 May–15 June: St. Petersburg.
 18–27 June: Danzig-Langfuhr (Gdańsk-Wrzeszcz), Oliva (Oliwa).
 23 July: "Die weiße Fürstin" submitted to the journal *Pan*.
 29 July–12 September: Bibersberg/Meiningen, Russian studies with Lou, guests of Frieda von Bülow.
 20 September–14 October: Berlin-Schmargendorf, "Das Buch vom mönchischen Leben."
 Autumn: Berlin-Schmargendorf, "Aus einer chronik — Der Cornet — 1664." Written in "a stormy autumn night."
 "Ewald Tragy": first printed in limited edition, Munich, 1929 (95 copies), then New York, 1944.
 5–21 November: Stories in the "Schmargendorfer Tagebuch": inter alia, "Die Turnstunde," "Ein Morgen," "Der Grabgärtner," "Der Kardinal," and "Frau Blaha's Magd." Also writes "Das Buch vom lieben Gott" and the story "Das Haus."
 9 December: Registered for Russian studies at the University of Berlin.
 25 December: Christmas in Prague.

- 28 December: Breslau (Wrocław), visits the art historian Richard Muther; *Auguste Rodin* will appear in the latter's series *Die Kunst*.
- 1900 "Die weiße Fürstin: Eine Szene am Meer" appears in *Pan* 5, number 4.
- Vom lieben Gott und Anderes: An Große für Kinder erzählt* (Berlin and Leipzig: Schuster & Loeffler, Insel) appears at Christmas.
- 9 May–27 July: Second Russian trip with Lou. (See chapter 3: 2, Lou's *Rußland mit Rilke*.)
- 28 July–22 August: St. Petersburg, alone. Meets Russian art historian and artist Alexander Benois.
- 27 August–5 October: Worpswede: Heinrich Vogeler, Paula Becker, Clara Westhoff, Carl Hauptmann.
- 22–25 September: Excursion to Hamburg for premiere of Carl Hauptmann's *Ephraims Breite*.
- 26 September: End of "Schmargendorfer Tagebuch."
- 27 September: "Worpsweder Tagebuch" begins.
- 5 October: Berlin-Schmargendorf, Misdroyer Straße 1.
- 28 October: First letter to Axel Juncker.
- 19 December: Attends rehearsal of Gerhart Hauptmann's *Michael Kramer* with Lou.
- 22 December: Final entry in "Worpsweder Tagebuch."
- 1901 February: Moves from Misdroyer Straße 1 to Netzlers Hotel, Berlin C, Burgstraße 11.
- 28 February: Lou sends Rilke a "Letzter Zuruf," a "final call," cataloguing his emotional vagaries.
- 5–12 March: Visits mother in Arco.
- 15 March: Bremen, scarlet fever.
- 28 April: Bremen, marries Clara Westhoff in a Lutheran ceremony. Rilke has officially left the Roman Catholic Church but is not a convert to Protestantism.
- May: Honeymoon at Dr. Lahmann's sanatorium, Weißer Hirsch (Radebeul / Dresden).
- End of May: Peasant house rented in Westerwede, near Worpswede.
- 18–25 September: "Das Buch von der Pilgerschaft."
- 12 December: Ruth Rilke born.

- 1901 20 December: *Das tägliche Leben: Drama in zwei Akten* performed at Berlin's Residenztheater, causes audience laughter. Rilke is not present.
- 1902 *Das tägliche Leben* (Munich: Langen).
 Das Buch der Bilder (Berlin: Juncker).
 Die Letzten (Berlin: Juncker).
 Zur Einweihung der Kunsthalle (private printing).
 January: The cousins, Paula and Irene, withdraw stipend established by Jaroslav Rilke.
 9 February: Bremen, lecture on Maurice Maeterlinck.
 15 February: With Gustav Pauli, directs Maeterlinck's *Soeur Béatrice*.
 19 March–16 November: Fourteen reviews for *Bremer Tageblatt und General-Anzeiger*.
 30 May–18 July: Schloß Haseldorf, Holstein, guest of Prince Emil von Schönaich-Carolath.
 26 August: Home in Westerwede dissolved.
 28 August: Paris, 11, rue Toullier.
 1 September: First visit to Rodin.
 6 September: correspondence with Ellen Key begins.
 4 October: Clara arrives; they move to 3, rue de l'Abbé de l'Épée.
 25 December: Rilke and Clara in Paris, Ruth with her grandparents in Oberneuland (near Bremen).
- 1903 *Worpswede: Fritz Mackensen, Otto Modersohn, Fritz Overbeck, Hans Am Ende, Heinrich Vogeler* (Bielefeld and Leipzig: Velhagen & Klasing).
 Auguste Rodin (Berlin: Bard).
 23 March–28 April: Viareggio, "Das Buch von der Armuth und vom Tode."
 28–30 April: Genoa, Avignon, Dijon.
 1 May: Paris, violent attack of influenza.
 1 July: Rilkes leave Paris for Worpswede and the Vogelers.
 circa 24–31 July: Oberneuland, with Ruth and parents-in-law.
 1 August: Worpswede.
 21 August: To Marienbad (Márianské Lázně), Josef Rilke.
 26 August: Munich.

End of August–9 September: Venice, Florence.

