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THE WINDOW-MOTIF  
IN  
RILKE'S POETRY

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Contents

Introduction . . . . .	3
I. Chronology and Background . . . . .	4
II. The Sonnet "Die Fensterrose" . . . . .	9
III. <u>Les Fenêtres</u> . . . . .	16
IV. The Late Lyric "LÄNGST von uns Wohnenden fort..." . . . . .	43
Conclusion . . . . .	53
References . . . . .	54
Select Bibliography . . . . .	58

### Introduction

In this dissertation my object is twofold: to examine where and how Rilke used the motif of the window, and also to discover the meaning this had for him. To this end, I propose to briefly review the chronology of the major window-poems and the broad background to them in Chapter I. This will in itself reveal just how significant the motif is and where it occurs. The following chapters will be given over to detailed analyses of those poems most significant to the second object of my investigation. Therefore, Chapter II will deal entirely with the earliest of these, "Die Fensterrose", Chapter III with the cycle Les Fenêtres, and Chapter IV with that poem which 'sums up' what Rilke wrote on the window, "LÄNGST, von uns Wohnenden fort,...". Finally, a conclusion will not only summarize my findings, but also indicate the development to the final vision of the window.

I. Chronology and Background.

Rainer Maria Rilke's examination in his poetry of the nature and quality of existence led him to use certain significant and frequently recurring object-motifs as a means to aid in, and concentrate, the findings of such an examination. Of these, one of the most significant, and yet less frequently commented upon than most, is the window.<sup>1)</sup> Already in Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge, the importance of the window, both to Rilke himself and to his poetry, becomes clearly evident: "Aber es ist ein anderer Dichter, den ich lese, ... Ein glücklicher Dichter, der von seinem Fenster erzählt und von den Glastüren seines Bücherschranks, die eine liebe, einsame Weite nachdenklich spiegeln. Gerade der Dichter ist es, der ich hätte werden wollen..."<sup>2)</sup> and "...ich wünschte manchmal, mir so ein volles Schaufenster zu kaufen und mich mit einem Hund dahinterzusetzen für zwanzig Jahre."<sup>3)</sup>

The desirability of the window as an observation post on the world, which is manifested here in Malte, can be seen to have become a reality by virtue alone of the frequent recurrence of the motif in Rilke's work. Quite apart from the great number of lyrics in which the window is merely mentioned or serves as a point of observation,<sup>4)</sup> there are no fewer than three independent poems in German, one complete cycle and three cycle fragments in French, in all of which the window has a primary significance. Interestingly enough, it was not until about the 8th of July, 1906, a mere three years after he began to write Malte, and while still in the process of writing the novel, that Rilke composed the first poem in which the window figures as a primary image. This was the sonnet "Die Fensterrose",<sup>5)</sup> a "Dinggedicht" in which Rilke

examines the symbolism and meaning of the rose-windows of a mediaeval cathedral.

Little more than a year later, on the 19th of July, 1907, Rilke wrote "Béguinage", a two part poem, in which the window plays a highly significant rôle.<sup>6)</sup> In this poem, he observes the daily life and worship of a closed community of nuns, the béguines. He conceives that their houses provide a shelter, a place of concealment, for each béguine and that their small windows reflect the restricted world of the béguinage, indicators of the solitary life within the confines of the convent.

In "Béguinage" (II), the window of the béguines' church is seen from the outside. The thousand panes of this window are considered as reflecting the quiet life of the béguinage. These reflections and counter-reflections mingle, "drink each other up" and age fantastically, like an old wine. Rilke then enlarges upon the effect of this window. The leaded panes have been there and unused for so long that the dust and grime of ages has formed, layer upon layer, on them, so that they are "growing blind". Nobody knows on which side these layers have been formed, yet some panes, indeed, are already dark. In these darkening layers on the window, Rilke sees time and eternity showing. He indicates specifically, in the third strophe, that the grey of an old winter still lies under the reflection of a summer's day. This seems to him as if someone who has been waiting for a long time stands motionless behind the window, and another person waits, crying, in front of it. The "sanftgesinnter/langmütig lange Wartender"<sup>7)</sup> might be seen as the figure of Christ and that of "eine weinend Wartende"<sup>8)</sup> as a béguine nun. This configuration

of a weeping nun before a long-waiting Christ would express the essential activity of the convent throughout the years of its existence. In this way, Rilke sees the age-old history of the béguinage reflected in the window of its church.

After 1907 and "Béguinage", a break in the writing of poems featuring the window ensues, and it is not until nearly seventeen years later that Rilke takes up this motif again with any significant emphasis. The window as a primary motif first reappears in June 1924 with "N'ES-TU pas notre géométrie",<sup>9)</sup> intended as the first of a cycle entitled "La Fenêtre". This was followed a month later, in July 1924, by "La Fenêtre" (II) and (III), "FENÊTRE, toi, ô mesure d'attente", and "ASSIETTE verticale qui nous sert",<sup>10)</sup> at which point the cycle was discontinued. It was no accident, that, despite the early and continued association with France and the enduring influence of certain notable Frenchmen, especially Rodin, Cézanne and Baudelaire, Rilke appears to have made no attempt to compose in French until now. From 1912 to 1922, he suffered the long crisis of doubt and frustration, the many barren periods from which the Duineser Elegien, considered by him to be his major poetical task and work, finally resulted.<sup>11)</sup> This was finished almost simultaneously with the writing and completion of another major work, Die Sonette an Orpheus. In the following period of relative tranquillity and freedom from creative frustration, he was, in spite of increasing physical debility, able to turn to composition in the French language, of which "La Fenêtre" (I), barely preceded by Les Vergers, is one of the earlier results. At this point, the fierce conflict between the driving creative urge and creative frustration had been largely resolved. For this reason, and because it is in a language not native to him,

Rilke's French verse is often seen in the light of minor poetry. While true to a large extent, the long-standing importance of the window to Rilke as an indicator of the quality of existence, especially since much of his major work dealt with just this, makes the neglect of this side of his French poetry, at least, all the more incomprehensible.

Although no French window-poems were composed in 1925, nevertheless, the window must have continued to preoccupy Rilke, for in April 1926 he again took up this motif with "SANGLOT, sanglot, pur sanglot!"<sup>12)</sup>, which is the first written of a new window cycle, Les Fenêtres, and appears as (IX) in the final version of the cycle. In the same month, Rilke wrote two more short window lyrics which were later to be included in this cycle; these were (I) and (VIII). Then in May 1926, came poems (VII), (VI), (V) and (X) in quick succession, and the first two lyrics of 1924 completed the cycle as (III) and (IV) respectively.<sup>13)</sup> Within two months of the composition of Les Fenêtres, two incomplete cycle fragments were written, which were never released for publication. Both bear the same title ("D'un Cycle: Fenêtres")<sup>14)</sup> and, like "La Fenêtre" and Les Fenêtres, examine the quality of human existence through visions of the window seen from many different angles.

Since the window cycle which was finally published, Les Fenêtres, did not appear until mid-summer 1927, posthumously, it is quite certain that Rilke in fact made four attempts to realize his aims in the cycle and that he did not succeed until, having selected, rejected and arranged from amongst all those French window lyrics he wrote, he came up with the ten poems making up Les Fenêtres. This is strongly borne out by a comment Rilke made to Merline in a letter dated the 24th of May,

1926: "Encore quatre Fenêtres nouvelles, sans que je sache leur assigner la place qu'elles prendront dans la suite de nos deux 'séries'." <sup>15)</sup>

Between 12-18 June 1926, Rilke composed "LÄNGST, von uns Wohnenden fort,..." <sup>16)</sup>, his last word in German on the window-motif. It must be borne in mind that, since the poem was written at the same time as Rilke's French poems on the same motif, it may in fact be possible to reveal the true meaning and significance of this lyric through a comparative method of interpretation.

In relation to the size of Rilke's whole work, the window does not at first appear to be a major motif, but, that such a number of poems should deal with the window either centrally or exclusively, and that Rilke's interest in it should extend over such a long period, does highlight the major importance which the poet himself attached to this motif and symbol.

II. The Sonnet "Die Fensterrose".

## Die Fensterrose

DA drin: das träge Treten ihrer Tatzen  
 macht eine Stille, die dich fast verwirrt;  
 und wie dann plötzlich eine von den Katzen  
 den Blick an ihr, der hin und wieder irrt,  
  
 gewaltsam in ihr großes Auge nimmt, -  
 den Blick, der, wie von eines Wirbels Kreis  
 ergriffen, eine kleine Weile schwimmt  
 und dann versinkt und nichts mehr von sich weiß,  
  
 wenn dieses Auge, welches scheinbar ruht,  
 sich auftut und zusammenschlägt mit Tosen  
 und ihn hineinreißt bis ins rote Blut -:  
  
 So griffen einstmals aus dem Dunkelsein  
 der Kathedralen große Fensterrosen  
 ein Herz und rissen es in Gott hinein.<sup>17)</sup>

The poem "Die Fensterrose" is the first of Rilke's lyrics that treats of the window as a primary image. Although a sonnet composed on the classical Petrarchan pattern of 2 quartets and 2 tercets, the metre is not the totally iambic pentameter of the Petrarchan sonnet in all respects. The irregularities fall in lines 1, 3, 10 and 13, all of which contain a single extra unstressed syllable at the end of the line. This is not, however, of consequence to an understanding of the sonnet.

