

RAINER MARIA RILKE'S
NOTEBOOKS OF MALTE LAURIDS BRIGGE:
A THEATER OF IMAGINATION

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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NATALIE S. PALASVIRTA



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NOTEBOOKS OF MALTE LAURIDS BRIGGE:
A THEATER OF IMAGINATION**

by

© Natalie S. Palasvirta

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Abstract

Rainer Maria Rilke's The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge (1910) are viewed as a new kind of theater for the modern age. Through protagonist Malte's subjective imagination we witness sound and silence, visualize scenery and lighting, observe how costumes affect perception of character, and discover a connection between Malte's masks and masks in Greek theater. These technical aspects of theater, plus two special effects, support the premise of Malte as an actor. Learning to see opens him to empathize with others. Remembering the past helps Malte to understand his present and helps him discover the great human drama represented at Orange. From the St. Vitus Dancer, Malte learns how to play a role, which leads him through rehearsal for his part, the Prodigal Son. At last Malte comes to terms with love, Abelone, and God, and finds a secure self behind a role on the world's stage.

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1. Introduction

The roots of literary modernism lie in the rapid industrialization of Europe in the 19th century and the subsequent breakdown of traditional life and society. The loss of social guidance and security which tradition had offered, accompanied by a loss of personal identity, are common themes in German literature in the early 20th century. Franz Kafka's stories reflect an awareness of the chaos, absurdity, and alienation characteristic of life in the modern age. Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "Letter of Lord Chandos," published in 1902, illustrates the way language has lost meaning or has acquired different, unknown meanings at this point in time. The late 19th century writings of philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, associated with the claim "God is dead," influenced this generation of writers and artists who struggled, along with society in general, to adapt to a new way of life that seemed to ignore, or deny, any connection with a traditional, mostly rural, way of life.

Rainer Maria Rilke's The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, published in 1910, reflects all of the uncertainty and loss of meaning characteristic of the early modern period. Though it is referred to as a novel, it is not a traditional one. Its structure consists of sporadic, tentative notations by Malte Laurids Brigge in which he records thoughts, memories, and events of his life, not necessarily in an orderly time sequence. It also lacks a definitive ending in the traditional literary sense.

The Notebooks is a record of a young would-be writer's struggle to find his self, which begins shortly after his arrival in turbulent, anonymous, early-20th-century Paris. Malte's problem is that, as the last in a line of nobility, he no longer knows his role in life.

Later in the Notebooks, Malte glimpses, in the mask of light and shadow at the theater in Orange, an immense drama which has been performed throughout human history – every person acting his own role, on numberless stages, with an infinity of conflicts and tales. Malte takes comfort from his recognition of the prevalence of roles in life, even though now people are left to play whatever roles they can find, without traditions to give them direction.

Malte's wish, to become a writer, is hampered by the fear that the words he knows are inadequate for the stories he wishes to describe. Through the act of writing his notebook entries, Malte is able to eventually define a role for himself and to find and strengthen the self which facilitates the performance of that role, which at the end is known as the Prodigal Son.

The term “psychodrama” is sometimes used when discussing the Notebooks. The meaning of this term varies depending on the circumstance. In literature it refers to a drama which emphasizes the characters' psychological state rather than the story. It is used to describe a form of psychoanalytic therapy which incorporates theater games, enactment of scenarios, and role-playing into patient treatment. Psychodrama may also be defined as a dramatic presentation in the form of a monologue by one character. Rilke himself tried his hand at writing such monologues in his youth. The Notebooks could be considered a complicated dramatic monologue which documents one young man's psychological journey and growth. Since Freudian and psychoanalytic theories were prevalent in Rilke's time and society, and because Rilke tended to be receptive to the literary, psychological, and theatrical currents of his time, all of these definitions can be applied to the Notebooks.

Following the tendency of author Rainer Maria Rilke to speak of theater, roles, and masks, it is my view that The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge form a theatrical effort in which supporting elements of sets, lights, sound, costumes, and masks are created and augmented by Malte's imagination and empathy. The development and strengthening of Malte's self come about through a process which is much like that of an actor learning his craft. Some psychological study is involved in learning a new and difficult role. Seeing, remembering, role-playing, and rehearsing, though the practice of them is sporadic and non-sequential, eventually bring Malte to the point where he is able to safely perform. Along the way, Malte meets other characters and learns from them. He also finds a way to include the special effects of *deus ex machina*, from Greek tragedy, and *tableaux vivants*, living pictures.

Though at the beginning Malte rues his inability to write drama that will hold an audience's attention, by the end the Notebooks can be viewed as a theatrical piece, unconventional in form, but adequate to convey the story of the protagonist, Malte Laurids Brigge.

2. Secondary Literature

Several major themes which have been identified in Rainer Maria Rilke's Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge are: the problem of narration in the modern age, loss of the self, non-possessive love, subjectivity versus reality, childhood, and masks. Some of these themes as they appear in the Notebooks are interdependent. For example, at the turn of the 20th century, loss of tradition and the breakdown of traditional society have led to an individual loss of identity. Because people cannot define themselves against or within a tradition, they are on their own in determining how they fit into the ever-changing modern society. To survive, most people adapt by figuratively putting on masks for disguise or protection. They frequently must rely upon their own subjective impressions, for there are no longer overall right or wrong standards to guide them. Malte Laurids Brigge grapples with all of these things, and others as well. He wishes to become a poet, but fears that the very words he uses no longer hold any meaning. Because he has moved away from his family, alone, to the city of Paris, he feels himself disoriented and adrift, finding his own way, which sometimes causes him to doubt his own existence. One way he decides to find his "self" is by reviewing his childhood. He eventually comes to formulate a concept of non-possessive love, which he believes can only come from God, whatever he or it may be. Most of these topics are addressed to some degree in this paper, but a review of how they have been treated by others may, by contrast, help to orient the reader to my perception of the situation Malte faces.

Of particular interest has been the extent to which Rilke, the writer, appears in the Notebooks, and how Malte might represent Rilke. Rilke said that Malte Laurids Brigge was

a different person altogether.¹ Judith Ryan has written much about connections between Rilke and Malte. In “Rainer Maria Rilke: Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge,” she terms the Notebooks quasi-biographical (64) and explores how Rilke uses the Malte character to express his own views and work out his own problems. Malte’s crisis of expression represents Rilke’s own. In Rilke, Modernism, and Poetic Tradition, she explores the literary models which inform the Notebooks (41-49) and surveys this and other of Rilke’s works with reference to his personal life. Walter Seifert, in Das epische Werk Rainer Maria Rilkes, analyses and interprets the Notebooks with regard to (among other things) reality and subjectivity, Rilke’s childhood, and the effect of the sculptor Rodin’s work upon Rilke. Erich Heller, in The Poet’s Self and the Poem, traces the interweaving of Rilke’s time in – and relationship to – Paris with his letters, poetry, and the character Malte. Heller posits that Rilke “attempted to rid himself of his misery by making Malte Laurids Brigge miserable...(53), and calls the Notebooks one of the “documents of Rilke’s Paris existence...” (59). Personal connections between Rilke and the character Malte have become a given.

The positioning of The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge as an early-modern piece is explained by Käthe Hamburger in Rilke: Eine Einführung. Also characteristic of modernity is the way Rilke writes, as well as what he writes about. The character, Malte, writes because he is learning to see, and the learning occurs through writing the Notebooks themselves.

1

Rilke describes Malte as being “quite detached from himself” in a letter from 1910 (Letters 1892-1910, 362), and refers to “the fictitious figure of M.L. Brigge” in a letter from 1924 (Letters 1910-1926, 356).