10 September: Rome, Rilke lives at Via del Campidoglio 5, Clara has studio and rooms at Villa Strohl Fern.

1 December: Rilke moves to the Studio al Ponte in the park at Villa Strohl Fern.

- 1904 *Geschichten vom lieben Gott* (Leipzig: Insel), dedicated to Ellen Key.
 “Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Otto Rilke (geschrieben 1899)” (*Deutsche Arbeit*, Prague, 1904).
 8 February: Sketch, later discarded, for opening of *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*.
 circa 27 May: The Danish authors Edith Nebelong and Helge Rode, with their child, visit Rilkes.
 circa 5–9 June: Rilkes in Naples.
 14 June: Viareggio.
 17 June: Milan.
 19–22 June: Düsseldorf, art exhibits.
 23–24 June: Bremen, Hamburg, Kiel, Copenhagen. Clara remains in Bremen-Oberneuland.
 25 June: Arrives at Borgebygård, Flädie, Skåne. Guest of the owner, Hanna Larsson, and the artist-poet Ernst Norlind.
 18 July: Visits Lund.
 19–20 August: Copenhagen.
 25 August: Rilke meets Clara in Copenhagen; they return to Borgeby. Ellen Key arrives.
 2 September: Rilkes and Ellen Key at Furuborg, Jonsæder (near Gothenburg), guests of James and Lizzie Gibson.
 8 September: Return to Borgeby.
 12 September–end of September: Copenhagen. Georg Brandes, Sophus Michaelis. Clara seeks employment, in vain, at Royal Porcelain Factory.
 Physical examinations at Dr. C. Ottesen’s sanatorium, Skodsborg.
 2 October: Gibsons and Rilkes send greetings to Ellen Key from Furuborg.
 6 October: Rilke accompanies Clara to Copenhagen; she departs for Germany.
 8 October–2 December: Furuborg.

- 1904 18 November: Finishes second version of *Die weiße Fürstin*, printed in *Die frühen Gedichte* (1909).
 27 November: Rilke and Gibson visit Ellen Key and her brother Mac Key at Oby, Alvesta, Småland. (Source of the Schulin episode in *Malte Laurids Brigge*.)
 3–8 December: Copenhagen, Charlottenlund; visits painter Vilhelm Hammershøj.
 9 December: Leaves Copenhagen via Fredericia for Hamburg, Bremen, Oberneuland.
- 1905 *Das Stunden-Buch enthaltend die drei Bücher: Vom mönchischen Leben / Von der Pilgerschaft / Von der Armuth und vom Tode* (Leipzig: Insel).
 March–April: Sanatorium Weißer Hirsch, with Clara, meets Countess Luise von Schwerin.
 30 April–10 June: Worpswede.
 28 June–9 September: Schloß Friedelhausen, Lollar (Hesse), guests of Luise von Schwerin.
 9 September: Godesberg, guests of Karl and Elisabeth von der Heydt.
 12 September: Paris.
 15 September: Meudon-Val-Fleury, Rodin's secretary.
 21 October–3 November: Cologne, Dresden (lecture), Prague (lecture), Leipzig, Cologne.
 18 December: Worpswede-Oberneuland.
- 1906 *Das Buch der Bilder: Zweite sehr vermehrte Ausgabe* (Berlin & Leipzig: Juncker).
 Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke (Berlin, Leipzig, & Stuttgart: Juncker).
 24 January: Death of Luise von Schwerin, Heidelberg.
 14 March: Death of Josef Rilke, Prague.
 2 April: Meudon.
 12 May: Break with Rodin; Paris, 29, rue Cassette.
 29 July–16 August: Belgian trip with Clara and Ruth.
 17–31 August: Godesberg (von der Heydts).
 1–8 September: Braunfels, Weilburg.
 8 September–3 October: Schloß Friedelhausen.

5 October–24 November: Berlin-Grunewald.

29 November: Naples.

4 December: Capri, Villa Discopoli, guest of Luise von Schwerin's sister, Alice Fachndrich.

From now on, Rilke's publisher was Anton Kippenberg of the Insel-Verlag. The first volume of *Neue Gedichte*, dedicated to Karl and Elisabeth von der Heydt, appeared with Insel in December 1907; *Der Neuen Gedichte anderer Teil* in 1908, dedicated to Auguste Rodin; *Die Frühen Gedichte* (revisions of *Mir zur Feier* and *Die weiße Fürstin: Eine Szene am Meer*), and *Requiem* ("Für eine Freundin" [Paula Modersohn-Becker], "Für Wolf Graf von Kalckreuth") in 1909; *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* in 1910. On 9 December 1909, in Paris, Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis, the owner of Castle Duino, invited "Herr Rielke" to tea.

I. Prague

1: Vally, Hidigeigei, and Others

THE TALE OF RENÉ RILKE'S VICISSITUDES, as a child and adolescent, has often been told:¹ his cossetting by his mother, his attendance, often interrupted by illnesses, at Prague's Piarists' School, his parents' marital troubles and divorce, his enrollment in the junior military school at Sankt Pölten, where he spent four years, his advancement to the upper and more rigorous academy at Mährisch-Weißkirchen (a catastrophe, with long spells in the infirmary), and then his eight months at the commercial institute in Linz, where he appears to have led a mildly dissolute life.²

From Muzot, on 18 December 1925, in a famous postscript, he told Arthur Fischer-Colbric, an inquisitive Linz poet: "In Linz könnte freilich niemand über mich 'Auskünfte' geben: die unglücklichen, dort verbrachten Monate fassen eine Zeit zusammen, da ich mir selber ganz unkenntlich war: wie sehr muß ichs erst den Anderen gewesen sein!" (*GB* 5:389; In Linz, of course, no one could supply information about me: the unhappy months I spent there constitute a time when I was quite unrecognizable to myself: how much [more] then, I must have been that to others!). After his flight to Vienna with the nanny, Olga Blumauer, it was plainly a question of what to do with the troubled youth next.