The title of any poem generally gives the reader an expectation of the subject being immediately mentioned in the text. In this poem, despite the title, the rose-window as the subject is not introduced until the final tercet, whilst the initial 11 lines are taken up with a metaphorical statement, divided into two parts. Thus, the sonnet does not fall into the four divisions of the strophes, but into three thematic divisions governed by the semi-colon (at the end of line 2), the colon (line 11) and the final full-stop (line 14).<sup>18)</sup>

The thematic contents of each division are as follows. Firstly, the opening two lines which make up the first division form an expository statement of the setting. The sonnet opens with the statement "DA drin:..." In effect, this laconic phrase sets the general locale of the poem; it is set "within" some place. But the locale is further detailed in the remainder of the line to being a place in which lives, or is kept, some type of animal with paws. Because of the meaning of the foregoing "DA drin:" it has to be assumed that this is a cage. The main statement of this division conveys the impression of the slow but restless pacing of a large animal. This impression of movement is underlined by the alliterative effect of "t(r)" in the phrase "das träge Treten ihrer Tatzen". After such a strong impression of movement, the reader might expect to hear of the noise of the animal's walking, instead, line 2 immediately points out that the walk is silent. This silence is confusing since we expect sound to be associated with any activity involving movement. Therefore, the poet views this noiseless padding as actually creating a silence.

The second division extends for the following 9 lines and contains

what Wolf terms the central metaphor of the poem, which relates both to the glance and to the eye.<sup>19)</sup> This division contains the final two lines of the first quartet, the second quartet and the first tercet. Its opening statement gives a clear indication of what animal the poet has been observing in a cage. It is a large wild cat,<sup>20)</sup> walking up and down, as may be seen from the fact that the glance, following its movements, is described by the relative clause: "der hin und wieder irrt". The animal is in no wise moving in a circular pattern. These two lines and the first line of the second quartet stand together as the first of three subdivisions to be seen in the central metaphor. In it, the great eye of the cat is seen to draw the wandering glance deep down into itself with great force. By this means, the glance and the eye, which are treated in the second and third subdivisions respectively, are linked together.

In the second subdivision, the remaining three lines of the second quartet, the cat's eye is drawn metaphorically as a whirlpool which sucks an object into it; the object then circles momentarily on top of the whirlpool, finally to disappear within it entirely. The metaphor shows a striking validity in this context, in that both German and English speak of the "eye" of a whirlpool. It is, however, not so much the c a t ' s e y e which is of primary importance in this strophe, as that which is drawn into the whirlpool - the o b s e r v e r ' s g l a n c e . Within the syntactical context, the glance is given two characteristics: firstly, it is hesitant and undecided; secondly, after it finally sinks into the whirlpool-eye, it loses all consciousness of itself. These characteristics of the glance strengthen, and are in turn

emphasized by, those qualities so far given to the eye, in words such as "plötzlich", "gewaltsam" and "ergriffen", which denote decidedness, violence and strength respectively on the part of the eye. Moreover, in line 5, the alliterative use of "großes" and "gewaltsam" in close juxtaposition indicates the great power of the cat overall. In the same strophe, the power of the whirlpool-eye is formally underlined by the enjambement from the end of line 6 into line 7.

All these qualities of the eye are even more emphatically laid down in the consideration of the eye itself in the third subdivision, the first tercet. For the eye is drawn antithetically to the glance. It is characterized by an apparent repose, since it "scheinbar ruht". But this belies an underlying decisive mood, inherent in the application of the verbs "auftut", "zusammenschlägt" and "hineinreißt", and by the thunderous noise which the poet perceives in the closing of the eye. The use of these antithetical characteristics impresses on the reader the overwhelming power of the eye over the glance. It is overwhelmingly powerful because the eye seizes upon the glance of the observer and draws it into the centre of the animal itself: "bis ins rote Blut".

Only with the third division, comprising the three lines of the final tercet, is the real subject of the sonnet - "Die Fensterrose" - actually mentioned. From the initial comparative particle, "So", the reader notices, however, that the long contemplation of the eye is in fact a metaphorical statement about the rose-windows of mediaeval cathedrals, as seen from within the church.<sup>21)</sup> The windows must be seen from within, for, on the grounds of the punctuation, the opening statement, "DA drin:", is thematically transposable to the beginning

of the second tercet. "DA drin" is followed by a colon, and the metaphorical statement about the eye of the cat is concluded with a colon. The whole metaphor may be justifiably seen as a parenthetical statement contained within the two colons, and "DA drin:", whilst applying directly to this, also applies to the statement about the window, although widely separated from it by the main body of the sonnet.

Rilke describes the function or effect of the rose-windows in the final tercet of his sonnet:

So griffen einstmals aus dem Dunkelsein  
der Kathedralen große Fensterrosen  
ein Herz und rissen es in Gott hinein.

On a first level of meaning, the rose-window draws the worshipper's heart out of the dim interior of the church and up and outwards into the light which is God. However, "aus dem Dunkelsein [greifen]" may also contain, on a second level of understanding, the mental or spiritual concept of one being drawn out of the darkness of self-consciousness to participate in or with a higher and divine being. Both these meanings are reinforced by the melody of the strophe, which passes from the dark sounds of the first three lines to the light sounds of the final line.

Rilke's sonnet is about mediaeval rose-windows. These had their specific symbolic meaning in the Middle Ages. Like the rose itself, they symbolized Christ or the Madonna greeting the worshipper as he entered the cathedral.<sup>22)</sup> Their colour effect was a mystical one: "Im Lichtrausch der Rose soll das Auge erdverloren untergehen, damit geschehe, was der Mystiker kündet: "Dich essend und trinkend und in

besonderen Stunden mich in dich hüllend, werde ich unsagbare Wonnen genießen."<sup>23)</sup> However, Rilke does not use any of these mediaeval symbolic meanings, nor does he recreate the glorious colour effect of stained glass windows. But his poem describes a similar effect on the mediaeval worshipper. In both cases, the result is the same: the heart of the worshipper enters into an unio mystica with God. In addition, in Rilke's "Dinggedicht", the rose-window is given a new symbolic meaning. Through the transferred epithets of, and the comparison with, the cat metaphor, the rose-window becomes the powerful eye of God.<sup>24)</sup>

Throughout the sonnet, certain characteristics and qualities are given to the cat and its eye. By transferred epithet these also become distinct qualities of the divine eye. They are the adverb "gewaltsam", the adverbial phrases "wie...eines Wirbels Kreis" and "mit Tosen", finally the verbs "zusammenschlägt" and "hineinreißt". The important factor is that all of these terms indicate qualities of strength, decisiveness and violence. If they are characteristics of God's eye, then they allow us to comprehend the type of God whom Rilke envisages. He conceives of an almost Old Testament God, powerful and awesome. This concept is added to by the description of the eye as one "welches scheinbar ruht", which, transferred, attributes to God a quality of ever-lasting motion beneath what is only a seeming tranquillity. Of the glance, when seized by the cat's eye, Rilke says that it "nichts mehr von sich weiß". The same holds true of the heart of the mediaeval believer when drawn, through the power of the rose-window, into a mystical union with God.

As in all his "Dinggedichte", Rilke has, then, established a new

significance in his central object, in this instance the cathedral rose-window, by lifting it to a higher level of meaning and providing an explanation of the essential nature of that object for the reader.

III. Les Fenêtres

In an unpublished letter to Mme Nanny Wunderly-Volkart dated August 27, 1920, Rilke conceives of the window as: "Maß und Rahmen des menschlichen, häuslichen Daseins; als dasjenige Maß..., aus dem wir unsere Vorstellung von der Welt eigentlich schöpfen, dessen Form auf unser Gemüt wirkt, es möge nun das Fenster des Gefangenen, die croisée eines Palastes, die Schiffsluke, die Mansarde, die Fensterrose der Kathedrale sein."<sup>25)</sup> The direct result of this idea was given final shape some years later in the first published edition of the cycle Les Fenêtres.<sup>26)</sup> Yet, as early as 1920, there is evident in this letter a definite statement at least of the various attitudes the poet is going to take to the window in general. For it is to a generalized window that Rilke addresses himself in his later poetry. Whilst he may mention specific types of windows in his letter, poetically the exact shape or place of the window has less or no importance for the window. What is important is that he is speaking of windows.

The chronological order of Rilke's writing of Les Fenêtres becomes important at this point.<sup>27)</sup> For from the fact alone that the poems were not written in the same sequence as that of their final publication, we may assume that some conscious structuring was done in the final ordering to give a cyclical form. It is not, however, a cycle in the traditional sense: unlike Die Sonette an Orpheus there is no unity of poetic or strophic form; there is no strict cyclical composition in terms of thematic development, and no unity or regular succession and alternation of perspectives. Nevertheless, certain principles of ordering can be

established. These might be what made the poet determine the final sequence of the ten poems.