The fragmentary nature of the Notebooks and its sometimes obscure references often require explanation. Bernhard Arnold Kruse and Wilhelm Loock have both written their own overviews of the novel by analyzing each entry and how it relates to other entries, as well as explaining the Notebooks' many references to historic and literary figures.

The subjective nature of reality, and subjectivity itself, is a theme that runs throughout the Notebooks. Käte Hamburger takes this theme and weighs it against philosopher Edmund Husserl's concept of phenomenology in her article, "Die phänomenologische Struktur der Dichtung Rilkes." While her analysis deals mainly with Rilke's poetry, the Oxford definition of Husserl's philosophy can be applied to the Notebooks as well, such that "the pure and transcendental nature and meaning of phenomena, and hence their real and ultimate significance, can only be apprehended subjectively...." As well, Ryan, in her book The Vanishing Subject, traces how in the Notebooks Malte starts out with empiricistic tendencies and, by the end of the novel, has evolved to view things with a more distant subjectivity. In "Validating the Possible," Ryan uses Rilkean works, among others, to address the issue that what may be possible can become actual, that there is really no difference between the two concepts as they are treated in Rilke's poetry and prose.

Subjectivity leads to another major theme. Ryan, in "Rilke's Early Narratives," identifies "the impossibility of narration in the modern age" (82-83) as a major theme in many of Rilke's works, not just in the Notebooks. Walter Seifert blames this impossibility on "die totale Entwertung der Realität" (133) which results from the breakdown of traditional society and a disjuncture between the inner person and the modern external world. As a

result, language no longer holds the meaning it used to. Words become inadequate for the task of communicating. Since traditional rules no longer apply, everyone is left to make sense of the world, their being, their life, on their own without a guide. The most reliable way of coping is through reliance on empiricism and subjectivity. Malte Laurids Brigge is one who must exist in such a society. Not only what he writes in the Notebooks, but how he writes it, exemplify his own casting about to find stability and meaning, even while he sometimes doubts his own existence. This crisis is discussed in another of Ryan's works, "Hypothetisches Erzählen."

The breakdown of traditional society is part of what causes Malte's weak, sometimes absent, sense of self. That Rilke suffered the same should come as no surprise. Seifert, in "Der Ich-Zerfall und seine Kompensationen bei Nietzsche and Rilke," describes how Rilke compensated for his personal feelings of "loss of self" by writing about them, something that the philosopher Nietzsche did to work through his own problems. "[Das] Problem der Ich-Bedrohung findet man bereits 1895 anlässlich seiner Maturaprüfung, als er in einen Konflikt zwischen Kunst und Leben kam....Rilke [arbeitete] solche Krisen in Gedichten auf, so daß seine Lyrikproduktion als Mittel der Krisenbewältigung, als Kompensationsmittel dienen konnte" (233).

There is a direct connection between Rilke and Nietzsche. It was most likely through his association with Lou Andreas-Salomé that Rilke learned about Nietzsche, for she had an intense relationship with the philosopher and wrote her own book about his Birth of Tragedy. Rilke read Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy, but whether or not Rilke ever read Salomé's book

is not known (Freedman, Life 63). Heller identifies influences from Nietzsche upon Rilke in his book, The Disinherited Mind, especially with regard to Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy. Heller proceeds to show "how Rilke used one or another of Nietzsche's ideas and, believing them or not, transformed them into poetry..." (Disinherited 126). "The writings of the young Rilke show Nietzsche neither assimilated nor transformed, but rather initiated and sometimes vulgarized" (Disinherited 127). Heller pinpoints Rilke's "last-known letter using undisguised Nietzschean terms" (Disinherited 137) as being written in the spring of 1904, and identifies Nietzsche clearly reappearing in Rilke's poetry which appeared in 1922, long after the Notebooks were published in 1910.

I would like to point out what I believe to be disguised Nietzschean terms which appear in the Notebooks. Certain passages in The Birth of Tragedy seem to act as prompts for expanded scenes in the Notebooks, which the character Malte helps to flesh out. Nietzsche refers to the Dionysian dances from the German Middle Ages in honor of St. Vitus, where "we rediscover the Bacchic choruses of the Greeks...as far back as Babylon and the orgiastic Sacaia. There are some who, from obtuseness or lack of experience turn away from such phenomena as from 'folk diseases' with contempt or pity born of the consciousness of their own 'healthy-mindedness'" (36-37). Compare this to Rilke's figure, the St. Vitus dancer, who is ridiculed by the passersby, but with whom Malte feels an empathic connection. Upon losing control, the man displays a version of what may be termed a "Dionysian" dance, but the modern-day audience, excepting Malte, cannot sense the "elemental force" (Rilke, Notebooks 70) which is making an appearance. Nietzsche speaks

of “the rapture of the Dionysian state with its annihilation of the ordinary bounds and limits of existence....[A] chasm of oblivion separates the worlds of everyday reality and of Dionysian reality. But as soon as the everyday reality re-enters consciousness, it is experienced as such, with nausea: an ascetic, will-negating mood is the fruit of these states” (Nietzsche 59-60). Malte’s reaction to the St. Vitus dancer, to the propped-up house wall, his flight from the dying man in the cr  merie — all could result from Dionysian reality giving in to the everyday. The appearance of the Big Thing at the doctor’s office could be the Dionysian state forcing its way into everyday reality, just as young Malte in layers of cloth before the mirror finds himself in another reality altogether. One more quote from Nietzsche is appropriate here: “Transform Beethoven’s ‘Hymn to Joy’ into a painting; let your imagination conceive the multitudes bowing to the dust, awestruck – then you will approach the Dionysian” (37). Rilke expands on this: “World Consummator [Beethoven]....Your music: it could have encircled the whole universe; not merely us....[Bedouin] merchants would have flung themselves to the ground at the edge of your music, as if you were a storm....if some pure spirit with a virgin ear were to lie down beside your music: he would die of bliss...” (76-77).

In his biography of Rainer Maria Rilke, Life of A Poet, Ralph Freedman refers to Rilke as an “artist of language” (144) as well as a “stunted dramatist” (104). The influence of the visual arts upon Rilke’s writing, notably the work of Rodin, C  zanne, and Picasso, is well documented by Freedman in an article, “Rainer Maria Rilke and the ‘Sister Arts’,” and also by Barbara Carvill in her article “Homage    C  zanne.” Addressing the “stunted

dramatist” label, Rilke’s plays were not always successfully received nor financially rewarding for him. He seriously wrote plays only from 1895 until 1900, but carried the hope that one of his plays, “The White Princess,” could be a vehicle to bring the great Italian actress, Eleanora Duse, out of retirement and back to prominence on the stage. When Rilke finally met Duse in 1912, however, after The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge was finished, it was only to realize that she was then too old to play the part (Freedman, Life 348).

When Rilke and Lou Andreas-Salomé met in 1897, she was not only established as a writer and essayist, but “she was thoroughly immersed in the theatre....[Her] theatre reviews represent a substantial portion of the work Andreas-Salomé published in a range of literary magazines over a period of 40 years” (Böttger 97). According to Claudia Böttger in “‘...how literature becomes life,’” Andreas-Salomé’s view of theater, that it is “derived from ritual, cult worship, and myth” (99), is linked “to Nietzsche’s conception of theatre as a primordial phenomenon (‘Urphänomen’) where, as in Greek theatre, spectators and actors create a single chorus. According to Andreas-Salomé it is the empathic participation of the spectator in the dramatic event that makes theatre into real theatre imitating the proximity to cult worship...” (100).