His paternal uncle Jaroslav Rilke (1833–92) devised a plan — to submit René, going on seventeen, to a program of rigorous cramming, in order to make up for the classical-gymnasium education he had missed in his half-a-decade as a cadet. Perhaps there was some thought of eventually having René enter the law practice Jaroslav had established. Jaroslav, awarded an honorific knighthood by the emperor in 1873, as "Ritter von Rülken," was a bright, ambitious, and thoroughly successful man. A relative, Anna Grosser-Rilke, has left a glowing picture of him: he was a "leader of the German party in Prague" and not only "a nobleman, inside and out," but exceptionally intelligent; he commanded an enviable oratorical gift, and was, as well, "a close student of human nature" to which insight one might attribute "the plans he made for his nephew."³

Neither of René's divorced parents was in a position to take him in. His mother, Sophie (or Phia) Rilke, née Entz (1851–1931), was often in Vienna, enjoying the nimbus of her admired emperor, Franz Josef, and, in the opinion of Anna Grosser-Rilke, was "a little highly-strung." His father, Josef Rilke (1838–1906), long an officer's candidate but never commissioned, had become a railroad official (thanks to Jaroslav) and, handsome

as he was, had blossomed as a lady's man, if not a *roué*. In his memoiristic novel, *Rebellische Herzen* (Rebellious Hearts, 1957), Max Brod left a portrait of Josef Rilke in his later years:

When in those long-past days the citizenry [of Prague] went strolling on the "Graben," the old gentleman, who resembled a smart cavalry officer in civilian dress, took up his post at the turning point of the promenade and gazed deeply into the eyes of the pretty, well-protected young ladies, making them blush. He was only a simple official of the Austrian northern line, but everyone could take him for a French fire-eater, a marquis grown gray on the field of battle and an army-commander of Louis le Grande.⁴

Josef Rilke surely did not want his bachelor's life disturbed. Thus it seemed appropriate to quarter René in the spare room of Jaroslav's and Josef's sister Gabriele von Kutschera (1836–1909), recently separated from her husband, Wenzel Ritter von Kutschera-Woborsky, a public prosecutor and Jaroslav's professional colleague.

René spent the summer of 1892 at Schönfeld (Krásno) in northern Bohemia, preparing for the educational program laid out for him. (Schönfeld, by the way, would remain an almost wholly German-speaking town until the summer of 1945.) But the Prague in which René then settled down to study was a linguistic-cultural powder keg. The city Mozart had loved from his four visits there had been a placid place, with German as its predominant and socially acceptable tongue. Mozart's final Prague stay, in September 1791, a few months before his death, was for the premiere of *La Clemenza di Tito* and the coronation of the Emperor Leopold II as King of Bohemia. Franz Xaver Niemetschek, his first biographer (1808), a Czech, wrote: "To go to Prague, to write for his dear Bohemians, had too much charm for him to be able to refuse it."⁵ But when the Rhineland Clemens Brentano stayed there some two decades later on (and wrote the unperformable verse-drama *Die Gründung Prags* about the legendary founding of the city by Libuše), he sensed that something was amiss. In April 1812 he wrote to his friend and fellow author Achim von Arnim: "Otherwise, things here are a heap of the most manifold baseness. Nowhere love of the fatherland nor of learning nor of art. Hunger amid the poor, the most extreme immorality amidst the rich. No sense of history, no political standpoint."⁶ Does Brentano (1778–1842) mean a larger German fatherland, or the Austrian Empire, or the Kingdom of Bohemia? One thing is clear: the poor were the proletariat, largely Czech-speaking among themselves, the rich were German-speaking, and macaronic "Küchelböhmisches" (kitchen Bohemian), a German-Czech mix, was the means of communication between downstairs and upstairs.

With the rapid growth of Czech pride, a tipping point was reached at mid-century. The Slavic Congress, held in 1848 on Prague's Sophieninsel (Zofin, then changed to Slovanský ostrov, Slavic Island), was an unmistakable sign of Czech (and Pan-Slavic) self-awareness, albeit it was attended by Bohemian-born German-language authors (Karl Egon Ebert, Moritz Hartmann, Alfred Meißner, still confident of a shared "Bohemian" identity). The music critic and aesthete Eduard Hanslick (1825–1904), a Prague native, destined to be so detested by Richard Wagner, recalled in his autobiography, *Aus meinem Leben* (From My Life, 1894) that in his youth the upper and middle classes spoke only German plus some Czech crumbs for the servants. He himself neither spoke nor wrote Czech and left Prague in 1847 for his studies, and then a brilliant career, in Vienna. Writing in his old age, he was astonished, he said, at the change that had come over his home city, with Czech cultural institutions unimaginable in the past: a national theater, a Czech university, and a Czech academy of sciences. From 1861 municipal administration was in the hands of a Czech majority; by 1881, the population broke down into 81.3% Czech speakers and 17.9% "Germans." Prague's factories had long since attracted large numbers of Czech-speakers from the countryside. Baedeker's *Österreich-Ungarn* (1895) says that street-signs, "unfortunately," are mostly in Czech alone, so that "for a stranger, orientation is difficult."

A striking symptom of the change, and of the hatred of the new Czech majority for its fellow inhabitants, now fallen from preeminence with dizzying speed, is the first opera of Bedřich Smetana (1824–84), *Braniboři v Čechách*, composed after he had returned from his stints as conductor in Sweden. (Within Gothenburg's musical circles, his operative language was German, which he commanded better, in those days, than his native Czech.) The text was by Karel Sabina, the librettist-to-be of *The Bartered Bride* (see chapter 2), whom Smetana let drop like a hot potato when it was revealed that the impecunious Sabina was a small-time informer for the Austrian police. *The Brandenburgers in Bohemia* was based on a notorious episode of circa 1285: Duke Otto of Brandenburg, appointed guardian to little King Venceslas II, allowed his occupying troops to run wild, looting and killing, it was rumored with the collaboration of Prague's German merchant colony. Dipping into František Palacký's great history of Bohemia (first written in German), Smetana-Sabina meant to win a prize (and did) offered by a member of an ancient Bohemian noble family, the artist Ferdinand von Harrach, for a "truly national opera." (Rilke called the Harrachs' big "Stadtpalais," opposite the house where he was born, to the attention of Nanny Wunderly-Volkart when she visited Prague in 1920.) The opera, composed in 1863, had its premiere — after delays caused by a recalcitrant conductor, replaced by Smetana himself,

and a coloratura (no showy number for her) — at the “Interim Theater,” the predecessor of the National Theater, on 5 January 1866. The villain of the piece, a wealthy Prague German named Tausendmark, lusts after a daughter of the Lord Mayor, Volfram Olbramović, and kidnaps her and her two sisters. Prague’s vagabonds, led by a runaway serf, the beggar-king Jíra, propose to join in the looting, but then, reminded of their patriotic duty by Olbramović, they drive the Brandenburg interlopers away. The cowardly traitor and spy, Tausendmark, captured by Jíra, is dragged off to justice and execution. Ludiše, the lead soprano, will be reunited with the honest burgher Junoš (think of ‘junák,’ a strapping young man or hero), and Jíra — by far the opera’s most interesting role — is offered sanctuary by Olbramović at the latter’s estate outside of Prague, where, the Lord Mayor sings, they will be friends. Musically quite up-to-date (it was accused of being Wagnerian) but a hodgepodge of sociological implications, its central anti-Prague-German message was more than clear.