One element which introduces cyclical progression is the motifs of invitation and farewell. The first is found at the beginning of the cycle in (II) where the window itself is seen as inviting the poet. Moreover, in this poem the movement of the curtain should be seen as an additional element of invitation. On the other hand, Rilke introduces the motifs of isolation, loneliness and leave-taking at the end of the cycle. We may conclude that, in respect of these motifs, the cycle ends on the opposite note to that with which it began; invitation, as a process of potential movement from outside in, being set in contrast with leave-taking, a process which indicates a movement from inside outwards, a movement away from participation in communication.

An enclosure of the main body of the cycle is also achieved by the presence of another motif, which nevertheless undergoes a subtle and significant change: the curtains at the window. In the early part of the cycle, in (II), the curtains are seen as wishing to r e v e a l a dear secret. In this particular poem, curtain and window fulfil the same function of invitation. The effect of the curtain is reversed at the end of the cycle in (IX). Here the window is a void: it becomes symbolic of emptiness, loneliness and isolation, and the curtain c o n - c e a l s the abyss of loss.

Both the above motifs serve the same end, insofar as they delineate the bounds of the cycle. But there are further elements which give interrelationship between those poems forming the central body of the

cycle, and between what I shall here term the "inner" and the "outer" poems.

The most important of these may be seen in single motifs which are repeatedly taken up as leitmotifs and thereby developed further. The strongest of the recurring motifs establishes the controlling of the fullness of our existence, by the line of the window-frame. This appears in (III) as "très simple forme / qui sans effort circonscris / notre vie énorme..."<sup>28)</sup> and in so doing creates "...ce peu d'espace autour / dont on est maître."<sup>29)</sup> (IV) takes this up again in viewing the window as our "mesure d'attente".<sup>30)</sup> The idea of it framing "ce peu d'espace" of (III) is developed into the idea of the window as the "prise, par laquelle parmi nous s'égalise / le grand trop du dehors".<sup>31)</sup> In this respect, (IV) is a logical outgrowth from (III): the frame of the window is developed from that which simply delineates into that which actively measures and makes manageable the view which it presents to us. In (VII), the idea of the frame as a limitation upon our lives or our view of life becomes even stronger when it is seen as: "Boucle qui ferme / la vaste ceinture de notre vue."<sup>32)</sup> With the use of the verb "ferme", the window-frame is given the most highly developed function of limitation possible. This view is reinforced in that the word falls in the most emphatic, the most tense position, the end of a line.

The elevation and heightening of the figure seen within the window-frame becomes a leitmotif of almost equal strength as that above, since it occurs in no less than four of the poems - (III), (V), (VIII) and (X).

In the first of these, the figure seen within the frame - "elle" - is given qualities of eternal lastingness by appearing at the window. The more generalized and diversified figures of (V) derive a deeper existential significance from the window. (VIII) repeats "elle" as the enframed, but she is here as if moving out to the every edge of her existence through the agency of the window. This state leads her into a state of dream in which she is understood to be isolated within herself and drawing away from others. Finally, in (X), the isolation aspect of (VIII) is heightened in the figure who appears at the window. The window is seen as a barrier between the person standing at it and the world outside. Thus the various figures at the windows become heightened indicators of several existential states, both with regard to themselves and to the poet outside.

Another important leitmotif of the cycle is the figure of a beloved woman, who may be found somewhere in all of the ten poems.<sup>33)</sup> She is manifestly present in poems (I), (III), (V), (VII) - although here as a memory -, (VIII) and (X). Although no person is stated as present in (II), the moving of the curtain and the poet's uncertain "Qui attendrais-je?"<sup>34)</sup> might imply a person hidden behind the curtain. In poem (IV), the figure of a beloved woman is most definitely to be seen in the lives which move towards one another through the window. Finally, in (IX), the lines "C'est le trop tard, le trop tôt / qui de tes formes d'écident"<sup>35)</sup> reveal the possibility of seeing a shadowy female form at the window. It is not, by any means, an actual human presence, but rather, past and future "amantes", whom the poet envisages at the empty window. This is borne out in the terms used of the curtain, "robe" and "habilles", which

are suggestive of such a human presence.

The final leitmotif of the cycle may be seen in the mirror effect.<sup>36)</sup> This is very closely linked with the window images of (IV) and (VII). In (IV), the mirror effect of the window-pane is seen as symbolic of "une liberté compromise"<sup>37)</sup> Our face looks at itself in the window and is reflected back, unable to pass beyond the window itself. But this is also inextricably mingled with what is seen through it. In its mirror effect the window becomes that which separates (us from the world outside), but, by the mingling of mirror and transparent qualities in the window-pane, it is also that which draws together (the individual and the world). In this way, the mirror effect becomes the means of compromising or restricting our liberty to pass through and beyond the window: it presents a continuous reminder of the self and the inside world of the room. The mirror effect of (VII) is presented in the lines

Fenêtre, dont une image bue  
dans la claire carafe germe.<sup>38)</sup>

This supposes that the window, both pane and frame, are manifoldly reflected, not only in the cut and polished glass of a carafe, but also in the liquid which it contains.

A formal element helps in establishing this collection as a cycle as well. In five of the ten poems, (II), (III), (IV), (V) and (VII), the window is apostrophized. This technique tends to emphasize and strengthen the active quality of the window as a measure of existential phenomena in those poems in which it occurs.

To this point, it has already been established that the cycle

displays close unity and interrelationship of parts. Nevertheless, there is one further reason why these poems, structured in the given order, should be considered as a closed cycle. It was pointed out earlier that this is not a cycle from the point of view of traditional thematic development. Indeed, as one reads through the cycle, it becomes increasingly clear that Rilke treats each of the ten windows as a new vision seen always from a different vantage point. This is evident in the way in which the poet's position as observer changes constantly and without regularity or alternation from inside the window to outside it and back again. Indeed, in several cases the observation point cannot be determined exactly. Furthermore, the poet's attitude to the world which lies on the other side of the window also changes continuously, and is commensurate with the ever-changing approach to the window. In fact, Rilke uses a phenomenological approach<sup>39)</sup> in his poems on the window and its influence on our lives. The window is viewed as from different points and it is the varying angles and distances from which the poet sees the window that cause it to show widely differing aspects of our existence. But convincing proof of this can only be achieved through analysis of each of the ten poems, with especial attention to the particular vision of each window and also to the total concept of the window that arises out of these.

The first lyric of Les Fenêtres, a mere ten lines, depicts the briefly-seen image formed within the frame of a window when a woman appears there.

## I.

IL suffit que, sur un balcon  
 ou dans l'encadrement d'une fenêtre,  
 une femme hésite..., pour être  
 celle que nous perdons  
 en l'ayant vue apparaître.

Et si elle lève les bras  
 pour nouer ses cheveux, tendre vase:  
 combien notre perte par là  
 gagne soudain d'emphase  
 et notre malheur d'éclat! 40)

In these two strophes, irregular in rhyme and metre, Rilke views the window-framed image from the outside, and the woman, pausing at the window, becomes for him the image of her whom we lose in having seen her appear. Thus, in the first strophe, the window immediately becomes a barrier between the woman and the poet, the inside and the outside. Rilke also suggests that such an image is created when the woman appears on a balcony. In this case, the barrier effect is shown by the railing in front of the woman. The window in this poem should be conceived of as the sash type, so that even if it were open, the lower sash, which corresponds directly to the balcony railing, would still form a barrier. The window-pane and the window-frame must, however be differentiated between as having each its own function. For the frame is that which attracts the poet's attention to the woman's appearance. This is perhaps formally indicated in the a b b a

rhyme scheme of the first four lines, which might symbolically represent the enframing window. But the pane, with its barrier symbolism, is the agent by which the woman is lost to him. We can therefore establish that this strophe treats primarily a motif of loss. For this is what the poet's observation of the window indicates to him.

The initial two lines of the following strophe centre around a motif of beauty, inherent in the woman's graceful and classical gesture of raising her arms to knot up her hair. By melding his two primary motifs together in the remainder of the strophe, Rilke completes his first vision of the window. As the woman's appearance at the window forms an image in his mind, the barrier effect of the pane conveys an awareness of loss to the poet, a loss which is heightened and emphasized because he sees beauty in the image. And here the window, by virtue of the differing functions of pane and frame, is therefore both the agent and the measure of his loss.

Despite the painful awareness of loss the poet feels in (I), and although a state of emptiness prevails in poem (II), the latter presents the beginnings of a note of optimism.

## II.

TU me proposes, fenêtre étrange, d'attendre;  
 déjà presque bouge ton rideau beige.  
 Devrais-je, ô fenêtre, à ton invite me rendre?  
 Ou me défendre, fenêtre? Qui attendrais-je?