There are obvious references to theater and theatrical personages in the Notebooks, such as the ancient Roman theater at Orange, playwright Henrik Ibsen, and the above-mentioned Eleanora Duse. Masks and costumes, and all the many meanings they might carry, are also themes in the Notebooks. The business of learning to see and role-playing inform

the novel from beginning to end. That “the world is a stage” is often implied, and is referred to in the second half of the novel by the term “superhuman drama” (232). However, critics of Rilke have in general not deliberately dealt with any theatrical themes except for that of the mask. J. Barry McRaith, in “Stages of Mask Development in *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*”, traces “the progressive stages of Malte’s inner life, his quest...” (30), using the mask as the vehicle for doing so. Graham Parkes and Walter H. Sokel both validate the theatrical implications of Malte’s masks by discussing them in conjunction with “the principle of Greek tragedy as interpreted by Nietzsche” (Sokel 185). According to Parkes, Nietzsche speaks “both of himself and of the actor in each person. ‘Falseness with a good conscience’ is possible as long as one has acknowledged that upon which one is putting a better face, as long as we remember we are playing a part” (68). Rainer Maria Rilke: Masks and the Man, by H. F. Peters, which traces the impact Rilke’s poetry and prose had upon modern writers of the same (ix), contains a chapter about the Notebooks wherein the character of Malte is compared to Shakespeare’s character Hamlet (74). As Hamlet recites monologues and soliloquies, so Malte recites a monologue while viewing tapestries in the central portion of the novel, while “soliloquy” is an apt word to describe the passages where he attempts to reason out his attitudes and reactions. One observation in Rainer Maria Rilke - The Poetic Instinct, by Siegfried Mandel, is appropriate here:

Throughout his life, Rilke had an affinity for costuming. In childhood he donned dresses to please his mother, in adolescence his suits were cut to please his clothes-conscious father, from Russia he derived the peasant blouses he liked to wear while writing, and equally well-known are the

dandish-aristocratic apparel of his later years. These clothes fetishes Malte shares...(83)

Malte's inner life and the psychology behind his actions can be connected to the theatrical by virtue of the necessity of an actor to understand the psychological background of the character he is playing. David Kleinbard's book, The Beginning of Terror: A Psychological Study of Rainer Maria Rilke's Life and Work, shows how Rilke's works reveal aspects and experiences of the writer behind them. Manfred Engel, in "Weder Seiender noch Schauspieler: Zum Subjektivitätsentwurf in Rilkes 'Malte Laurids Brigge'," uses examples from the Notebooks to explain how Malte's weak sense of self is revealed in several scenes which Engel terms "Dionysian."

Others who write about Malte occasionally use theatrically oriented statements. Since Malte sees masks, imagines roles, tries on costumes, and masquerades as a little girl, this is unavoidable. George C. Schoolfield calls Malte's ruminations on Brueghel and Bosch a "coup de théâtre" (176). On a broader scale, Gerald Peters, in "Autobiography as Masquerade: The Spectacle of Rilke's Other Self," views the entire Notebooks as a masquerade in which Rilke has disguised himself as Malte. Also, H. F. Peters says of the ending of the Notebooks, "All we know, when the final curtain on the *Malte* drama is rung down, is that the play will go on" (95). McRaith furthers these theatrical leanings by bringing in a quote from a "contemporary playwright and critical theorist of theater..." (34), Dario Fo, in which Fo advises against touching a mask while it is being worn. McRaith explains,

“Because a mask is an essential protector and deceiver, not to wear a mask or to interfere with its power is the substantive equivalent of death” (34).

Irina Frowen deals directly with Rilke’s attitude toward theater and drama in her article, “Die Szenerie war Abschied.” Here she points out that Rilke’s idea of what true drama should be is depicted in what Malte experiences at the Theater at Orange. Using examples from many Rilkean works, Frowen explains that Rilke, inspired by Nietzsche, believed that his modern society no longer had the capability of creating theater that unites people as it used to. Because of the trend of naturalistic theater, no actor is now capable of true transformation, either of himself or his audience (212). Because of the unreality, the distance from tradition of modern theater, the only place true theater can be found is upon the inner stage of each individual person (213).

In my search for articles and books about the Notebooks, only one writer was found who selects Rilke’s novel as a model for illustrating a theatrical concept. Ralph Yarrow, in his article “Anxiety, Play and Performance: *Malte* and the [post] modern”, discusses his proposition that the Notebooks “can usefully be seen as a text in which the narrative becomes performative...” (216). Yarrow sums up the style of the narrative in the Notebooks as “a kind of performance art. The self becomes performer and performance.... reality becomes a text-for-performance” (Yarrow, “Anxiety” 230).

It is with theater and performance in mind that I approach The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge. The purpose here is not to discount or ignore the Notebooks’ documented and established themes. Subjectivity, crisis of expression, loss of self, masks, and love are

all aspects of the theatrical development that I see within the Notebooks. Malte's mention of theatrical personages, his preoccupation with masks and clothing, his recognition of the roles people play in life, his descriptions of scenes suspended in light and dark, or scenes described as if they were paintings or theater sets, made me wish to discover if there was a purpose or unity behind them. What I have found and tried to express here is out of the norm, but I believe it is valid. The following presents the character Malte Laurids Brigge as an actor in life who follows a course, involuntary or deliberate, much like that of a stage actor learning his craft. This involves learning to see, drawing on childhood memories, trying on different roles, and rehearsing in preparation for performance. Along the way Malte learns something of stagecraft and special effects. Most important, he learns that there is a difference between his self and his role, and that the separation or connection between the two is entirely under his control.

3. Setting the Stage

3.1. Imagining Sound and Silence

Malte controls everything in the Notebooks, therefore we as readers, or audience, can only know what Malte allows us to know. Because all we are witness to are Malte's thoughts, because we are confined in his head, so to speak, any sounds that we "hear" are given us at Malte's discretion. The range of noises is wide, from sounds merely mentioned in passing to those that transform into other things altogether. Many of the sounds are described in such a way that they are more seen or felt than heard.

The most theatrically-styled sounds occur when Malte is new to Paris and tells what he hears: "A door slams....A girl screams....A dog barks....a rooster crowing..."(4-5).² These are written as simple stage directions would be, but they are ultimately left to the interpretation of the listener, since Malte leaves them undescribed.

Some descriptions are of things that are capable of producing sound, but which we can easily see and understand without hearing them: "a little girl...beats a tambourine (19)....a chair being overturned..."(33). The blind man who shouts *chou fleur* (45) is more notable to Malte because Malte sees him, not because he hears him. "I saw an old man who was blind and shouted. That is what I saw. Saw"(45).

Some sounds develop their own life and character. Chamberlain Christian Detlev's death effectively takes over his dying body and screams and howls on its own. "And during

2

Any direct quotes from the Notebooks are from Stephen Mitchell's translation of Rilke's The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, New York: Vintage International, 1990.

that time it was master...it was like a king who is called Terrible, afterward and for all time”(15). Malte’s neighbors in his apartment building, since he has no face-to-face interaction with them, evolve from mere sound effects on the other side of walls into a sort of creature which “gets into your ears...hatches...[and flourishes] devastatingly...”(168). This creature can be devastating because Malte only imagines it. Part of the power of offstage, or behind-the-wall, sound effects comes from allowing the hearer’s imagination free rein, which can often produce results more horrific than the truth. Nicolai Kuzmitch’s poetry recitations weave a cocoon that threatens to hatch out something fearful until Malte is eventually told his story. Imagination is still in control, though, for Malte learns Kuzmitch’s tale second-hand, and we learn it from one more step removed as Malte writes it down.