This was the unsettled world in which René found himself. The 124 extant letters⁷ and notes from René to Valerie von David-Rhonfeld (1874–1947), the daughter of a colonel in the Austro-Hungarian army, are a record of the poet’s emotional ups and downs, his stressful and compressed education, and — something often overlooked — his reactions to life in a community awash with hostility. The correspondence has a checkered history. After Rilke’s death on 29 December 1926, Valerie, who had preserved the correspondence — written between 9 January 1893 and 14 June 1896 — during the ensuing thirty years, decided to reap some profit from it. She turned a portion over to the Prague littérateur Paul Leppin (1878–1945) in hopes of attracting a publisher’s attention for the lot. In Leppin’s “Der neunzehnjährige Rilke” (The Nineteen-Year-Old Rilke),⁸ the main exhibit was Rilke’s long birthday letter of 4 December 1894, written “before midnight.” The letter subsequently achieved much fame in Rilke biographies; it contained René’s account of “die licht-arme Geschichte meiner verfehlten Jugend” (the light-impooverished story of my failed youth), in which his mother, who loved him only when she could show him off, as a little boy, to her friends, bore the blame.

Leppin printed the letter with omissions and changes. In his printing, the word “Mutter” in parentheses was inserted following the phrase, “die Laune eines vergnügungssüchtigen, erbärmlichen Wesens” (the fancy of a pleasure-seeking, wretched creature). Was this a clarification put in by Valerie? The book-and-manuscript dealer Curt Hirschfeld, to whom Valerie had sent the whole correspondence with the intention of selling it, also made extensive use of the birthday letter in his “Die Rilke-Erinnerungen Valerie von David-Rhonfelds.” According to Valerie in her letters to Hirschfeld, René’s mother was “highly gifted and very pleasure-loving,” and his father “an extremely handsome man, to be sure, but a hard-

hearted egoist,” paraphrases from the birthday letter. As for René himself (who, as it were, had abandoned her), he was simply a mess: pimples, pustules, halitosis, “features of repulsive, vulgar ugliness” (VDR, 278); she had taken pity on this poor wretch, whom everyone shunned like a mangy dog. About the quality of Rilke’s first book, *Leben und Lieder*, the publication of which she had underwritten by the (no doubt secret) sale of family heirlooms, supplemented by her pin money, she maintained a more tempered tone; in consideration of the youth of the poet, nothing better was to be expected. René’s letters themselves in Valerie’s description (she showed herself to be an astute businesswoman) also contain wonderful lyric poems, splendid pictures of moods and interesting observations, and vivid descriptions of episodes from the poet’s young life. Even as she copied them, she succumbed to their magic once more (VDR, 291).

The letters were sold to the Prussian State Library; there Rilke’s son-in-law, Carl Sieber, examined them for his work on Rilke’s youth,¹⁰ in which Sieber quoted the farewell note of 28 December 1895, René’s thanks to Valerie for “the gift of freedom” from their informal engagement. Not very gallantly, Sieber portrayed Vally as “considerably older” than René (she was a year and three months his elder), and a sort of temptress, “a player with fire” (123). Working as it were for the family firm, Sieber took revenge for what Valerie had told Hirschfeld about René’s parents and his personal shortcomings. In Sieber’s account, Rilke was by no means badly off at the time of the quasi-affair, or whatever it was; he was healthy and found satisfaction in his work, preparing through private tutorials for the *Matura* and entrance to the university, paid for by the legacy of his late uncle Jaroslav Rilke, a prominent lawyer ennobled in 1873 as “Ritter von Rüliken.” His loving aunt Gabriele Kutschera-Woborsky, with whom René lived, cared for him “in a quiet manner” (113). Valerie had led him down the primrose path, with her affectations, her “artistic” extravagance, her red empire gown and her shepherd’s staff. She was unable to give him “the help in a positive sense,” that she might have bestowed as a “loving woman.” (The perceptive biographer Ralph Freedman suggests that she may have provided her adolescent boyfriend with physical intimacy, or, as one said in the days of René’s youth, the final favors.)¹¹ And René’s feelings for her — despite his fantasies of a traditional marriage and children, described in the letters — were not very deep.

During the Second World War, the correspondence was moved to Cloister Grüssau (changed to Krzeszów in 1945, when the monks and German-speaking inhabitants of the little Silesian town were expelled) for safekeeping. It then landed in the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków, which provided a copy for the Scharffenberg-Stahl edition. The copy made before the original sale by Valerie had been donated by her to the Prague City Archive and was destroyed by fire when the retreating German forces

shelled the Prague City Hall in May 1945. Another set, made by one Dida Čepek, traveled far afield. It was rescued by the scholar Ladislav Matejka.