Ne suis-je intact, avec cette vie qui écoute,  
 avec ce cœur tout plein que la perte complète?  
 Avec cette route qui passe devant, et le doute  
 que tu puisses donner ce trop dont le rêve m'arrête?<sup>41)</sup>

Although this poem is divided into two strophes with a regular rhyme scheme, it falls thematically into three. The first thematic section indicates the position of the poet outside an empty window. It is, however, this lack of any enframed person which allows the poet to conceive of the window as inviting him inward. He also sees the curtains at the window, and these, too, fulfil a function of inviting by almost moving. That it almost moves is a strong indication that it hides a secret, which it wishes the poet to share. Therefore we can perceive a strong central motif of invitation in this thematic section. The second comprises the concluding two lines of the first strophe. It is formed of three rhetorical questions which ask whether the poet should yield to the curtain's invitation, whether he should rather forbid himself to accept it, and whom he is waiting for. In this last, H.W. Panthel suggests the hidden presence of a woman.<sup>42)</sup> But certainly, in all of them, the poet expresses his unwillingness to yield to the window's invitation. The third thematic section takes up the whole of the second strophe, which gives the specific reason for the poet's decline. He feels that in the secret of the window which the curtain offers to share with him there is nothing that can add to his existence, which is at once full and incomplete. Indeed, his feeling is so strong, that he rejects both secret and invitation, for he has no precise knowledge of the unfamiliar, secret world behind the window and feels "whole"

in possession of his own, small, familiar world. There is, then, a certain promise in this vision of the window, for it offers to the outside observer to share in something new and unknown. But, because he holds back, we may also conceive of the window here as the symbolic measure of his doubt.

In poem (III), Rilke presents a different vision again: the window as an enframing limitation of our world.

### III.

N'ES-TU pas notre géométrie,  
fenêtre, très simple forme  
qui sans effort circonscris  
notre vie énorme?

Celle qu'on aime n'est jamais plus belle  
que lorsque'on la voit apparaître  
encadrée de toi; c'est, ô fenêtre,  
que tu la rends presque éternelle.

Tous les hasards sont abolis. L'être  
se tient au milieu de l'amour,  
avec ce peu d'espace autour  
dont on est maître.<sup>43)</sup>

Although this poem shows no regularity of metre, it has a highly meaningful rhyme scheme. Strophe 1 indicates the window of this vision

as that form which effortlessly defines the boundaries of our vast lives. The rhyme pattern is a simple a b a b. The window's new effect having been established, strophes 2 and 3 examine precisely this concept of the manner in which the window functions, and the rhyme changes significantly to a b b a. We may conclude that in this respect form parallels content, for in the last two strophes the rhyme scheme mirrors the window's effect of enframing the person who appears at it and thereby also emphasizes this quality as the primary motif of the poem. This holds true despite the differing rhyme scheme of strophe 1, for in content this establishes only a generalized concept which is exemplified in the last two strophes. It is only in these latter that any person appears and that the window actually demonstrates an effect which is only stated in strophe 1. Furthermore, the whole poem forms the first apostrophization to the window - thus a poem which is addressed to the window matches it in form.

Strophe 1 is a single four-line rhetorical question which clearly establishes the window as that form which gives a manageable view of our vast lives. By the use of "géometrie" Rilke raises the window to the level of an exact, almost mathematical form, which governs our lives and the extent of them. This is further underlined in "simple", which might be rendered in English as "basic". In his examination of this effect of the window, Rilke uses a different motif in strophe 2. This is the already familiar one of beauty. Now the window is seen to heighten the beauty of a beloved when she appears there, and this heightening seems to render her eternal. Here an analogy can be drawn between the total image the poet sees and Renaissance and Baroque portraits, which, for the first time, were set in frames to heighten the

actual picture's effect. These frames were painted or leafed with gold, firstly because the colour was an additional heightening element; secondly, because gold was symbolic of durability and eternity. Similarly here, the window-frame enhances the woman's beauty and gives the whole image an apparent lastingness.

Structurally, this poem shows some similarity with (I), for again, in the first strophe, Rilke blends two initial motifs together to indicate a complete vision. For, in making manageable our view of the world, the window abolishes change and therefore acts as a true measure by showing what is and sizing up its significance. In the context of the third strophe, its effect is to size up and reflect love. Since the poet can observe the small space which the window shows at a glance, and since, also, that space reflects love, the latter becomes that which he can control. In this respect, Jacob Steiner comments: "Wenn sich der Blick nur gerade auf das Rechteck konzentriert, dann kann das ein Bild sein für die Kleinheit des Weltinnenraums, in der wir zuhause sind."<sup>44)</sup>

The manner in which the window measures and governs our lives is a motif which is developed increasingly in the following few poems and it brings differing and important corollaries. It must be borne in mind that such differences result because Rilke treats the window always from a new angle. Even in the first line of (IV), the apposition, giving the window a symbolical equation, harks back to "Tous les hasards sont abolis" of (III), but the approach has changed.

## IV.

FENÊTRE, toi, ô mesure d'attente,  
 tant de fois remplie,  
 quand une vie se verse et s'impatiente  
 vers une autre vie.

Toi qui sépares et qui attires,  
 changeante comme la mer, -  
 glace, soudain, où notre figure se mire  
 mêlée à ce qu'on voit à travers;

échantillon d'une liberté compromise  
 par la présence du sort;  
 prise par laquelle parmi nous s'égalise  
 le grand trop du dehors.<sup>45)</sup>

The window is a measure of expectation, is that which gives us a view of an expected outside world. Thus it is, that when one lonely or isolated person makes the move from the inside outwards to contact another person, the window is the agent by which this attempt is made possible. Nevertheless, the window shows a dualism of character. The many "lives" of strophe 1, which try to reach out, are allowed this opportunity by the nature of the window as that which "draws together". But paradoxically, the window is simultaneously that which separates, keeps the self and the outside world apart. The first word of line 3 in strophe 2 explains this paradox. The window is not only a transparent means of access, it is also a mirror. By its very nature, a mirror

reflects back what stands before it; no passage through it is possible. If the window is both transparent and a mirror, then it does not only show us what is outside, but it also reflects our image back at us and keeps us within. Both our own entrapped reflection and what we can see of the outside world are inevitably and inextricably mingled. Beda Allemann, referring to the mingling of transparent and mirror qualities in the window of (IV), says: "Hier vereinigen sich eigenes Spiegel-Bild und durch das Spiegel-Fenster gesehene Landschaft zu einer bedeutsamen Metapher des Raums, in welchem Welt und Ich sich durchdringen."<sup>46)</sup>

Strophe 3 immediately views this intermingling of reflection and the outside world within the window as a compromise of our liberty; we can see what liberty is possible, but we cannot contact the actuality. In such showing but not allowing, an inescapable fate is present. Our liberty is compromised only while we remain at the window, for then the intermingling process does take place. And we must remain at the window to see and wish for contact with the outside world. This is not, however, a malignant fate, for we find the outside world too large to master, offering too many choices, and therefore unmanageable. But the window renders this vast world down to a small and constant portion with which we become as familiar as we are with our own home and room.

"Les Fenêtres" (IV) is an important transitional stage in the cycle, in which several earlier motifs are reiterated, and a future motif of Fate in "LÄNGST, von uns Wohnenden fort..." is alluded to for the first time.

## V.

COMME tu ajoutes à tout,  
 fenêtre, le sens de nos rites:  
 Quelqu'un qui ne serait que debout,  
 dans ton cadre attend ou médite.

Tel distrait, tel paresseux,  
 c'est toi qui le mets en page:  
 il se ressemble un peu,  
 il devient son image.

Perdu dans un vague ennui,  
 l'enfant s'y appuie et reste;  
 il rêve...Ce n'est pas lui,  
 c'est le temps qui use sa veste.

Et les amantes, les y voit-on,  
 immobiles et frêles,  
 percées comme les papillons  
 pour la beauté de leurs ailes.<sup>47)</sup>

In his fifth window, Rilke considers the manner in which the enfaming window gives a deeper existential significance to any person observed at it. The important qualification here is that such significance is one visible only to the outside observer. To exemplify this, Rilke considers states which generally lack an especial significance: standing inactive, listlessness, boredom, and the absorption of women in love

in their own state of mind. Each of these states is characterized by a physical inactivity which renders them meaningless to the observer in the wide context of existence. But when framed by a window, the observer sees the persons in these states in a smaller, more limited context of which they are sole object and possessor. Thereby their present state of existence gains a certain meaningfulness for the observer. An enframing window endows a state of merely standing with the more positive qualities of meditating or waiting. In that the window puts a distinct boundary around a listless or idle person's world for the observer, the whole "picture" enclosed by it comes to serve the purpose of a portrait. It captures and concentrates meaning in the existence of the person portrayed. Strophe 3 considers the effect of the window on a dreamy child. Day-dream is not an aspect of conscious existence, but takes place within the human imagination and is therefore infinite in its extent. But the window again creates a definite and bounded world around such a child and shows the continuing governing by time of the child's state. Finally, in the fourth strophe, Rilke returns to his motif of beauty in considering how the window heightens the significance of existence of women in love. For, as is also indicated in poem (III), the frame of the window reveals not only such women themselves, but also the "aura" of love with which they are surrounded. In this respect, the window highlights love and the qualities of pure beauty which surround it. Thereby, the window-framed image becomes one of the spirit of love, held there by and for its beauty alone. Thus it indicates another meaningful aspect of existence. The simile of the fifth strophe shows strikingly just how the window gives a context to otherwise meaningless states of existence. For the women enframed at the window are like

butterflies which a collector transfixes on card and displays in a showcase so as to draw attention and concentration to them.<sup>48)</sup>

"Les Fenêtres" (VI) is probably the most important poem of the cycle. This would seem to be indicated by several factors of form: it is the only poem which has a sub-title, indeed any title at all, and could therefore stand entirely on its own; it also shows the longest line form and a significantly more flowing rhythm within its lines. Certainly it is the most complex poem of the cycle, for here Rilke investigates the relationship of time to the window and, in so doing, also reviews the position of the window as an intermediary between the inside and the outside worlds.