The medical student living next door disturbs Malte the most. A sound like the lid of a tin can falling and rolling across the floor next door becomes, in Malte’s imagination, the sound of the student’s eyelid closing involuntarily – a disturbing magnification. Even after the student moves out, Malte fears to visit the room and find out what actually made the noise. Because of the effect the sound had on him, Malte is convinced that if there is still a tin can in the room, it had it in for him (182). This noise is transformed by imagination into a threat to Malte’s hard-won, fragile calm.

Any conversations in the Notebooks, or any comments interjected, because they have been filtered through Malte’s thoughts, serve more to advance and color the telling of each tale than to realize those characters who do the speaking – with one exception. The scene in the gallery at Urnekloster between Malte and Erik has such vivid dialogue and description

that to reproduce it on stage would be simple. Through this dialogue we see a side of Erik which is only hinted at earlier – when he holds the door open for Christine Brahe to pass out of the dining room. He has the upper hand in the shadowy portrait gallery where Malte cowers with his candle. Erik’s teasing, under the circumstances, reveals a slightly mocking or sadistic nature when he blows out the candle and grabs at Malte in the dark. When he finally leads Malte out of the gallery, his magnanimous comment, “They won’t hurt you,” (118) followed by a giggle, hints that perhaps he knows better.

Silence, too, has its place in the theatrical realm. During the planning stage of theatrical production, “A designer must never forget the power of silence! The artful process of establishing an atmospheric sound, such as crickets chirping, and suddenly cutting off the sound can be more dynamic and effective than any other device” (Parker and Wolf 330). An example of this technique of sudden silence is in Malte’s description of a dreadful silence occurring while witnesses wait for the terrifying crash of a burning high wall(5). Here, it is the contrast between unexpected silence and (imagined) screams of panic that creates a moment of “extreme tension”(5).

Because the reader is not privy to any “sounds” but those Malte deliberately acknowledges, the silence in the Notebooks is sometimes deafening. Throughout the Notebooks, though we “hear” Malte’s soliloquy, it is still as if we are covered over, muffled within the soundlessness of Malte’s skull. Even when Malte declares, “It is good to say it out loud: Nothing has happened” (44), he has still declared it silently, only in writing. Most of the interactions Malte has with the people of Paris are brief and occur silently. The

downtrodden people Malte encounters who show him what they are holding do not speak. One of Malte's favorite pastimes is to read in the quiet library. He longs for the life of a certain poet who has "a quiet house in the mountains" and a bookcase that reflects a "solitary distance"(42). He envies the shopkeepers who read alone all day behind their shop-windows. However, what H. F. Peters refers to as Malte's "sense of solitude" (81) is expanded by Leslie Kane's observation, "As a metaphor of solitary confinement, silence confirms man's inability or unwillingness to relate to others and his concomitant torture by exclusion" (24). Malte is truly unable, perhaps unwilling, to relate to others. He is certainly excluded by the stratum of society to which he feels he belongs. Any torture Malte experiences results from the effect of his self-imposed confinement in a solitary room upon his naturally sensitive nature. The deafening silence, therefore, may result from Malte defending himself (and inadvertently defending us) from possible exaggerated reactions to aural stimuli. His mission, to take action and write, is also best done alone, in silence.

3.2. Scene, Space, and Light

As with sound and silence, we as audience can only see what Malte allows us to see. Similarly, Malte considers the possibility that only the surface of life has ever been seen by people through the ages (23). An audience is meant to only see the “front” of stage scenery. Malte’s description of the remaining wall of an apartment house (45-46) gives the impression of abandoned stage scenery. Ordinarily, it is just the actors and stagehands who know what scenery looks like from behind. Similarly, the outside facade of an apartment building is all that a passerby would ever see. A visitor to the inside would only be allowed access to the areas which are properly arranged (staged, if you will) to receive visitors, and would never be privy to what really goes on when only the inhabitants are present and are not on company manners.

The basic flats of a stage set are usually propped up from behind with diagonal braces to keep them upright (Reid, 41). On the back of the flats, which are often used over and over again, would be left-over evidence of performances past; different colors of paint cracking away, nails left in the frame, torn muslin haphazardly fastened together. This may conjure up images of much more than just what the scenery looked like: of muffled laughter, hastily whispered instructions, muted exhalations of panic, gasps from kisses stolen in the dark. Like a stage flat, the apartment building wall is kept upright by a diagonal “scaffolding of long, tarred poles” (46), which press their support against the inside wall, not the outside facade. This wall, which has absorbed the odors and breath of those who once lived alongside it, now exhibits the secrets which were once private. It bears the signs of previous lives lived, and

Malte can see what was never openly expressed, what would have been hidden behind the facade of manners and social propriety. We are allowed, so to speak, a peek at the reality behind the scenery.

In the case of the Schulins' manor house, its front steps remain in place, though the main house which stood behind is burned down. The steps have the ability to evoke the missing part of the house, especially on the misty afternoon when young Malte's family comes to visit. Malte's family is fooled by the remaining steps into thinking that the house still stands, as if the steps are an on-stage set piece which appears to lead somewhere, but which, if one looks behind the curtain, leads nowhere but the dark backstage. The Schulins know the building is gone and laugh at the Brigges' mistake. The Schulins continue to invite and welcome visitors despite the small, adjacent rooms they now live in, but a new scene which they must play out is added to their daily lives. They reject the continued existence of the house that burned, but are convinced that a fire will happen again. Initiated by the Countess Schulin, the entire family embarks on a hunt for smoke. "[They] admitted there was something here that they couldn't see" (144). It may have been the Brigges' certainty that the house was still standing which stirred the Schulins' imagination. As theatrical scenery creates impressions of things which do not exist, in this case the remaining front steps conjure up not only the manor house, but the fire which destroyed it. Malte and his mother, so alike in sensitivity and imagination, are convinced that the house which they imagine is again burning away to nothingness.

Stage scenery is built to be temporary. “[When] the production reaches its last curtain, the usefulness of the scenery ends. It is doomed to storage, rebuilding, or destruction” (Parker and Wolf 16). The scenery of life is also temporary, though it usually lasts longer than a stage set. Chamberlain Brigge, for 23 years, keeps locked the room where his dear mother died, and only when Death takes him over is the room unlocked again. The mother’s protected furniture and cherished personal objects, her carefully-placed life props, are destroyed when death is finally allowed to swoop onto this stage of a life. “The curtains were pulled back, and the robust light of a summer afternoon examined all the shy, terrified objects and turned around clumsily in the forced-open mirrors. And the people did the same” (11). Because the mother’s performance is over, at last her set is taken down – the stage curtains are pulled back, the doors opened, the work lights turned on. Props are broken, misplaced, or removed. Death, in charge on this occasion, guides the demolition crew.

As the opposites of sound and silence share eloquence in theater, so do stage settings and props share importance with empty space. Malte, in one of his memories, describes the banquet hall at Urnekloster:

This high and I suspect vaulted room was more powerful than anything else. With its darkening height and its never fully illuminated corners, it sucked all images out of you, without giving you anything definite in return. You sat there as if you had disintegrated — totally without will, without consciousness, without pleasure, without defense. You were like an empty space. (26)

The annihilation and disintegration threatened by this darkening space is initially overcome when Malte touches his father’s knee with his foot. Compare this mental picture of Malte and

his father suspended in space amid gradually darkening distance with that of a spotlight focused on two actors on a dark stage, where surrounding black curtains above and alongside swallow up any reflections or light “spill.” Even the surface of the stage seems to disappear. Eventually, the circle of light, through Malte’s description, widens to reveal other characters sitting at the table at Urnekloster, and the action begins. There is a sense that the diners are suspended in space, or are on a bright island amid black sea and sky, which is made more acute when the ghost of Christine Brahe moves in the semi-darkness, steps “into the shadows of the doorway...” (33), moves across the clear space “through an indescribable silence...” (34), and vanishes through a door. Though Christine “steps,” no mention is made of a floor. Like many stage pictures, this scene at Urnekloster is seemingly suspended in space, as well as in time, perhaps.

