Rainer Maria Rilke Essay, Research Paper

Rainer Maria Rilke

"Rose, o pure contradiction, desire to be no one?s sleep beneath so many lids." This was Rainer Maria Rilke?s self-composed epitaph, written before leukemia took his life on December 29, 1926. The rose was a symbol of love, beauty, and devotion in many of Rilke?s writings.With quotes such as this Rilke became known as one of the best poets of the 20th century.

Rainer Maria Rilke was born on December 4, 1875 in Prague, which is now the capital of Czechoslovakia. He was the only child of a very unhappy marriage, which eventually ended in a divorce. When his parent?s separated he was torn between them. His mother dressed him as a girl and his dad sent him to military academies. His savior would turn out to be his uncle who realized he was extremely sensitive and gifted.

With the help of his uncle he entered Charles University in 1895. By this time he had already published his first volume of poetry. 1896 brought about the decision to leave the university for the city of Munich, Germany where his poetic life and career would begin to unfold. Rilke spent the next years traveling to different places and meeting new people because he believed poetry was as much made up of experiences, as it was emotions. It was his travels to Russia, though, that marked the beginning of his serious works when the Book of Hours was published in 1905. Rilke would continue to travel to places such as Italy, Spain, Egypt, and Paris. While he was in Paris he developed a new style of lyrical poetry, influenced by the visual arts of the great sculptor Rodin. These poems would turn out to be New Poems published in 1908.

In his later life, Rilke moved to Switzerland, where he completed Duino Elegies and Sonnets to Orpheus both published in 1923. These later works reflected culmination of the development of Rilke?s poetry. These works gathered his dominant themes of love and the idolization of women, life and death, God and religion, into something all encompassing, a unity.

Rilke died at the age of 51 from leukemia. In his relatively short life Rilke produced a body of poetry and writings unsurpassed in its genius of emotion, insight, and sensuality. Rilke?s poetry has attracted many people, especially in America where translations of his works and biographies are abounding.