After leaving Czechoslovakia after 1948, Matejka became lector of Czech at Lund University in Sweden; while there he published Rilke's unknown love-letters, translated by a major Swedish man of letters, Johannes Edfelt.¹² The article's interest lies not in the partial translations of the midnight birthday letter and the thank-you-for-freedom note but in details about Valerie's life after Rilke. She became an anachronistic figure in the streets of Prague, with her empire gown, ivory-handled parasol, and broad-brimmed hat; during the German occupation she lived in some danger (she was one-quarter Jewish, from her maternal grandmother), and in the course of the anti-German atrocities of 1945/46 she was imperiled as a German speaker, albeit her Czech, as the letters prove, was good. Peter Demetz would report that she died in a Prague hospital (1947);¹³ Matejka gave a more melodramatic account of the circumstances of her passing. She lived in seclusion with her cats, descendants of the felines that figure in the correspondence and in a rather nasty article by Paul Leppin;¹⁴ she was found dead when these pets, starving, broke out of the apartment in Prague-Weinberge. This was the part of town where she had lived with her parents at no. 3, Šafařík-Straße in her Rilke days. "She must have wasted away for many days amidst her valuable belongings, her old china, her books and her antiques of various sorts; near her, she also had the fan on whose handle was written the name René Maria Rilke."¹⁵

Closing off the birthday letter, René had used his pet name in this correspondence with Valerie, "Hidi," elsewhere "Hidigeigei" or "Your little gray tomcat"; hers was "Piepmatz," possibly meaning dicky bird. (Valerie's — or Vally's — letters to René, the other voice in the love duet, are missing forever, as far as one knows.) Sieber mentions the feline appellations as signs that the friendship was superficial; the nomenclature is surely a reminder that both correspondents were young and a little silly. They can also, to contemporary eyes, have a sexual connotation. Whatever they mean, they tell something about the cultural ambience in which René and Vally had been brought up. The names originated with Josef Viktor von Scheffel's *Der Trompeter von Säckingen* (*The Trumpeter of Säckingen*), first published in 1854, which was one of the bestsellers of its time and made the fortune of the Stuttgart publisher Bong. It was fitted out with illustrations by Anton von Werner (a happy coincidence, since Werner was also the Christian name of the trumpeter), the "official painter" of Wilhelmine Germany. By 1913, it had reached 299 printings.

Scheffel's poem consists of sixteen cantos, principally in trochaic tetrameter and unrhymed, in imitation of Heine's *Atta Troll*; one, number 14, "Das Büchlein der Lieder" (The Little Book of Songs, another Heine allusion) is in rhymed quatrains. *Der Trompeter* tells the story of

Werner Kirchhof, an unenthusiastic law student at Heidelberg but a zealous trumpet player, who leaves the university, finds his way to a parsonage in the Black Forest, and is advised by the friendly priest to go to nearby Säckingen (on the upper Rhine) to seek protection (and reform) from the town's patron saint, Fridolin. He is recruited by the baron of Säckingen's local castle — a veteran of the Thirty Years' War — for the baron's amateur orchestra and also gives trumpet lessons to the baron's daughter, Margareta. (The baron is the owner of the tomcat, Hidigeigei.) When rebellious peasants attack the castle, Werner leads its defense, is wounded, and nursed back to health by Margareta — they fall in love, but the commoner Werner's suit is rejected by the baron. Brokenhearted, Werner goes to Rome and becomes a member of the musical establishment of Pope Innocent VI (the year is 1674). In time he is spied in Saint Peter's by Margareta, on a pious visit; the kindly pontiff dubs the trumpeter (and now conductor) "Marchese Camposanto," and the expected happy ending is achieved. The poem's enormous popularity rested on its love- and action-scenes, its touristic views (Heidelberg, the Schwarzwald, picturesque Säckingen, baroque Rome), and its historical inserts (Fridolin's conversion of the heathen Germans, the baron's memories of the great war), all told with exuberant humor and German cultural patriotism: *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* is coeval with it, and Werner is praised by Innocent as "the German master." The lyrics of "Das Büchlein der Lieder" captured special attention: the university songs of Werner, of the mysterious "quiet man" (a spirit he meets in the woods), of Werner upon his arrival in Italy (or "Welschland"), of the bereft Margareta, and — a special hit — of the baron's tomcat, Hidigeigei.

The prologue of *Der Trompeter* — from Capri, where the whole was written — implies a connection between Scheffel and the tomcat ("Who there is the black-hued stranger / Who on Don Pagano's roof goes / Back and forth like to a tomcat!"). The introduction to the third edition of 1862 is spoken by Hidigeigei himself. Hidigeigei's effectiveness as a drawing card is attested to by Baedeker's *Italien von den Alpen bis Neapel* (sixth edition, 1908): Capri's coffee house and beer hall are named "Zum Kater Hidigeigei" (At the Sign of the Tomcat Hidigeigei), located on the Piazza and a gathering place of Germans (draft beer is served in the wintertime). One has to assume that a much more mature Rilke, during his stays on Capri in 1906/7 and 1908 at the Villa Discopoli of Frau Alice Faehndrich, a born Freiin von Nordeck zur Rabenau, avoided the Hidigeigei café and beer hall like the plague. The Maeterlinck translator Leopold von Schlözer, who strolled around Capri with the poet in May 1907 (the von Schlözers, she a born Baroness von der Ropp, were visiting at the Villa Discopoli), recalled that while he and the poet were engaged in elevated conversation, they bumped into a band of rowdy German tourists, mounted on

donkeys and armed with cameras. The noisy group cried, as it broke up: "See you tonight at Hidigeigei's, you'll be there, won't you? There at least you get tolerable beer." As the tourists rode away, Schlözer heard one of them whistle the waltz from *The Merry Widow*; it must have been "Lippen schweigen, flüstern Geigen, Hab mich lieb" (Lips are silent, fiddles whisper: Love me). Looking around, Schlözer found that Rilke had disappeared.¹⁶

Composers were very quickly drawn to *Der Trompeter*. Hugo Wolf set some of Hidigeigei's texts (as well as other Scheffel poems). The young Mahler, second conductor at the Kassel Opera, wrote music to accompany "tableaux vivants" from Scheffel's poem; he detested the work, but a tune inspired by it, "Werner's Trumpet Song," survived in the "Blumine" movement of his First Symphony, which movement was then discarded. The Alsatian Victor Nessler (1841–90), associate orchestral director at the Leipzig city theater, composed *Der Trompeter von Säckingen*, which had its premiere there in 1884 and began its triumphant progress across the opera stages of Germany and beyond. It very quickly reached Prague's Neues Deutsches Theater, where it was conducted by Gustav Mahler (who again detested it) in 1885 and it was performed very frequently thereafter.¹⁷