Imagery of an island suspended in space and time is repeated in Malte’s memory of The Hand. Malte leaves the island of the well-lit table surface to dive down underneath in search of a dropped crayon. There, as the darkness grows transparent, another “larger, extraordinarily thin hand” (94) comes groping toward him. Is it a creature from the depths of the dark sea of time? An inkling of relentless eternity arises here, in that Malte’s own hand, should it be touched by the other, may enter “into something it could never return from” (94). The dark space underneath the table where the thin hand gropes shares with the dining hall at Urnekloster the element of timelessness and a similar threat of annihilation.

The way space and objects on stage are perceived by an audience depends on the way the lighting designer does his job. “The lighting designer must...be concerned with revelation

of form, with the mood of the scene, and with the overall composition of the stage picture” (Parker and Wolf 363).

[The] first thing the young lighting designer must concentrate on is learning to *see*. There is not a practicing lighting designer worth his or her salt who does not possess a strong visual memory. In order to develop a mental file of visual experiences, one must first learn to notice, to observe, and to analyze light and shadow. Light is a constant part of our lives. The lighting designer must...see the color of the noonday sun. Learning to see is an ongoing process, not one to be learned in a month or even several years. We are constantly seeing anew. (Parker and Wolf 365; emphasis in original)

Just as a stage picture is a representation subjectively created by a production team, so are the Notebooks’ pictures colored by Malte’s own feelings and reactions. “[Das] Gesehene [stellt] im Grunde eine Spiegelung des eigenen Inneren [dar]...” (Ryan, “Hypothetisches” 348). That Malte is already seeing as an artist is clear early on when he tells of the “beautiful autumn morning” (17) in the Tuileries and the effect that “a small moon” (18) can have on a scene. Both of these entries tell how objects and colors can appear when illumined by an artist. The small moon scene, balanced and static, is representative of a perfect painting. The Tuileries scene has more three-dimensionality and motion, in that single flowers stand up and statues sun themselves. The gray curtain of light which hangs in the foreground is an effect that can be accomplished on stage with some dry ice and side lighting.

Malte knows how proper lighting can create or enhance a mood. His slow fade to darkness during the family’s ride to the Schulins’ on a misty December afternoon sets up a mood of foreboding, preparing us for the phantom of the manor house. On another occasion,

what a shock when “work lights” are switched on and a harsh glare destroys any sense of artistry present in the “half-bright solace” (73). “Beware of the light that makes space more hollow...” (74). The sharply outlined shadow which rises up behind delineates Malte too well – surrounds and puts a limitation on his being. Plus, the “light is not to be feared because it illuminates some actual horror, but because it creates a hollow space which *potentially* could harbor some horrifying reality” (Cervi 52; emphasis in original). The warning is: if you are hollow and empty, something dangerous may swoop in to fill you up – the Big Thing, undefined timelessness, or death – to demolish whatever cherished props may still be sheltered there.

In the Notebooks, too little light is preferable to too much. Malte can take refuge in shadow where harsh reality is disguised, and mood and subjectivity can color scene and space.

3.3. The Role and Costume

[In] the theater, players deliberately dress to fit a role, choosing costume that helps the audience identify the age, social class, sex, or occupation of the character being portrayed, and the audience knows that the dress used is intended to transform the actor temporarily into the stage character and obliterate for the moment the real-life identity of the person playing the part. (Roach and Eicher 11)

Costume, or clothing, is important in Malte's Paris life. He is quite aware of the effect that one's appearance has on others and has experienced how clothing affects his own self-image. When one puts on clothing, one assumes a role, either deliberately or involuntarily, for costume has the power to affect the wearer as well as the onlooker. Parkes explains that "much of the impression a well tailored three-piece suit makes on the viewer comes from the effect it has on the wearer, from the way it draws him out – and into the part" (68).

One of Malte's early memories is of wearing a dress and having his hair braided by Maman. It was still common, even in the early twentieth century, for mothers to make their boy children wear dresses or lacy blouses until they were somewhere between four and eight years old (Stone 152-153). Young Malte not only is required to dress as and look like a girl, but is encouraged to play at being a girl named Sophie. Malte knows that Maman "wished [he] had been a little girl and not the boy that [he] undeniably was" (99), and while he may play along out of a wish to please his mother, this situation must surely have some effect on his budding sense of self.

Another event, during an exploration of the upstairs wardrobes, affects Malte's identity in a more sinister fashion. It is here that he first comes to "know the influence that

can emanate from a particular costume” (103). Ceremonial uniforms of ancient orders, eighteenth-century ballgowns, “random paraphernalia for masquerades” (104), and masks are here at his disposal. Through donning the costumes and masks and imagining himself in various roles, Malte becomes many different characters, but it takes only a moment until he recognizes merely himself in the fragmented mirror. He discovers that maintaining the illusion of otherness requires some action. Malte learns that if he walks about, begins “to talk, to bow, to nod” (103), that his character can exist for as long as he wishes. A sort of partnership between the costume and the wearer is created. The reflection of the costume in the mirror feeds the imagination of the wearer, who should act, or take action, accordingly. “Wichtig ist...daß das ‘Fremde’ durchaus nicht von vornherein als negativ erscheint, sondern als willkommene Erweiterung des Ich, als Realisierung ungelebter Möglichkeiten” (Engel 186). However, when young Malte wraps himself in the unused fabrics and scarves from the wardrobe, the “free and infinitely varied” (104) possibilities of being which are offered by these fabrics place no barriers on Malte’s imagination, and, without any predetermined character to hold him back, while looking at his own reflection, Malte loses himself. “[I] simply ceased to exist” (107).

Er behält die Kontrolle über sein Spiel, solange sein Verstand die Rolle benennen kann und solange sein — ironisches — Bewußtsein des Spielens die kontrollierte Ich-Spaltung in Rolle und Rollenspieler überbrückt, da es zugleich um deren Differenz wie letztliche Identität weiß. Sobald er jedoch eine nicht identifizierte Verkleidung aus amorph-gestaltlosem Material wählt, sobald durch den Unfall seine Aufmerksamkeit zerstreut wird und seine Gefühle — Angst, Ärger, Verzweiflung — die Oberhand gewinnen, verliert er die Kontrolle. Damit bricht die Bewußtseinsinstanz zusammen, und das

durch sie nicht wirklich integrierbare Fremde gewinnt die Oberhand. (Engel 186)

The possible obliteration of self is the same danger which Malte senses in Paris. It is not only Malte's attitude toward himself, but the reaction of onlookers to him that act upon him. The nondescript clothes he wears as a struggling poet threaten to push him across an unseen boundary into the world of "human trash, husks of men that fate has spewed out" (40), where, instead of just playing a role, he may eventually lose himself completely among the nameless. Despite his clean hands and collar, his aristocratic background and education, the clothing he wears and his neglected beard mark him as an outcast.