## VI.

DU fond de la chambre, du lit, ce n'était que pâleur qui sépare,  
la fenêtre stellaire cédant à la fenêtre avare  
qui proclame le jour.

Mais la voici qui accourt, qui se penche, qui reste:  
après l'abandon de la nuit, cette neuve jeunesse céleste  
consent à son tour!

Rien dans le ciel matinal que la tendre amante contemple,  
rien que lui-même, ce ciel, immense exemple:  
profondeur et hauteur!

Sauf les colombes qui font dans l'air de rondes arènes,  
où leur vol allumé en douces courbes promène  
un retour de douceur.

(Fenêtre matinale.)<sup>49)</sup>

Although this poem is structured in two strophes, each having six lines, it must be considered thematically as having four three-line sections, each of which deals with a further aspect of the window. These sections are all similar in form. This similarity may be gauged in that in each section the first two lines show a total of eleven stresses and the final line two stresses. They are not, however, totally identical, for the metre is irregular and the stress pattern of the first two lines of the second section is 5 and 6, the opposite to the 6 and 5 pattern of the other three sections. This does, however, give strophe 2 a completely regular pattern, especially since the rhyme is a regular a a b c b in each strophe. Division into strophes is not arbitrary, for strophe 1 considers two related aspects of the window as night becomes day, whereas strophe 2 deals with two states of the window seen in full daylight.

As the transition from full dark to dawn is watched in the first thematic section, the window is established as the herald of a new day, in that its effect is to give warning of approaching dawn, to "proclaim the day" by showing that faint paleness that streaks the night sky immediately before dawn proper arrives. The stellar window and the dawn window are here indicated as separate entities and thus it is that Rilke can characterize the dawn window as "avare". For it greedily demands the place of the stellar window; it "swallows up" not only the night sky, but also all the heavenly constellations which grow dim as dawn takes its place. Finally, the use of "stellaire" here is sufficiently ambiguous and unqualified that "la fenêtre stellaire" may also be comprehended as a prefiguration of the constellation of the window, which Rilke described in one of his last poems, "LÄNGST, von uns

Wohnenden fort,..."<sup>50)</sup>

In the second section, strophe 1, the window is found to be more than a herald of a new day. The three verbs "accourt", "se penche" and "reste" carry us in one line from the faint paleness in the night sky to full dawn. This introduces a strong element of the passage of time; since it is a process shown by the window, indication of the inexorable progress of time also becomes an effect of this window, which is a transitional one between night and day. The concept of the constellation window is again hinted at in "cette neuve jeunesse céleste". Throughout the whole strophe, but particularly emphasized in the last line, the use of terms indicating surrender, giving way, taking possession and turn already suggest Rilke's view of time as being an endless, ever-repeating cycle.

The third section, which opens strophe 2, introduces the motif of the empty sky. The sky is another form of the outside world, and, because it is empty, it forms an infinitely deep and high expanse, which in itself becomes a vast example of the outside world. But the window can put some limitation upon it, as may be seen in that the line "profondeur et hauteur" has dual referants, the sky and the window, thereby linking them briefly. The use of a colon (end line 8) creates a partial break, and the ellision of subject, object and verb from the following line (9) makes it ambiguous. Thus, the nature of the empty sky is characterized by depth and height and these qualities are also the absolutes which define the window. The sky has depth by being seen through the window and gains height in that the window-frame gives a partitive and therefore measurable view of an infinite expanse.

If the window reflects the vast emptiness of the sky in the third section, then in the fourth it shows in that emptiness animate objects which it contains completely: the doves. The antithesis between the vast emptiness of the outside sky and the traditional symbolism of doves of peace, gentleness and innocence must not be overlooked. Their appearance in the sky makes possible a relief and comfort precluded in the vast empty sky.

The passing time measured by the sixth window has been seen as circular in pattern. It is emphasized in the circular flight of the doves, the nature of whose flight is structurally underlined by the recurrent stress pattern of each thematic section. This awareness of the eternally cyclical nature of time brings with it a reminder that the new day will pass into a new night and make visible once more "la fenêtre stellaire".

Closely as the first strophe of poem (VII) may be linked to the previous poem, in its entirety it adds new facets to Rilke's vision of the window.

#### VII.

FENÊTRE, qu'on cherche souvent  
pour ajouter à la chambre comptée  
tous les grands nombres indomptés  
que la nuit va multipliant.

Fenêtre, où autrefois était assise  
celle qui, en guise de tendresse,

faisait un lent travail qui baisse  
et immobilise...

Fenêtre, dont une image bue  
dans la clair carafe germe.

Boucle qui ferme

la vaste ceinture de notre vue.<sup>51)</sup>

It is significant that this poem should show again the a b b a rhyme pattern, which reflects the enframing effect of the window. For the first strophe lays down the new effect of the window as adding new horizons to the already familiar world of "la chambre comptée". Each of the three strophes forms an apostrophization, and the first establishes that the window is frequently sought to add to our limited rooms that extra scope to be found in the outside world. The darkness of the night hides its numerous daytime forms. In this situation, the window offers the observer no view and imagination can therefore create an infinite number of forms possible in the outside world. It is in this respect that night itself is considered to multiply the forms which the window presents to the observer during the day.

In some respects, the second strophe might be seen as a reiteration of the motif of beauty. For a female form is again present and the presence of a woman and the motif of beauty have always been coupled before. Certainly this strophe considers a past memory which is called up by the apostrophization. This is indicated in the tense and the use of "autrefois". If, then, the motif of beauty is also apparent, the connection of memory, a woman and beauty would suggest this to be a fond

memory of a beloved. "En guise de tendresse" gives convincing validity to this, for the phrase suggests in itself that the memory is concerned with a past love. His looking at the window, before which his beloved once sat, recalls the memory of that love to him.

The final strophe links two different concepts of the window together. The first image, contained in the initial two lines, states a mirror effect. The window itself is manifoldly reflected in a clear carafe within the room. But it is reflected not only in the glass but also in the liquid within the carafe. In this respect, the image of the window can be considered as "swallowed", "bue". This "swallowed" image springs forth again, however, "germe" in the many reflections. It is probable that Rilke's observation of the window's reflection in the carafe led him to the second image by association. The geometric form of the window would be seen greatly reduced in size in reflection, and from this comes the second image, the window as a buckle or clasp which closes the vast belt of our view. The line of the horizon is joined around and together by the window, as by the buckle of a belt.<sup>52)</sup>

"Les Fenêtres" (VIII), like (VII), illustrates yet again the way in which the outside world may be encountered through the window. But here an entirely different reaction and an entirely different result are shown.

#### VIII.

ELLE passe des heures émues  
appuyée à sa fenêtre,  
toute au bord de son être,  
distracte et tendue.

Comme les lévriers en  
 se couchant leurs pattes disposent,  
 son instinct de rêve surprend  
 et règle ces belles choses

que sont ses mains bien placées.

C'est par là que le reste s'enrôle.

Ni les bras, ni les seins, ni l'épaule,  
 ni elle-même ne disent: assez!<sup>53)</sup>

The simple statement of the opening strophe of this poem presents one salient point: the window is the direct cause of the listlessness and tenseness of a woman who stands at it. Therefore, the principal theme of the strophe is that the window becomes the reason for the state of the woman on the edge of her being. Within the thematic unit formed by the second strophe and the first line of the third, this state, "au bord de son être", is further described as "son instinct de rêve". The woman is in a dreaming state on the edge of her existence. The window therefore becomes the cause of her dream also. A motif of beauty enters when the folding of her lovely hands is compared with the delicately positioned paws of greyhounds lying down to sleep. These hands are governed, taken over, by her dreaming, edge-of-existence state. Now her hands may be seen as an outward sign of her inner absorption and distraction. Line 10 shows that by the governing of her hands she is drawn totally into the dreaming state. The final two lines exemplify "le reste" - no part of her has any control over her state. Indeed, she is so caught up in the state of dream that she cannot recall herself

from it at all. Nor, in fact, can the window, which is the cause of her state, but not the controller of it. Her inability to withdraw herself from the state of dream and from the window may be seen as the reason why she spends "des heures émues" at the window.

The enframing and limiting function of some of the earlier windows is no longer envisaged in that of poem (IX). Here it becomes a pure symbol, from which a tone of despondency arises.

## IX.

SANGLOT, sanglot, pur sanglot!

Fenêtre, où nul ne s'appuie!

Inconsolable enclos,

plein de ma pluie!