Did René, in a bourgeois atmosphere permeated with *Der Trompeter*, first apply the name of the poetic cat to himself? (A little later on, in his correspondence with a well born member of his Prague world, Láskva van Oestéren, he styled himself her "Schloßpoet," her castle poet, in memory of Goethe's *Tasso*.) Or did this element of the verbal games the young lovers played have its source in Vally, the cat fancier? René did not object; his literary taste was as yet scarcely refined. (Can one imagine "Loris," the young Hugo von Hofmansthal, letting himself be called "Hidigeigei" by his great and good friend, Poldi, Leopold von Andrian-Werburg?) Both René and Vally knew the Scheffel poem; it is far more likely that Vally had heard and seen the opera. (For practical reasons, Hidi does not appear in the libretto, but inventive stage managers easily gave him a walk-on part, to the audience's delight.) Whichever partner came up with the name, it was flattering, it allowed René to be mocking of himself and others, and as said above, it was vaguely daring.

The long hesitance of the Rilke heirs about allowing the publication of the correspondence was caused not only by its often quite daffy (and, in a way, touching) tone, pleas, complaints, and confessions to Vally but still more by René's vituperation against his mother. Number 44, undated, addressed to "Mein süßes schönes so grenzenlos geliebtes angebetetes Piepmatz, meine — ewig, *ewig* meine herrliche Vally! –Lieb!" (VDR, 91; My sweet beautiful so boundlessly loved revered dickybird, my — eternally, *eternally* my glorious Vally! Dear!), continues: "Sollten sie endlich meine Ex-Mutter, doch *endlich* einmal in eine Idioten Anstalt schaffen,

oder in ein Irrenhaus, wo sie ihre tollhäuslerischen Ansichten gemach an Mann bringen kann" (VDR, 91; Someday they should finally put my ex-mother into an institution for idiots, or into an asylum, where she can comfortably express her lunatic opinions). Does the boy mean Phia Rilke's rabid Roman Catholicism or her contempt for Czech speakers? He likes to throw out hints about the divorcee's life style and friends; there is contemptuous allusion to "a certain person in Carlsbad" where Phia Rilke liked to spend time, and he tells Vally that he has not informed "the well-born lady Phia" about the successful results of his annual examinations after his tutorials. He seems to have heard rumors about multiple flirtations — from his father, or, more likely, from the aunt with whom he lived. "Nebst dem liebenswürdigen 'alten' Herrn, jenem Gutsbesitzer ist ja nun auch der Sultan von Johore abgereist — der aber gewiß ebenso wie jener 'alte' Herr nicht abstehen wird, mit der geistreichen schwarzen Dame zu correspondieren" (VDR, 77; Together with that obliging "old" gentleman, the estate owner, the sultan of Johore has departed — who however will certainly not desist, just like that "old" gentleman, from corresponding with the brilliant lady in black). Early on, he gave Vally a hint (as he would to other correspondantes: Ellen Key is the best-known but by no means the only case) that she was a kind of mother surrogate for him; in verses stuck into letter no.13 (in the editors' numbering) he played both a wandering and misunderstood outcast and a child:

Und weil alle ohn Erbarmen
Ohne Mitempfinden sind,
Nahmst in Deinen Götterarmen
Auf Du das gequälte Kind. (VDR, 27)

[And since all are without pity,
Lacking sympathy's least trace,
You lifted the tormented child
Into your heavenly embrace.]

Josef Rilke comes off somewhat better in the letters to Vally. René grudgingly appreciated his father's non-interference in the course of studies — a compressed version of the classical gymnasium's — that he undertook: ". . . selbst mein Papa gab mir die Versicherung sich *nicht* um meine Studieneintheilung zu kümmern; er hat es auch bisher *nicht* gethan. Er weiß ich thue gewissenhaft meine Pflicht — alles andere überläßt er ganz mir" (VDR, 34; . . . even my father gave me the assurance he would *not* concern himself with my course of studies; so far he has *not* done so. He knows I'll do my duty — he leaves everything else entirely up to me). To be sure, the former non-commissioned officer was not a very lettered man, and René made mild fun of him, for which he would make up in

“Jugend-Bildnis meines Vaters” (Youthful Portrait of My Father) in the *Neue Gedichte* (SW 1:522), the daguerreotype of his father with “der vollen schmückenden Verschnürung / der schlanken adeligen Uniform” (the full, adorning lacings / of the slendernoble uniform).

In July 1894 René visited Vally and her parents at Lautschin (Loučeň), a hamlet northeast of Prague whose most interesting feature was a castle belonging to the Princes of Thurn und Taxis. Returned to his aunt Gabriele’s apartment on the Wassergasse (Vodičkova) in Prague, he reported that his aunt received him in a friendly way, but his father, who often looked in on his sister, was cool toward him when he arrived for dinner. (René got preserved veal, the grownups ham, details meant to show Vally he was given a second-class menu.) Then he told about the excursion: “Malte ihnen Lautschin herrlich aus, wenngleich ich unsere in der oder jeder Beziehung gemachten üblen Erfahrungen nicht verschwieß” (VDR, 135; I painted a wonderful picture of Lautschin for them, even though I didn’t keep quiet about our unpleasant experiences in that or every connection). One wonders what had befallen the lovers during the visit, the splendors of which René had described for Vally, in a letter-poem written *before* he set out: they would shake the fog from their souls, in Lautschin, they would count the golden hours by the bird calls, hours which, to be sure, would flee all too rapidly. (What had gone wrong? Had the young people been burdened by Vally’s parents?) At any event, Josef and his sister wanted to hear more about Vally’s parents, socially a step up and better off. “Sie lauschten Alle mit gespitzten (Esels)ohren — besonders bei gewissen Stellen, wo es sich um ‘die Herrschaft’ handelte” (VDR, 135; They all listened with pointed (donkey) ears — especially at certain places where it concerned “the master and mistress”; From the letters one deduces that there was no objection on the part of Josef Rilke or Aunt Gabriele to René’s keeping company with the colonel’s daughter.) René confessed that he may have gilded the lily a little: “Daß ich nicht ganz bei der Wahrheit blieb, verleiht der Sache noch geheimnisvollen Reiz” (That I didn’t wholly stick to the truth lends the matter secret charm).