The attention Malte pays to the dresses of young girls, perhaps influenced by his early role of Sophie, elevates them to a symbol of lost tradition, similar to the forgotten uniforms in the upstairs wardrobes. The care taken to store the dresses, their emergence in the spring from dressers in preparation for the warmth of summer, speaks of tradition, of the continuity of life of a bygone day, the loss of which Malte rues. Girls and women, "whose strength has always consisted in being found" (133), now go out searching for what life can offer them, as Malte is also searching, for with the death of his father and the sale of the family home, Malte's connection to his past and personal tradition is severed. Young girls, usually the most protected of family members, are leaving the traditional family homes, which may or may not still exist. Like Malte, their roles are no longer defined. In museums they view reminders of what used to be. They may still wear the cherished spring dresses at Easter, but the dresses have so many buttons up the back that the girls cannot fasten them properly. The

dresses were made for servants to button, but the girls are now without servants. Certainly a new costume, a ready-made dress without buttons would be more practical for young girls now. Like the ready-made life which waits for so many, they would “just have to slip it on” (9).

The ready-made role of outcast which Malte faces is not one that he accepts. The non-verbal signals his clothing sends (Enninger 78) are incongruent with the way he thinks of himself. It is ironic that by inspecting the non-verbal clothing signals of another outcast, Malte finds a congruency. The blind news seller outside the Jardin de Luxembourg (208) is unnoticed by most, but Malte is so intensely aware of him that he is afraid to look at him. Malte is aware that nothing about this man is insignificant, and, perhaps out of fear that the wretchedness of this man is a reflection of himself, can only create a picture of this significant person in his imagination. By comparing the news seller to his image of a Pietà, Malte approaches the truth which overtakes him once he finally gathers courage to actually look at the man. This wretched, blind news seller, more horrible in reality than in imagination and barely noticed by his fellow humans, takes the care to wear a special hat and necktie because it is a Sunday, though he “himself didn’t get any pleasure from them...” (211). This wretched creature who has acknowledged God’s day through the medium of costume is graced with the task of proving God’s existence. This is what Malte sees. The lesson for Malte from this small play is to seek truth and accept it without judgement.

3.4. Masks Old and New

In Rainer Maria Rilke: Masks and the Man, H. F. Peters explores, among other topics, Rilke's fascination with masks. "The mask theme symbolizes the will to transformation, which Rilke considered to be the basic principle of existence" (Peters 32). J. Barry McRaith, in his article "Stages of Mask Development in *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*," analyzes mask imagery in the Notebooks, and traces three stages of Malte's inner development as represented by masks. The first stage, primitive, is when a person as social actor wears a mask mainly for survival, to protect his inner self from the cruel outside world. The second stage, cognitive, is when the social actor becomes conscious of wearing the mask, but continues to wear it out of necessity due to a lack of harmony between his inner and outer worlds. When the actor has developed enough inner self-assurance to exist without the mask, then the third stage, transformational, is achieved (30-31). Parkes, in "Facing the Masks," explores the metaphor of the face as a mask and its various purposes – to conceal, reveal, protect, to present a socially acceptable image, among many examples. Parkes relies on the writings of Nietzsche, Jung, and others to explain Malte's thoughts and actions with regard to the mask. These writings lay the groundwork for this section. In the following pages, two books by David Wiles, The Masks of Menander and Greek Theatre Performance: An Introduction, will provide support for comparing Malte's masks with some of the common characteristics and meanings of classical Greek and Roman theater masks.

Within Greek Religion, transitions and liminal states are the particular sphere of Dionysos, who crosses the boundaries between life and death, land and sea, city and wilderness, civilization and savagery, reality and illusion.

Dionysos is associated with temporary states...and theatrical performance...In accordance with this understanding of the god, the mask of Dionysos functions as a symbol of transition. (Wiles, Masks 113).

Also, a mask has the ability to transform him who wears it. “[Das] Aufgeben der eigenen, individuellen Persönlichkeit...kennzeichnet die Gefolgschaft dieses Gottes” (Blume 88).

The classical Greek tragic mask covers the whole head, has large eye holes and a gaping mouth, and is larger than the normal human head. When combined with the robes worn as costume, it completely obscures the personality of the actor, just as young Malte, wrapped in his scarves and mask, loses his self before the mirror. The mask itself is “neutral,” without expression or semblance of feelings. “There could be no sense of the uniqueness of the individual once the actor donned his tragic mask, in accordance with the guiding principle that classical art should deal in universal truths” (Wiles, Masks 69). The neutrality of the Greek mask is mirrored in Malte’s conception of the people around him. Rarely does he describe anyone’s face, and then it is quite matter-of-fact and general. People smile, grin, or laugh. The Schulins’ faces are strained or troubled. Sieversen’s face is kind. The dead father’s face is tidied up. Among the people depicted in the gallery paintings, Christian IV has “beautiful braided hair along his broad, gradually rounded cheek” (114), which resembles a decorative addition to a neutral Greek mask. Another personage there has one black-painted eye. The descriptions are slightly more specific when Malte tells of people who are dead. Those who live but traffic with spirits, like Sten with his large, round eyes, have some specific features. Count Brahe’s look is specifically mask-like: “The Count...sat with a contemptuous smile on his lips. His face seemed larger than usual, as if he had put on

a mask....though his voice was very soft, it could be heard all through the room” (30-31). Greek actors, comic or tragic, trained diligently at voice projection so they could be heard through the all-covering mask by the spectators in the huge amphitheater.

The masks worn in Greek comedy, by contrast, have asymmetrical features. The mouth of the mask is larger and might depict a broad smile, a distorted frown, or anything in between. Eyebrows are prominent and expressive. “The principles of the expressive mask are directly relevant to comedy, where distortions of the face encourage the actor to develop distorted patterns of movement, and it is a general truth that masks determine how the body will move” (Wiles, Greek 149).

“Hellenistic comedy always turns upon the chaos caused by ignorance of ascertainable material facts” (Wiles, Masks 112). The circumstances on the occasion of the meal when the ghost of Christine Brahe first appears are set up as comedy from the very beginning, as Malte begins laughing out loud at the old butler who plays his role of server despite the absence of someone to serve. Upon hearing that Christine will make an appearance later, the Major makes a quick exit, only to turn and beckon to Malte and Erik, as if he had just remembered that the boys were supposed to exit also. However, they know their parts better than he does and stay at the table. Malte’s father reacts violently and must be physically restrained by the Count when the ghost appears. Only the Count and Erik are comfortable in this comedy, as the Count keeps control with his mask-like smile, and Erik courteously bows to the exiting ghost. Malte is merely an appreciative spectator. In the second description of the ghost’s appearance, the Count’s face is no longer just mask-like,

but is a “large mask” (37) with a gray smile. This time the comedy runs more smoothly, but Aunt Mathilde unexpectedly vanishes. The Major remains at the table this time, and Malte’s father salutes the ghost with his wine glass (perhaps a reference to Dionysos’ other role as the god of wine). Greek comedy “in an immediate and direct way commented on the circumstances of the audience” (Wiles, Greek 25). “The writer of comedy had a special freedom to slander individuals in the audience and to ridicule the behavior of the gods. Insult was the celebratory core of classical comedy...” (Wiles, Greek 33). Erik’s face with its one unmoving eye is mask-like all the time, only it is the half-mask of the Roman *commedia* (Wiles, Masks 141) rather than the Greek classical mask. As described previously, Erik reveals his sadistic nature with Malte in the picture gallery. He ridicules Malte for not knowing if Christine’s ghost is “inside” or “here” (117). He insults Malte’s offer of friendship. Erik, as the major comedic character in the Notebooks, plays his representative role quite convincingly.

Malte’s notice of the varying number of masks people can wear is reminiscent of the frequent doubling of roles in Greek theater. Because there are never more than three principal actors on the stage at one time (the chorus acts as a unit unto itself), classical Greek actors often play more than one role. Consequently, they must change masks in order to change characters. All of us learn to do this in our lives, starting when we are small. Parkes describes childhood as “a period antedating the acquisition of masks in any form” (77). Brian Bates notes that “even in very young people, the face is already reflecting the deep pools of

experience within” (121). In the Notebooks, we are not told the age of the child in the baby-carriage (4), but the rash on its forehead might be a symbolic proto-mask.

