

**Rainer Maria Rilke, from *Das Stundenbuch [Book of Hours]*
(1899-1903, published 1905)**

Ich lebe mein Leben in wachsenden Ringen,
die sich über die Dinge ziehn.
Ich werde den letzten vielleicht nicht vollbringen,
aber versuchen will ich ihn.

Ich kreise um Gott, um den uralten Turm,
und ich kreise jahrtausendelang;
und ich weiß noch nicht: bin ich ein Falke, ein Sturm
oder ein großer Gesang.

I live my life in ever widening circles,
each superseding all the previous ones.
Perhaps I never shall succeed in reaching
the final circle, but attempt I will.
I circle around God, the ancient tower,
and have been circling for a thousand years,
and still I do not know: am I a falcon,
a storm, or a continuing great song?

Tr. Albert Ernest Flemming

I live my life in widening circles
that drift out over the things.
I may not achieve the very last,
but it will be my aim.

I circle around God, around the age-old tower;
I've been circling for millennia
and still I don't know: am I a falcon, a storm,
or a sovereign song?

Tr. Edward Snow

I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.
I may not complete this last one
but I give myself to it.

I circle around God, around the primordial tower.
I've been circling for thousands of years
and I still don't know: am I a falcon,
a storm, or a great song?

Tr. Joanna Macy

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Was wirst du tun, Gott, wenn ich sterbe?
Ich bin dein Krug (wenn ich zerscherbe?)
Ich bin dein Trank (wenn ich verderbe?)
Bin dein Gewand und dein Gewerbe,
mit mir verlierst du deinen Sinn.

Nach mir hast du kein Haus, darin
dich Worte, nah und warm, begrüßen.
Es fällt von deinen müden Füßen
die Samtsandale, die ich bin.

Dein großer Mantel läßt dich los.
Dein Blick, den ich mit meiner Wange
warm, wie mit einem Pfühl, empfangen,
wird kommen, wird mich suchen, lange—
und legt beim Sonnenuntergange
sich fremden Steinen in den Schooß.

Was wirst du tun, Gott? Ich bin bange.

What will you do, God, when I die?
I am your jar (if cracked, I lie?)
Your well-spring (if the well go dry?)
I am your craft, your vesture I —
You lose your purpose, losing me.

When I go, your cold house will be
Empty of words that made it sweet.
I am the sandals your bare feet
Will seek and long for, wearily.

Your cloak will fall from aching bones.
Your glance, that my warm cheeks have cheered
As with a cushion long endeared,
Will wonder at a loss so weird;
And, when the sun has disappeared,
Lie in the lap of alien stones.

What will you do, God? I am feared.

Tr. Avrahm Yarmolnksy and Babette Deutsch

What will you do, God, when I die?
I am your jug (and I will shatter)
I am your drink (and I'll go bad)
I am your clothing and your calling,
you'll lose all reason, losing me.

With me gone, you'll have no house
where warm words will welcome you.
Without me, you'll have no sandals:
your exhausted feet will wander bare.

Your mighty cloak will fall away.
Your gaze, which my cheek took in
soft and warm, like a pillow,
will arrive here, look, search long—
and finally at the end of sunset
lie down in the lap of alien stones.

What will you do, God? I'm afraid

Tr. Edward Snow