



Transcending Angels: Rainer Maria Rilke's Duino Elegies

Kathleen L. Komar

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In the 'Duino Elegies,' written between 1912 and 1922, Rainer Maria Rilke attempted to come to terms with his own personal crises and the destruction of European culture during and after World War I. The elegies sought new ways to communicate what seemed ever more incommunicable -- humanity's longing to transcend its moral limitations in a world increasingly dominated by self-consciousness. Rilke's first line asks, "Who, if I cried, would hear me among the angelic orders?" Author Kathleen Komar reveals that Rilke's answer lies, finally, not in the divine realm but in moving beyond the angels in order to return to the humanly possible world transformed by poetic language.

The author discusses each of Rilke's complex and fascinating elegies, offering fresh perspectives and showing their connections to the cycle and the rest of Rilke's poetry. Her study makes available to English-speaking readers the critical issues surrounding the work of a poet whose poetry has exerted an international influence.

Finally, this book is an answer to Rilke's challenge: "To consider art not as a selection from the world, but rather as its total transformation into the glorious...In the sphere of the terrible there can exist nothing so renunciatory and negative that the multiple action of artistic mastery would not leave it behind with a great, positive surplus, as something that affirms existence, that wants to be: as an angel."

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