C'est le trop tard, le trop tôt

qui de tes formes décident:

tu les habilles, rideau,

robe du vide!<sup>54)</sup>

In the first two lines of this poem, the ninth and now empty window is immediately conceived of quite objectively as an expression of pure sorrow. "SANGLOT, sanglot, pur sanglot" is what "[la] Fenêtre, où nul ne s'appuie" expresses. In the third line of the first strophe, the window is personified in "inconsolable" - ability to be consoled being a purely human feature. Only now, after the window has been personified, does the fourth line expressly refer the empty window to the poet's own

life in "plein de ma pluie". Rilke sees that the empty window, being an expression and symbol of sorrow, reflects his own state of emotion as well.

The second strophe may be considered in two parts. In the first two lines, the empty window implicitly becomes a meaningless form. It is stated that only those moments before or after its being empty, when some-one stands at it, allow the window to show something meaningful. At those moments of "fullness", the poet can see something to which he may positively respond. As he reflects about this, Rilke notices, in the final two lines, the curtain at the empty window. He conceives of this as "dressing" the window in all the forms it takes, both early and late. The curtain is referred to as that which would underline the meaning of each form the window takes on. As he grows aware of this function, he realizes that it does the same for the empty window, which it heightens into a "vide", an abyss of sorrow and anguish, which perfectly reflects the sorrow and emptiness in the abyss of his heart.

In poem (X) the cycle Les Fenêtres comes full circle. Until now the window has measured many aspects of our existence, and yet, in the tenth, Rilke's final, vision, it is only a measuring of emptiness and farewell. Here the very nadir of despondency is reached.

## X.

C'EST pour t'avoir vue  
penchée à fenêtre ultime,  
que j'ai compris, que j'ai bu  
tout mon abîme.

En me montrant tes bras  
 tendus vers la nuit,  
 tu as fait que, depuis,  
 ce qui en moi te quitta,  
 me quitte, me fuit...

Ton geste, fut-il la preuve  
 d'un adieu si grand,  
 qu'il me changea en vent,  
 qu'il me versa dans le fleuve?<sup>55)</sup>

There is a strong suggestion of the window's creating a "portrait" in this poem. A woman leaning at the window becomes for the poet a "portrait" of leave-taking and thus of his experiencing loss once again. The concept of pure beauty, inherent in the woman's gesture, and that of loss are perhaps even more strongly linked in this poem than in (I). Seeing the beloved woman leaning out of her window brings home the realization to the poet that he has delved into the depths of his soul and gained nothing. It is for this reason that the window is conceived of as the last. As the woman stretches her arms outwards and upwards to the night, in strophe 2, this becomes a gesture inviting the night and rejecting the poet below and any contact with him. Moreover, not only does her gesture of turning away symbolize a loss of contact and communication, but it also brings realization that he has lost an essential part of himself, has, in fact, attained a state not merely of an existential loss, but of existential emptiness, lack and loss. For this reason, he asks the rhetorical question of strophe 3 (it can only be answered in the affirmative) in which he considers this gesture as

a sign and symbol of so profound and stirring a farewell that it changes his very form of existence. He has nothing left to which to attach his life and it becomes as intangible and uncontrollable as the wind; as unstable and drifting as an object borne along in a swiftly-flowing river. It is perhaps fitting that in this last vision, which conceives of the window as creating a "portrait" of farewell, the final strophe, where the realization of the emptiness that farewell brings to the poet is stated, should follow the rhyme pattern a b b a, thus once and for all formally reflecting the shape of the window.

The above analyses establish that there is a strong relationship of composite units in this collection. Every poem centres around the window and the way in which it operates in that particular form. The poems do not, of course, all depict the same window, but in each case the window is seen to exert an influence on some aspect of human existence. It is most frequently seen as the enframing limitation of our vast world, as a border between two worlds, which assume various different forms, and as a means by which various aspects and meanings of existence are heightened. It is evident, that in many cases several of these functions are combined in one poem. But, as given above, these are only generalized functions, which differ specifically from poem to poem. Because of its wide disparity of function and form, the window eventually becomes "ein Symbol..., das fast die ganze Rilkesche Welt einbegreift".<sup>56)</sup> The window is phenomenologically examined from many different angles and positions. Each window is always quite distinct and entirely separate from any other. And yet the total vision arising conjointly out of all ten poems is the same: the window is always the encompassing and influential geometry of our existence.

IV. The Late Lyric, "LÄNGST, von uns Wohnenden fort,...".

LÄNGST, von uns Wohnenden fort, unter die Sterne versetztes  
Fenster, das feiert und gilt;  
du, nach Leyer und Schwan, überlebendes, letztes  
langsam vergöttlichtes Bild.

Wir gebrauchen dich noch, leicht in die Häuser gerahmte  
Form, die uns Weite versprach.  
Doch das verlassenste oft irdische Fenster ahmte  
deinen Verklärungen nach!

Schicksal warf dich dorthin, sein unendlich gebrauchtes  
Maß für Verlust und Verlauf.  
Fenster aus stetem Gestirn, wandelergriffen taucht es  
über den Zeigenden auf. 57)

Between 12 - 18 June 1926, Rilke wrote his final poem in which the window is a primary motif. For two reasons it is not certain if he meant this poem as a final and conclusive statement about the window: first, the poem is found in the Sämtliche Werke amongst the "Entwürfe"; and second, it remained unpublished, although other poems written within a few months of it were considered complete and polished for publication.

The form of the poem as it stands is complex. Although composed primarily in dactyl metre, all lines of the three strophes show a number of metrical irregularities. Even viewed syllabically, there is regularity only in every second line, all of which have seven syllables. However,

a number of other features which appear in all strophes, indicate a regular form. In terms of accent stress there is an alternation of 6 and 3 stresses per line throughout the poem. This means that in each four-line strophe a stress pattern of 6, 3, 6, 3 appears. Since the whole content of the poem examines the window in its two forms, the heavenly and the earthly, this pattern conceivably represents symbolically the geometric form of the window itself.<sup>58)</sup> The effect of this formal element is underlined by the thematic grouping of the lines, which is partially indicated by the punctuation. For, with complete consistency, the three strophes are each broken into two pairs of lines. Each 6-stress line ends with a feminine rhyme and is joined to its following 3-stress line by enjambement; the latter verse has a strong masculine rhyme and a punctuation mark which indicates a distinct break or conclusion at the line's end. The recurrent 3-stress lines, regular in metre, syllables and accents, mark the rhythmic climaxes of each pair of lines. Further rhythmic climaxes are also created in the line pairs by a caesura, which falls precisely in the middle of each 6-stress verse.

The regularity of form given pairs of lines by means of stress pattern, caesura, syllable count, masculine and feminine rhyme alternation and a regular a b a b rhyme scheme establishes these pairs as the basic structural units of the poem as a whole. For this reason, their content may be indicated as forming a series of six statements about the window, interrelated in pairs to give the strophic form.

The first statement of the opening strophe reads: "LÄNGST, von uns Wohnenden fort, unter die Sterne versetztes / Fenster, das feiert und gilt". The punctuation divides this first apostrophization into three content groups, individually establishing the position and duration of

position, the origin and the nature of the constellation window: "LÄNGST...unter die Sterne versetztes / Fenster", "von uns Wohnenden fort", and "das feiert und gilt". The first states that the window rests among the constellations of the stars and also that it was placed there long ago. In this way it immediately becomes a mythical image. This first line also contains the second content group, which refers to the origin of the window. Once it was part of earthly life. It is their basic nature, that humans are "Wohnende", dwellers, as Rilke understands it. It is a basic aspect of man's mode of life that he has a dwelling, a home. The window is part of this. But that which once, long ago, belonged to man's mode of life has now been placed amidst the stars. The third content group of these two lines shows that, as such a constellation, it is the nature of the window that it "feiert und gilt". The word "feiert" should be understood as "taking part in high festivity", "celebrating" or "commemorating". This, too, is a part of the human way of life, but it has an especial significance in relation to the constellation window. In the human sphere, festivity and commemoration are leisure and resting activities, taking place between the times of work and daily routine - they are thus of limited duration. But resting, "die Feier", in that sense, has become an unlimited aspect of the nature of the constellation. The window "feiert" eternally, and in so doing possesses a lasting validity. The alliteration in the line emphasizes the importance of this statement.

The final two lines of the first strophe form the second statement. This has two content groups and the whole, although self-contained, relates to the first statement in that it details further what the window has become as a constellation. Further linkage is achieved by the fore-going semi-colon, which is less of a conclusive break than the

punctuation at the end of any other statement. The two content groups of this second pair of lines are: "du...überlebendes, letztes / langsam vergöttlichtes Bild," and "nach Leyer und Schwan". In the first, Rilke indicates the starry window as an image which has, with time, acquired a divine character. It is because the window long ago became a constellation, and because, as such, it is lasting and valid, that it has gained a divine character. Both of these reasons are clearly expressed in "langsam vergöttlichtes" and "überlebendes" respectively. This apostrophization, being the most direct in that it is the only place where the window is addressed with a nominative personal pronoun of the familiar form, also emphasizes the raising of the window image to a constellation. The second content group shows that the window shares its divine nature with two others: the lyre and the swan. These are two constellations from antiquity, themselves symbolizing poetry and the artist respectively,<sup>59)</sup> which have survived because they relate to enduringly valid human creativity. For Rilke, the swan has particular reason to survive as a significant constellation, for this is his own symbol of death.<sup>60)</sup> And, as a poet, the Orphic lyre has great symbolic value for him personally.