People who are sick and without hope, no matter what their age, may have lost or worn away their protective layer, like the poor woman whose face comes off in her hands (7). Regarding this woman, Parkes writes, “The pressures of life can form the face into a mask, which then becomes the person so well that the self fuses with, comes to be, its masks. Then even the inside of a torn-off mask is an easier sight to bear – at least it is *something* – than the remnants of what the mask has been covering” (73). In the case of some of the patients at the doctor’s office, their protective layers have been replaced by cloth bandages or an inert, mask-like mien. Classical Greek masks were originally made of strips of cloth glued together. Stylistically, the doctor’s office presents a tragi-comedy. “And there were many bandages. Bandages wrapped around a whole head, layer by layer, until just a single eye remained that no longer belonged to anyone. Bandages that hid, and bandages that revealed, what was under them” (56). With bland stares or distorted features, tragic masks hide the individual, whereas comic masks hint at personalities beneath. The doctor and his assistants, with their polite smiling masks, play their professional roles without interest in their patients as people. Here are so many masks that it is not surprising the Big Thing makes an appearance.

Malte writes that “the Big Thing swelled and grew over my face like a warm bluish boil, and grew over my mouth, and already my last eye was hidden by its shadow” (62). Recall the unused fabrics and hollow smelling, undescribed mask that young Malte covers

himself with, giving him the guise of a Greek tragic actor in neutral mask. Here, Malte has no pre-determined character and loses himself. In a way, this costume and the Big Thing foreshadow the realization which hits Malte later at the theater at Orange: like it or not, we are all actors in the great drama of the world stage. Preparation for our roles is mandatory.

4. Learning to Perform

4.1. Seeing

One of the first admonitions given to beginning actors is to see, or observe, everything about them. “The actor must learn to observe familiar things as if he had never seen them before, and he must remember the experience” (McGaw 70). This practice, for an actor, should never cease. Observation of things, and especially of people – the way they move, what they wear, how they react – becomes easier with practice. With observation should come questions, beginning with simply “what?” What do I see? This may expand into the query, “why?” Why does one person move a certain way? Are they ill or joyous? Have they been injured, physically or in spirit? Does their joy show in ways other than a smiling face? Another question that might be asked is “How?” How does someone’s mood or desire manifest itself? The answer can lead beyond physical appearance into behavior, action, or reaction. How might someone act in a certain situation? Any or all of these questions can be asked in practicing observation. However, the actor must try to accept the answers to his questions in a non-judgmental way. To accomplish this, he must let down his guard, or crack open his mask, so to speak, to allow the “sights” to pass through. This can be frightening or painful for some, simple for others.

“Seeing” implies understanding. A sense of empathy can help an actor understand what he observes. To arrive at understanding, one must also have imagination, for impressions are filtered through the observer’s perception. Michael Redgrave observes that “in life we interpret, unless in very exceptional moments of objectivity, other people through

our own mood” (78). Because we cannot know others fully unless we become them, imagination and empathy help to complete the picture. Still, seeing remains subjective, no matter how non-judgmental the observer may try to be.

Malte claims he is learning to see. We do not know why he chooses to learn, or if someone put him to the task. It does not matter. We may ask to what end Malte is learning to see. Actors “see” to broaden their awareness of the possibilities of expression within themselves. If Malte is an actor on the stage of his life, then he may be learning to see in order to discover his own possibilities.

From the very beginning of the Notebooks, though, Malte is already “seeing” beyond what one might expect of a beginner. He is well within McRaith’s second stage of mask development. In addition to the sights and sounds he describes, Malte’s comments on them soon surpass the mere “what,” “why,” and “how.” They tackle the more complicated phrase “as if”: “I saw a house that was peculiarly blind, as if from a cataract.... (4) a pregnant woman [dragged herself along a high, warm wall] and now and then reached out to touch it as if to convince herself that it was still there” (3). Malte is already making connections, is relating to what he sees and what he knows. He is just not sure how to interpret what he is learning. “I don’t know why it is, but everything enters me more deeply and doesn’t stop where it once used to. I have an interior that I never knew of. Everything passes into it now. I don’t know what happens there” (5). Within a short space of time he drops the “as if,” and the “is” becomes a given. Each person has several faces (6). The poor woman, frightened by Malte, sits up so quickly she leaves her face in her hands. It lies there with “its hollow form”

(7). Though not yet described as “mask,” but far beyond “as if it were a mask,” it is here that Malte’s fear prevents him from “seeing” the woman’s faceless head, from recognizing the reality of her life, naked where there is no more mask, for he might see reflected there his own fate.

Malte’s many encounters with the poor in Paris offer opportunities for him to “see,” but at this point he has not yet the courage, the solidity of his own self perhaps, to digest so much. At the library, his borrowing card is an admission ticket to the refuge within, as others would buy a ticket to the theater (or a movie) in an effort to escape their troubles. In the reading room, with the other silent patrons, Malte can read the words of one who has already seen, who has dealt with observations, who offers the wisdom of returned memories (20).

The strong sense of empathy which accompanies Malte’s seeing often bonds him to situations that he cannot tolerate and from which he flees. He only glances at the bared wall remaining from the demolished houses before comprehending the stubborn life which “had not let itself be trampled out” (46). Malte says of the dying man in the *cr merie*, “[At] first I saw only that the table where I usually sit was occupied by someone else....But then I felt him, though he didn’t move. It was precisely this immobility of his that I felt, and I understood it in an instant. The bond between us was established...” (50). Malte’s empathy bonds him to the misery in the doctor’s office, which causes the Big Thing to reappear from his childhood to haunt him. Later on, he becomes better able to manage his seeing, but still is captured by his tendency to empathize. The appearance of the man with St. Vitus’s Dance starts up a warning within Malte, but he chooses to ignore it: “I recognized in the man’s

neck...the same horrible bisyllabic hopping that had just left his legs. From this moment I was bound to him” (68). This time, Malte attempts to help the man: “I gathered my little strength together like money and, gazing at his hands, I begged him to take it if it could be of any use. I think he took it...” (69-70). Though this offering of strength empties him, this time Malte is able to walk away, shaken but intact.

Malte was born into a tradition of “seeing” arising from his mother’s side of the family. It is a sensitivity and receptivity to what is normally not noticed. In Walter Sokel’s words, seeing “can only come about by a surrender of the ego. It is a selfless seeing” (180). Malte’s modern society demands that one be receptive to change, to instability, and Malte’s imaginative reception of what he sees proves that he is trying to adapt. Somehow, amid the chaos of the fragmented plays and “uncooked reality” (233) which surround him, he must learn to cope with it all.

4.2. Remembering

Personal experience can be a valuable source of insight into the behavior of others, just as understanding why others behave as they do can provide insight into one's own actions. "Das zunächst Verdrängte muß quasi noch einmal durchlebt werden, um das Individuum neu und gültig zu konstituieren – besonders die Kindheit, in der das Ich noch nicht in die verengte und schematisierte Erwachsenenwelt eingebunden war" (Engel 193).

Luckily for our purposes, Malte's past experiences have already been analyzed by psychologists such as David Kleinbard, whose psychological study of Rainer Maria Rilke's life and work, The Beginning of Terror, offers a great deal of insight into Malte's creator, and by extension, Malte himself. We need concern ourselves only with the fact that Malte does retrieve and examine some memories from his childhood. Through better understanding himself and the influences that shaped him, Malte will be better able to establish a solid foundation for himself.