The next month René accompanied his father to Munich, and he wrote to “Meine liebste süße theuerste vieltraute Vally! Meine panička!” (VDR, 139; My most beloved, sweet dearest much-adored Vally! My lady!) from the “work hall” of the Glass Palace (built entirely of glass and iron!), where the annual art exhibits took place from 1 June to 31 October. It offered — René’s excited report — 1807 items, with a special section devoted to the Bavarian historical painter and portraitist Franz von Lenbach. Luckily René is alone, his father — his interest quickly flagging — has flown through everything in five minutes: “Übrigens, ist er für mich — Luft. Und zwar eine solche, die mehr Stickstoff enthält, als Noth thut” (VDR, 140; By the way, for me he is — air. And, to be sure, of a

sort that contains more nitrogen than is necessary). As with the sophomoric humor of the donkey ears, René goes out of his way to hint that his father is intellectually dim. In “Ewald Tragy,” the story (in disguise) of Rilke’s own last days in Prague and his first months as a university student in Munich, Ewald’s father is much more impressive, “vornehm, geachtet, eine sogenannte Persönlichkeit” (*SW* 4:512; distinguished, respected, a so-called personality), a little pedantic, who loves but does not understand his son.¹⁸

The same adolescent bravado is frequently applied in the Vally letters to Gabriele, equipped, like her brother, with donkey’s ears. Letter 27 consists in the main of a long poem that chatters about a “plan of campaign,” directed toward “the old woman,” intended to win her favor with flattery:

Ist sie einmal so gewonnen
Und für alle andern blind, —
Sag ich, daß noch nicht die Sonnen
Ihres Blicks erloschen sind. (*VDR*, 57)

[If, just once, she thus is captured
And for all others blind, I say
That not yet the double sunlight
Of her glance has fled away.]

The next letter, number 28, has a passage about a dinner in the apartment on the Wassergasse (the building had belonged to René’s late Uncle Jaroslav and now belonged to his heirs) which was disturbed by a huge crowd of Czechs marching in the street below their windows on their way to the Karlsplatz (Karlovo náměstí), singing one of their familiar satirical songs, a frequent event in this time of linguistic tension. The mob had no doubt set out southward from its gathering place on the Wenzelsplatz (Václavské náměstí), and it took the shortest way to the still bigger square. Vally could imagine how the aunt behaved: “‘Gott, daß sie nur kein Fenster einschlagen 3 fl 80 kostet ja eine Scheibe . . .’ Der Schrecken und die Erregung zwangen sie bald ihre Liegestatt aufzusuchen wo sie süß träumen konnte von zerschlagenen Fensterscheiben und — leeren Portemon[n]jaies” (*VDR*, 59; “God, I hope they don’t break a window a single pane costs, of course, 3 florins 80 . . .” The fright and excitement soon forced her to her place of rest where she could sweetly dream of shattered windowpanes — and empty purses). How can one be sure that here René is not making fun of Gabriele’s panic and her cheapness as a cover for his own nervousness? The mocking songs of the mob are directed at the city’s and the country’s German-speaking minority, and René’s description of the “weihevollen Klängen” (solemn sounds) of the songs is also defensive irony.

A couple of passages make one suspect that René did errands for his aunt-landlady and took the chance to make further and coarser fun of her to Vally. After a meeting with his beloved, broken off when her mother called her home early (at seven), “Ich ging also dann — hielt mich nur noch in einer Trafik auf, eine Marke zu besorgen für das L. . . ! — Schad um die 5 Kreuzer, die das immer kostet” (*VDR*, 106; So I left then — stopped only in a tobacco shop to buy a stamp for the L. . . ! — too bad about the 5 Kreuzer that always costs). The complaint about the cost is doubtless not his own but aimed at his aunt’s tightfistedness. The crux of the passage, though, is the abbreviated L word, which must stand for “Luder,” slut, and is, one has to assume, applied to Gabriele. His harping on Gabriele’s niggardliness takes a strained and fanciful shape in letter 108 — was Vally’s flagging admirer trying ever harder to think of something to say? — in which the tomcat persona has a central part. Hidigeigei went off to his exile, in the company of “His Majesty King Quail,” who said very little on the whole way home, sailing as it were under the flag of the liqueur kümmel. (Very often the reader of the correspondence has to guess: had there been a party or reception at the Davids’, and René took home some tasty leftovers?) “Er klagte auch nicht, als sich eine halbe Stunde später der Hidi über ihn warf und ihn vor den neidischen Glut- augen der Tante ritzeratze verzehrte. Der schmeckte freilich sehr fein” (*VDR*, 197; He [King Quail] didn’t complain either when a half hour later Hidi cast himself upon him and devoured him one-two-three before his aunt’s eyes, glowing with envy. Of course, he tasted very good). But His Majesty would have tasted better still if he could have been devoured in the “fifth room” (Vally’s?) together with the letter’s recipient, “dear, sweet panička.” The Hidi-story goes on and on; after Hidi had conquered the king of the air in a greasy duel, and in a truly barbaric Hidigeigei-cat-fashion had gobbled the defeated foe as a punishment, he went off — with a heavy, full, round stomach, the way cats do when they have nibbled a great deal — in his little nightshirt into his little bed (“im Hemderl ins Betterl”). The cute cat humor — of which the passage just paraphrased is not an isolated example — is a telling element in the childish, or juvenile, air René created in his letters.