The first statement of the second strophe reads: "Wir gebrauchen dich noch, leicht in die Häuser gerahmte / Form...". Although there is the possibility of dividing this statement into two content groups, their interrelationship would be such as to make individual explanation and interpretation less easy. Rilke turns his attention on the earthly window and finds that, although it has become a constellation, it is a form which we "Wohnende" still need and use in our houses. Fitting easily into our dwellings, it is useful to us. But it is also a form, "die uns Weite versprach". The earthly window's former usefulness lay in its promising new horizons, but the tense of this clause indicates

it to be something which the earthly window no longer does. For Rilke, the window can no longer promise distance because the majority of windows are urban ones, whose wide view is barred. The second statement of the strophe reveals that the earthly window may, however, come to resemble the constellation. For, "...das verlassenste oft irdische Fenster ahmte / deinen Verklärungen nach". The initial "doch" gives this statement its relationship to the first of the strophe by indicating a difference in direction. The abandoned, lonely window in an earthly dwelling - that is, the most unused - imitates the constellation and thereby becomes similar to it. For, being an empty window, it becomes a window with no fixed purpose, and in this form it resembles the constellation which rests, lasting and valid, in the heavens, having no fixed or defined purpose. Therefore, such an earthly window is a transformed one, just as the window has been itself transformed in becoming a constellation. Both "transformation" and "radiance" are implied in "Verklärungen", which is made manifestly ambiguous by the plural form.

Having viewed the earthly window in the first three lines of strophe 2, Rilke brings the window back to a constellation in the final line. In strophe 3 he observes only the starry window. He considers the agency by which the window was raised into the sky in the first content group of the initial line pair: "Schicksal warf dich dorthin...". Fate placed the window in the night sky as a constellation. It is now clear that Fate's being the agency of the window's elevation is the reason why the constellation is lasting and valid. For Fate is that mysterious external force which works constantly and with significant effect upon all human existence. This reason is made all the more certain by the second content group: "...sein unendlich gebrauchtes / Maß für Verlust und Verlauf".

Fate, too, "needs" the window, using it as its own measure, with which it indicates loss and lapse in human existence. That Fate uses the window as a determining measure confirms the constellation's position and nature. The alliteration of "Verlust und Verlauf" underlines the significance of the concept.

The penultimate statement establishes the loss and lapse which the window, as a tool of Fate, measures and the lastingness and validity of its position in the sky, gained from Fate. The final statement melds these two concepts together in observing the effect of the constellation window on men: "Fenster aus stetem Gestirn, wandelergriffen taucht es über den Zeigenden auf." A division into the first two content groups is indicated by the comma. The first of these details the permanently valid nature of the window. It is made of stars, which are constant. But the window constellation is also "wandelergriffen". This is to be understood as a reference to the changing position of the constellation in the night sky. In this way, the final statement reveals in its first line that the secret nature of the window is that it is simultaneously enduring and changeable. In the final line, a third content group is given, which indicates human presence in "den Zeigenden". Man is thus here characterized, not as a dweller, but as one who looks up and points. When he sees the starry window above him, man points up to it in awe, sensing its deep and secret nature as a measure and symbol of Fate. The link between the final three statements, which thus allows them to stand together as one strophe, is given implicitly in that man's awe and sense of the constellation window as a tool of Fate stems from his awareness of the two aspects of its nature. This is especially significant in light of the ancient traditions concerning stars, which

were considered both as astronomical bodies and as astrological bodies, in which the movements of Fate could be foreseen.

Although the text of this poem is conceivably only a fragment, it should be realized that a certain circularity of form can be seen at its end. The window rises above the "pointers" at the end of the third strophe and this might still be seen as the age-old process of Fate elevating the earthly window into the heavens as a constellation. For, unlike the planets, stars do not rise each night, but merely become visible in the sky as it grows darker, and their seasonal movement is due to the earth's rotation. In terms of the window's rising to become a constellation at this point, a connection is given with strophe 1, where the window is first established as a constellation.

The most striking structural feature of the poem, when seen as a whole, is that lines 2, 6 and 10, the second in each strophe, stand out as central statements about the window. These lines show not only the formal syllabic and accent regularity, the regular metre, rhythmic climaxes and strong masculine line endings, that every second line shows, but also they are the only lines able to stand by themselves as appositions to the apostrophized window. Each comments upon a different aspect of the window. "Fenster, das feiert und gilt" describes essentially a present state of the window; "Form, die uns Weite versprach" comments upon a past effect; finally, "Maß für Verlust und Verlauf" upon a present function. But each statement also indicates the essential content of the strophe in which it is found. Strophe 1 considers what the window has now become; "Fenster, das feiert und gilt" reveals the nature of the constellation window. Strophe 2 is concerned with the

window in its earthly form; "Form, die uns Weite versprach" expresses what its nature was in this form. And the nature of the window as a tool of Fate, which is examined in strophe 3, is crystallized in "Maß für Verlust und Verlauf". To this extent, these three key lines determine the thematic structure of the poem. We must, however, guard against seeing these lines as a conclusive vision of the window. Since the poem is a fragment, a provisional poetic formulation, whose definitiveness and completeness are in doubt, it is by no means certain if it fully expresses what Rilke intended. Nevertheless a crystallization of certain aspects of the window as a symbol is contained in one of the three statements.

Most of the poems of the French cycle, Les Fenêtres, were written in the same year as this poem, 1926. In the statement "Maß für Verlust und Verlauf" a "summary" of certain essential aspects of some of these windows may be seen. In particular, this reflects the windows of poems (I), (II), (IX) and (X), which all show loss and lapse in some form. Poem (I) states this directly and (X) clearly implies it in "tu as fait, que, depuis, / ce qui en moi te quitta, / me quitte, me fuit...". In poems (II) and (IX) the link appears more tenuous, yet, in the situations of a doubtful poet facing the empty window of (II) and the anguished poet before an again empty window in (IX), the window might be conceived of as indicating loss and lapse. In poem (III) of this cycle, another aspect of the statement from "LÄNGST, von uns Wohnenden fort,..." is apparent. The window is there considered as "notre géométrie", a concept clearly reflected by the window's here being described as "Maß". The constellation window as a measure is also to be seen in the "Rahmen" which poems (I) and (X), the clearest indicators

of loss and lapse, form around the cycle. But in no way do the three statements cover all aspects of even this one cycle.

If, however, we realize that the elevation of the window to a constellation was already foreseen by Rilke in the final few years of his life, then "LÄNGST, von uns Wohnenden fort,..." may be understood as a partial culmination of the window-motif. Shortly after writing what were to become "Les Fenêtres" (III) and (IV), in June and July 1924, Rilke considers the elevation of familiar objects to constellations in the fragment "NACH so langer Erfahrung..." when he writes:

Daß wir das tägliche Wesen entwirrn,  
das jeder anders erfuhr,  
machen wir uns ein Nachtgestirn  
aus der gewußten Figur.<sup>61)</sup>

Even at this point, then, before the majority of Les Fenêtres were written, Rilke observes that images may become constellations. But the window is envisaged as a particular constellation earlier still in 1921-22 in the Duineser Elegien. In "Die Zehnte Elegie" the window is already conceived of as one of the constellations above the "Land of Lament":

Und höher die Sterne. Neue. Die Sterne des Leidlands.  
... -Hier,  
siehe: den Reiter, den Stab, und das vollere Sternbild  
nennen sie: Fruchtkranz. Dann weiter, dem Pol zu:  
Wiege; Weg; das Brennende Buch; Puppe; Fenster.<sup>62)</sup>

These are no astronomical constellations, but the images of our world as Rilke sees them, newly elevated because of their enduring validity into poetic constellations. As such a constellation the window reaches

its conclusion in "LÄNGST, von uns Wohnenden fort,...". We cannot conclude whether or not the text of the poem is more than a fragment. Nor can we say more of it in respect of the window-image than that it crystallizes a limited number of aspects of the window's meaning. But, fragment as it might be, this poem clearly does bring the constellation of the window to its final culmination.

### Conclusion

Rilke's major window poetry spans a period of twenty years, 1906-26. Although, over such a long period, no conscious development should even be considered, a certain progression and change is evident in the poet's attitude to the window. In about 1903, before any major window poem was written, Rilke makes a statement in Malte which may be understood as a first aim or desire with regard to the window. He wishes to become "Ein glücklicher Dichter, der von seinem Fenster erzählt und von den Glastüren seines Bücherschranks, die eine liebe, einsame Weite nachdenklich spiegeln."<sup>63)</sup> In 1906, this desire finds a first beginning in "Die Fensterrose" and a continuation in the 1907 poem "Béguinage". For a long interval the window is a recurrent motif, but one of lesser importance. No major window poetry appears. But in 1920 it begins to occupy Rilke's mind in a more significant form than it was in Malte. Now it is seen as a major symbol, as "...dasjenige Maß..., aus dem wir unsere Vorstellung von der Welt eigentlich schöpfen..."<sup>64)</sup> Between 1924 and 1926, Rilke examines this concept of the window thoroughly in the French cycle Les Fenêtres. In the same year, following the prefigured constellation as which the window is mentioned in "Die Zehnte Elegie", the window is elevated into the heavens in "LÄNGST, von uns Wohnenden fort,...". In this final poem, the window has reached its culmination, having passed from metaphor and image to become the final, definitive and highly symbolic constellation.

