

## Rainer Maria Rilke Biography

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Rainer Maria Rilke was a famous poet known for his modernist German poems. Read more about the life and journey of this great poet in the following article.

Quick Facts	
Famous as	Poet & Novelist
Nationality	Austrian
Born on	04 December 1875
Zodiac Sign	Sagittarius
Born in	Prague, Bohemia, Austria-Hungary
Died on	29 December 1926
Place of death	Montreux, Switzerland
Father	Josef Rilke
Mother	Sophie
Spouse:	Clara Westhoff
Education	Charles University in Prague
Works & Achievements	Duino Elegies, Letters to a Young Poet and The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge



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Rainer Maria Rilke was a famous Austrian poet known for his significant contribution in German literature. He was famous for the “Thing poems”, which transformed him from a traditional poet to a modernist. He had frequently and very often used Greek Mythology figures in his works. Angels, roses and the character of the poet were also repeatedly employed in his poems. Rilke also used metaphors, metonymy and contradictions in his writings. He was one of the most famous German poets among English readers with his best known works like “Duino Elegies”, which was a highly lyrical prose. His other famous prose works include “Letters to a Young Poet” and the semi-autobiographical “The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge”. He had also written more than 400 poems in French which showed his excellence in other language, apart from English.

### **Rainer Maria Rilke Childhood & Early Life**

René Karl Wilhelm Johann Josef Maria Rilke was born on December 4, 1875, in Prague, which was a part of Austria-Hungary at that time. His father, Josef Rilke worked as a Railway official, after serving in military, while his mother Sophie Entz was the daughter of a well-reputed bank official. His mother had a serious impact on Rilke’s childhood life. Sophie used to call him Sophia and dressed him like a girl until he was five. This was primarily done to compensate for the earlier loss of a baby girl. Rilke later blamed his mother for his bad

childhood, but one thing which Sophie did good for him was influenced young Rilke towards reading and writing poetry. His father always had an inclination towards military. As such, he used to give his son, soldier toys and dumbbells for exercise.

His parent's marriage fell apart in 1884 when Rilke was only nine. Even though Rilke was artistically and poetically talented, his parents forced him to attend the military academy of St. Pölten and Mährisch-Weisskirchenn. He stayed there for five years from 1886 until 1891, when his illness made him to leave the academy. He was tutored for three years for his university entrance examinations and finally cleared the university entrance exam in 1895. For the next two years, Rilke extensively studied literature, art history and philosophy in Prague and Munich.

While his stay in Munich in 1897, Rilke met Lou Andreas-Salomé, a famous Russian woman known for her intellectuality and long list of associations with western luminaries like Nietzsche, Wagner and Freud. She was fifteen years elder to Rilke but this didn't matter, for the two soon fell in love with each other. Lou Andreas-Salomé had significant influence on Rilke. She taught him Russian and later introduced him to the patrons and other people in the art. She remained his advisor, confidante and muse throughout his life. After making a several-weeks long trip to Italy in 1898, Rilke, along with Lou and her husband, Friedrich Andreas, traveled to Moscow in 1899. There he met Leo Tolstoy, the famous Russian novelist. In his second journey to Moscow in August 1900, Rilke met the family of Boris Pasternak and Spiridon Drozhzhin, a peasant poet. The following autumn of 1900, he stayed at the artists' colony at Worpswede where he met the sculptor Clara Westhoff whom he later married in the spring. But Rilke was not built to live a normal middle class life; he left for Paris in the summer of 1902 leaving his wife and daughter behind.

## **Later Life**

When Rilke visited Paris in 1902, he first encountered various problems which he mentioned in his only novel, "The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge". This period also marked his encounter with modernism. During this period, Rilke came under the influence of the sculptor Auguste Rodin. Rodin told him the significance of objective observation which later transformed Rilke's poetic style from the subjective into something new in European literature. The resulted "New Poems" had the elements of "thing elements" and also showed Rilke's newly acquired artistic vision. His next work, "New Poems: The Other Part", was shaped in the same "Things poems" mould. The period between October 1911 to May 1912, Rilke stayed in the Castle Duino, near Trieste which was the home of Countess Marie of Thurn und Taxis. He started writing his famous poem cycle, "Duino Elegies" in 1912, which he could finish only in 1922. Rilke later blamed it to the creativity crisis during that period. In 1914, the World War I broke out during his stay in Germany and he couldn't go to Paris. Rilke spent the major part of the war in Munich only, while his property in Paris was seized and auctioned. From the time period 1914 to 1916, he shared a disruptive relationship with the painter Lou Albert-Lasard. After receiving a basic training in Vienna, Rilke joined the military and was transferred to War Records Office. He was discharged from military in June 1916 and spent the rest of war days in Munich. His brief military service had a stronger influence on his personality and also to his subsequent way of thinking.

Rilke moved to Switzerland in June 1919. The main reason of his move to Switzerland was his escape from post-war chaos and to finish his old projects like "Duino Elegies". Despite his earnest efforts, Rilke couldn't find a suitable and affordable place to stay. He tried Soglio, Locarno, and Berg am Irchel, before finalizing Chateau de Muzot in the commune of Veyras. This proved to be Rilke's most creative period in which he finished his decade long-pending work "Duino Elegies" in few weeks. He also finished another poem cycle, "Sonnets to Orpheus" during this time period. Rilke's patron Werner

Reinhart came to his help in later years. The latter bought and renovated Muzot for him so that he could live rent-free. Reinhart also introduced Rilke to an Australian violinist, Alma Moodie. While all was well professionally, on the personal front, Rilke constantly faced health problems after 1923, which forced him to have long stays in Territet, near Montreux, on Lake Geneva. He also stayed in Paris from January to August 1925. Even in his last days, he continued to produce individual poems and few other poems in French.

### **Personal Life**

Rilke's life was always influenced by women. Starting from Lou Andreas-Salomé who had an intellectual influence on him in his early days, he also befriended Swedish writer Ellen Key, Marthe Hennebert, Italian actress Eleonora Duse, Marie von Thurn und Taxis, and Hertha Koenig and Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, finally marrying to Clara Westhoff, a sculptress and one of Auguste Rodin's pupils in 1901. The couple had a daughter named Ruth.

### **Death**

During his last days, Rilke's prolonged illness was diagnosed as leukemia. He was suffering from ulcerous sores in mouth, and had pain in stomach and intestines. Struggling continuously with low spirits, he died on December 29, 1926 in the Valmont Sanatorium in Switzerland. He was later buried in Raron cemetery to the west of Visp in Switzerland.