Much of the lambasting of René’s family circle, such as, for example, that of Aunt Auguste, perhaps not a blood relative, is done for comical effect: René takes it for granted that Vally knows her. Leaving the Davids’ apartment, René bumped into her, “shoving herself along” in an indeterminate direction. “Sie frug nach meinem Befinden und meinte ich ginge heut’ — als ob ich müde wäre” (*VDR*, 61; She asked how I was and expressed the opinion that today I was walking — as if I were tired). René replied that his books were too heavy, which made Aunt Auguste begin a tirade about the advantages and disadvantages of yellow shoes (was he

wearing such?), so that he finally pleaded a need to take a streetcar and jumped on board the next one. (Aunt Auguste is plainly both a chatterbox and a snoop.) Another time, after some beautiful moments in that fifth room at the Davids', he went on to the theater, where he was received in a friendly fashion by his father, someone who may have been his father's brother-in-law,¹⁹ and Aunt Auguste in "that high priest's garb," adorned with glittering stones. She wore a little white straw hat with a rose-colored cockade, and at the back of her collar a little white bow peeked out coquettishly (*VDR*, 94). The attention René pays to Aunt Auguste's outfit should be compared to the reverent care given Vally's costume (in a dream), a silver-gray silken gown, with a broad fold in the manner of Watteau on the back, and a long train; the gown's stomacher was sprinkled with large gray pearls (*VDR*, 66). Whether making fun of Aunt Auguste or flattering his beloved, René had a keen eye — which he would never lose — for feminine apparel.

Other relatives were the object of René's special detestation and nasty wit. His mother's sister Charlotte had wedded well (Phia Entz surely had not), a Colonel Mähler von Mählersheim,²⁰ and Charlotte kept a sharp eye on her nephew. Her daughter Gisela was a friend of Vally's, and Charlotte may have been piqued that René preferred Vally's company to Gisela's. (René wrote some listless lines into Gisela's album, to the effect that if she always strove for the best, she would not have lived in vain [*SW* 6:1218].) A violent letter (number 26) calls Gisela, an alleged bearer of tales, "die sentimentale stumme Kröte (Gymnophion Gisela)" (*VDR*, 55; the sentimental speechless toad), and gives her the scientific name for a particularly disgusting amphibian, information perhaps picked up in René's biology lessons. There was visiting back and forth between the two colonels' families, the von Rhonfelds and the von Mählersheims, and René compliments Vally on her epistolary reports about these boring affairs. In letter 44 it appears that the arrival of the Mählers robbed the young couple of a few minutes together — the intruders are incorporated into a single ironic phrase, "der Edelmuth (der oft schon bewiesene Edelmuth der Mähler)" (*VDR*, 91; the noble spirit, already often demonstrated, of the Mählers). They had been impertinent enough to ask Vally to join them. René is beside himself with indignation: "Wenn nur diese niederträchtigen Hunde mal zu bellen aufhören wollten!" (*VDR*, 91; if only these vile dogs would someday stop yelping!). Doubtless the Mählers meddled, as relatives are wont to do: Vally knew, so René wrote with some exaggeration, in letter 16, that no one from his family (that is, the Rilkes) had anything to do with the Mählers, and Charlotte could have no idea at all of what he was studying, nor could she accuse him of wastefulness. The Mählers thought the money Jaroslav Rilke had left for his nephew was being squandered.

René assured Vally that he had never loved G(isela), and that his only connection with her was through the home, Herrengasse (Panská) 16, of the Entzes, his and her well-to-do maternal grandparents. An outburst of letter 38 is apparently aimed straight at Gisela. He does not know how to apologize to Vally for

all die Gemeinheiten die das Luder das mir nur in diesem Leben nie mehr unter die Augen treten soll, — sich gegen Dich erlaubt. Diese aufdringliche Bestie. Ich habe ihr wie ich sie damals sprach längst ins Gesicht gesagt, daß ich sie mehr abscheue als die ärgste Dirne. Und das Luder drängt sich noch immer zu mir.” (VDR, 78)

[all the vile things the slut, who shall never again come before my eyes in this life — allowed herself toward you. The officious beast. When I spoke with her then, I told her straight to her face that I despised her more than the worst wench. And the slut continues to crowd in on me.]

In letter 86, René commissions Vally to find out who has spoiled their happiness; was it the Mähler woman? Or perhaps the Davids’ servant, Anna? “Aber nein es wird schon dieses L. . . , verzeih, im Spiel sein. Wie denn auch nicht?” (VDR, 158; But no, this s[lut], forgive me, will be mixed up in it. And why not?) In letter 94, René tells Vally (again) that some base creature has caused trouble by carrying tales, and “der Herr Papa,” Vally’s father, has sought him out at home, shouting in the resonant staircase at Wassergasse 15B. The humiliated youth casts suspicions right and left: “Ja kann denn dieses elende Natterngezücht nicht schweigen — diese Hunde — wenn ich nur wüßte wer . . . am Ende Kren? Oder doch diese Baronin, diese Bestie?” (VDR, 173; Yes, can’t this brood of vipers not keep quiet — the dogs — if I only knew who . . . In the final analysis Kren? Or, on the other hand, this baroness, this beast?) Might one conjecture that “Kren” — an Austrianism for “*Meerrettich*” (horseradish) — is a private nickname for Gisela Mähler von Mählersheim,²¹ shortly to be transformed into *Meering* von *Meerheim*, and that the baroness is her mother? Elements of a secret language of nicknames — a phenomenon not unknown among teenagers — are sprinkled throughout the correspondence. Assuming his tomcat role, René vows vengeance against the gossips, which he then took in the stories “Familienfest,” “Die Geschwister,” and “Ewald Tragdy.”

“Hidi’s” paws are not always velvety; “Man möchte’ gar nicht denken, daß auch Krallen dran sind” (VDR, 106; One really wouldn’t want to think that there are claws on them). The claws are extended, too, not only at the families, but, for entertainment’s sake, at strangers, as in a letter from the Baltic resort, Misdroy, in the summer of 1895. His affection for Vally was cooling and he wanted to find something to say; at the hotel dinner table were a fiftyish lawyer, red in the face, thin as a rake, and of