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Chapter I:

- 1) Cf. O.F. Bollnow, Rilke (Stuttgart, <sup>2</sup>1956), pp. 256 ff.; O.F. Bollnow, "Tür und Fenster", Die Sammlung, XIV (1959), pp. 113 ff.; H.W. Nieschmidt, Fenstergalerie. Window-motifs in German Literature (Hamilton, 1969), pp. 19 f.; H.W. Panthel, "Zu Rilkes Gedichtzyklus 'Les Fenêtres'", Etudes Germaniques, 93 (1969), pp. 48 ff.
- 2) R.M. Rilke, Sämtliche Werke (Wiesbaden, 1955 ff.), VI, p. 745. This work is hereafter quoted as Sämtliche Werke.
- 3) Ibid., p. 747.
- 4) The window occurs as a motif in:
  - Larenopfer: "Im Stübchen", (Sämtliche Werke, I, p. 14), "Vigilien" (II), (p. 48), "Der Fenstersturz", (p. 55).
  - Traumgekrönt: "Träumen" (I), (p. 75) and (XX), (p. 84).
  - Advent: "WARST du ein Kind in froher Schar", (p. 104), "IRGENDWO muß es Paläste geben...", (p. 112), "MIR ist:...", (p. 127).
  - Die Frühen Gedichte: "IST ein Schloß", (p. 162).
  - Das Stunden-Buch: "DICH wundert nicht des Sturmes Wucht", (p. 305), "WENN etwas mir vom Fenster fällt", (p. 320), "DENN, Herr, die großen Städte sind", (p. 345).
  - Das Buch der Bilder: "Aus Einem April", (p. 371), "Die Braut", (p. 378), "Martyrinnen", (p. 382), "Die Konfirmanden", (p. 387), "Vorgefühl", (p. 402), "In der Certosa", (p. 413), "Die Zaren" (III), (p. 430) and (V), (p. 433), "Der Sänger singt vor einem Fürstenkind", (p. 437), "Die aus dem Hause Colonna", (p. 440), "Fragmente aus Verlorenen Tagen", (p. 445), "Der Lesende", (p. 457), "Der Schauende", (p. 459), "Die Blinde", (p. 465).
  - Neue Gedichte Anderer Teil: "Eva", (p. 584), "Die Liebende", (p. 621), "Übung am Klavier", (p. 621).
  - Duineser Elegien: "Die Siebente Elegie", (p. 709), "Die Neunte Elegie", (p. 717), "Die Zehnte Elegie", (p. 721).
  - Uncollected poems: ("An Lou Andreas-Salomé") (III), (Sämtliche Werke, II, p. 39), "PERLEN entrollen...", (p. 42), "SO angestrengt wider die starke Nacht", (p. 52), "Die Große Nacht", (p. 74).
  - Unpublished fragments: ("Notre-Dame-de-Paris") (I), (p. 350) and (II), (p. 351), "SO wie eine Türe, die nicht zubleibt", (p. 379), "WER sagt, daß, wenn ich an ein Fenster träte...", (p. 397).
  - Exercices et Evidences: "L'ENFANT, à la fenêtre, attend le retour de sa mère", (p. 605).
  - Ébauches et Fragments: "DE toujours vous voir...", (p. 743).
- 5) Sämtliche Werke, I, p. 501.
- 6) Ibid., p. 535.

- 8) Ibid., p. 536.
- 9) Ibid., II, p. 548.
- 10) Ibid., p. 549.
- 11) Cf. O.F. Bollnow, Rilke, pp. 10 ff.
- 12) Sämtliche Werke, II, p. 591.
- 13) Ibid., pp. 587 ff. The dates of composition for each poem are given by E. Zinn, p. 934.
- 14) Ibid., pp. 631 f. and pp. 728 f.
- 15) R.M. Rilke et Merline, Correspondances 1920-26, ed. D. Bassermann, p. 580.
- 16) Sämtliche Werke, II, p. 509.

#### Chapter II:

- 17) Ibid., I, p. 501.
- 18) Cf. for the following interpretation E.M. Wolf, "Collision in a Panther's Eye", GLL, XXIII (July, 1970), pp. 340 ff.
- 19) Ibid., p. 343.
- 20) There is no justification for E.M. Wolf's assumption that the animal is a panther (ibid., p. 340).
- 21) E.M. Wolf agrees, but his argument is not convincing. Contextually, it is not the rose-windows that emerge "aus dem Dunkelsein" (ibid., p. 345), but, out of the dark, they seized "ein Herz und rissen es in Gott hinein".
- 22) K. Lipffert, Symbol-Fibel. Eine Hilfe zum Betrachten und Deuten mittelalterlicher Bildwerke (Kassel, 1956), p. 89.
- 23) H. Lützeler, Die christliche Kunst des Abendlandes (Bonn, 1950), p. 118.
- 24) Not, as E.M. Wolf suggests, "the vortex which is the Godhead" (p. 345).

#### Chapter III:

- 25) Quoted after J.R. von Salis, R.M. Rilkes Schweizerjahre (Frauenfeld, 1952), p. 62.
- 26) Ref. Chapter I, p. 7.

- 27) Ref. Chapter I, p. 7 for the detailed chronology.
- 28) Sämtliche Werke, II, p. 587.
- 29) Ibid., p. 587.
- 30) Ibid., p. 588.
- 31) Ibid., p. 588.
- 32) Ibid., p. 590.
- 33) In this observation I follow H.W. Panthel, "Zu Rilkes Gedichtzyklus", pp. 48 ff.
- 34) Sämtliche Werke, II, p. 587.
- 35) Ibid., p. 591.
- 36) Cf. O.F. Bollnow, Rilke, pp. 256 ff.
- 37) Sämtliche Werke, II, p. 588.
- 38) Ibid., p. 590.
- 39) K. Hamburger establishes Rilke's phenomenological poetic approach in Philosophie der Dichter. Novalis, Schiller, Rilke (Stuttgart, 1966), pp. 179 ff.
- 40) Sämtliche Werke, II, p. 587.
- 41) Ibid., p. 587.
- 42) Cf. H.W. Panthel, "Zu Rilkes Gedichtzyklus", p. 52.
- 43) Sämtliche Werke, II, p. 587; cf. O.F. Bollnow, Rilke, p. 257.
- 44) J. Steiner, Rilkes Duineser Elegien (Bern, <sup>2</sup>1969), p. 282.
- 45) Sämtliche Werke, II, p. 588.
- 46) B. Allemann, Zeit und Figur beim späten Rilke (Pfullingen, 1961), p. 139.
- 47) Sämtliche Werke, II, p. 588.
- 48) Cf. O.F. Bollnow, Rilke, p. 258.
- 49) Sämtliche Werke, II, p. 589.
- 50) Ibid., p. 509.
- 51) Ibid., p. 590.
- 52) Cf. H.W. Panthel, "Zu Rilkes Gedichtzyklus", p. 55.

- 53) Sämtliche Werke, II, p. 590.  
 54) Ibid., p. 591.  
 55) Ibid., p. 591.  
 56) J. Steiner, Duineser Elegien, p. 283.

Chapter IV:

- 57) Sämtliche Werke, II, p. 509.  
 58) Cf. H.W. Nieschmidt, Fenstergalerie, p. 20.  
 59) Cf. A. Henkel and A. Schöne, Emblemata. Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. and XVII. Jahrhunderts (Stuttgart, 1967), pp. 816 f., p. 1611.  
 60) Cf. "Der Schwan", Sämtliche Werke, I, p. 510.  
 61) Sämtliche Werke, II, p. 496. The poem was written in mid-August, 1924.  
 62) Ibid., p. 725.

Conclusion

- 63) Ibid., VI, p. 745.  
 64) Quoted after J.R. von Salis, Schweizerjahre, p. 62.

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## Curriculum Vitae

I, Philip John Mills, was born on the 25th of February, 1950 in Palmerston North, New Zealand, the son of Raymond Lawrence Mills, radiographer, and his wife Kathleen May, née Beesley.

I attended primary and secondary schools in Tauranga from 1955 to 1967. In 1968, I enrolled at the University of Waikato, studying German and French as my major subjects under Professors Nieschmidt, Chicoteau and Marshall. For two years I also took General Studies, an interdisciplinary course in European literature and the history of ideas, with eminent contributions from Professors Salmon, Sewell and Sawyer. I graduated Bachelor of Arts in 1971.

I wish to offer my sincere thanks to Professor H.W. Nieschmidt, my academic teacher and adviser, without whose guidance, patience and criticism this dissertation could not have been completed.