If an actor is to develop his talent and be able to play more complicated and challenging roles, he must also have some knowledge of human history. Though the setting, costume, and props may be correct for a "period" play, if an actor has no sense of where his role fits into the grand scheme of time and events, the potential for a successful performance is limited, at best. Though his choice of historical characters is obscure, Malte's musings over saints, lovers, and the characters from the stories in the "little green book" (187) open the way to his realization at Orange of the "immense...superhuman drama...suddenly measured in its sheer immeasurability" (232). "The narratives [in the little green book]...are

significant less for their chronology or narrative sequence ('histoire') than as examples of the *moment*, of the act and process of understanding" (Yarrow, "Anxiety" 230; emphasis in original). At Orange, Malte finds a connection to history and to something greater than himself — an experience which is traditionally associated with religion. The immenseness at Orange, "where everything was expectancy, emptiness, absorption..." (232), opens the way for infinite possibilities of improvisation, for freedom of action.

The enormous attentiveness of this space functions as the expectancy which invites being to manifest itself from the wings. The necessary condition is one in which one awaits the entry of the players, not knowing what will happen, but ready for anything. To be — psychologically and physically — on a level with this activity is what Malte's progress aims at. To some extent he achieves it...[he senses that] there is 'order' in 'immeasurability' (Yarrow, "Anxiety" 230)

The order that Malte discovers in the immeasurability of this drama is reassuring to him, despite the observation which follows that nowadays "we don't have a theater, any more than we have a God: for this, community is needed" (233). Following the passage on the theater at Orange, Malte makes a bow to one who has spent her life trying to share her own awareness of and connection with the superhuman drama. Eleanora Duse, one of the greatest actresses of her and Malte's day, has only limited success at this task. Her own fear holds her back from the brink of revealing the "immense reality" (235) during her performance. The audience, who could accompany her into the immenseness, is also frightened, and breaks into applause "as if to ward off, at the last moment, something that would force them to change their life" (235). So, instead of remembering and experiencing the immense drama as a community, it is left to the individual to do so piecemeal and alone.

It could be said that, at Orange, Malte stumbles upon evidence of what C. G. Jung calls the “collective unconscious.” It is deeper than the superficial, personal unconscious in that it “does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn [Jung has] chosen the term ‘collective’ because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals” (Jung 3-4).

Duse’s audience shows that they suspect something like the collective unconscious does exist, and that they fear it, since they ward it off at the last moment. Were this a more primitive society, the audience may be willing to receive the memory of the collective drama and to help Duse in her role of what Bates calls the “actor-shaman.”

For centuries, the role of the actor in traditional societies was to act on behalf of the community. The actor-shaman heals himself by going into the world of fantasy, the imagined, the spirits. And this world contains the secrets which we all know, individually, deep down in our unconscious, but which need to be *shared* publicly [and acknowledged]. (194)

Remembering is useless unless the memory can be translated and passed to others by a competent storyteller, which an actor-shaman is sometimes called upon to be. In Malte’s own family, this role is filled by Count Brahe, in touch with the past and the future, whose wish when telling stories is that his listeners not just hear him, but more importantly, see what he is telling them. In the absence of the Count, Malte wishes for “someone who knows how to tell a story” (191), someone with the talent to get beyond mere fact and action and bring about a transcendence of contradictions, someone to explain the logic behind a split-second choice, “infinitely compressed” (191), that means the difference between life and

death, which may change the course of history. Even if Malte could find a modern-day shaman, witnesses might not have the ability, or the courage, to “see” as well as he wishes them to.

Malte’s remembering in the Notebooks exposes more than just his personal memories. It illustrates the contradiction between the community offered and shared by the primitive actor-shaman, and the community offered by such as Duse but rejected by the modern audience. Malte identifies the storytellers of his experience, the stories they tell, and their ability to tap into the immense drama of time and being. He mourns the large-scale loss of connection with memory and his own inability to transcend allusion and fact with words.

4.3. Role-Playing

A task which accompanies seeing and remembering is acting within the safe harbor of a role in which expectations are more clearly delineated. "Acting, like any art, can be learned, finally, only in the arena....one is not going to learn to swim until one gets in the water..." (Mamet 80). As stated, Malte started the practice of role-playing through his performance as Sophie, plus he knows the pitfalls of being unprepared to play a role. "By acting out the role of the other, the child develops a conception of his own attitude or role as differentiated from and related to the adopted role" (Stone 153). This holds true for actors as well. The role-playing which Malte recognizes all around him reinforces the theatrical bent of the Notebooks,

In the Notebooks, not only people play roles. Flowers play their role and stand up to say "Red, with a frightened voice" (17). Laces play the role of landscape, garden, season, and the women who made them (137). Death, as an actor, is quite versatile. It plays the role of the dying Chamberlain and, in the process, uses up all of his leftover "pride, will, and authority" (15). Death plays the role of Life briefly when the heart of Malte's father is perforated. Malte writes that "in that spot something like a mouth appeared from which, twice in succession, blood spurted out, as if the mouth were uttering a two-syllable word....And now the wound stayed motionless, like a closed eye" (158-159). Death even plays an aged doyenne when it inhabits the very old and small women who, "on an enormous bed, as if on the stage of a theater, in front of the whole family and the assembled servants and dogs, discreetly and with the greatest dignity passed away" (16).

When one plays the same role for a long time, sometimes attention wavers and the scene is played without much thought. However, as proved by the nearly-blind butler who serves the diners without noticing that some are absent, sight gags can ruin a fine dramatic performance.

Countess Brahe tries not to let her performance as “the real mistress of Ulsgaard” be spoiled by the entrance of the beautiful, vivacious actress, Maman. The Countess has led the Ulsgaard show for so long as its star player that she continues to “calmly [make] decisions herself and [carries] them out without accounting to anyone” (119-120). Because she misses “another, brilliant life” (121) now that her play has had such a long run, she resorts to obvious attention-getters, such as choking at the table, to make herself appear “sensational and fascinating” (121). She was upstaged once before when her long-suffering co-star, the Chamberlain, deliberately poured wine on the dining cloth. Plus, she takes it personally when other actors get sick and draw attention away from her performance. But it is Maman, who has the effrontery to actually die during the show (thereby upstaging the Countess irreversibly), who causes the Countess to give up and slowly withdraw altogether from the performance. The Chamberlain, however, has the professional grace to wait until her death scene is over before beginning his own.

Birthdays, as Malte remembers them, are performances which must be played out no matter what happens. The unfamiliar actors-as-guests become uncomfortable with the staging, and are embarrassed by their unfamiliarity with the other actors. Some damage the props. In contrast to Malte, who is quite practiced in his role of gracious host, the other actors

forget their lines or lose their focus, and the stagehands get careless. It falls to Malte to save the performance by pretending that all is as it should be, that the props which are brought on stage are the correct ones, even if they are not. “In the end, you did everything you had to do; it didn’t require any great skill” (146).

Role-playing sometimes calls upon an actor to don the mask and costume of a character quite different from the self. This is a way to broaden and test the actor’s creativity and awareness of others. It can be quite trying for those whose talents fail to meet expectations. On Malte’s Paris stage, the “tall, emaciated man in a dark coat” (66), who is afflicted with St. Vitus’s Dance, attempts a role of normalcy while walking down the street. He has chosen a cane as his prop, which he uses as a supplemental spine to help keep him in character, though it only works for a short time. When the suppressed “elemental force” (70) of self finally explodes out through this man’s attempted role, his prop is no longer of use. “The cane was gone, he stretched out his arms as if he were trying to fly, and some kind of elemental force exploded from him...and flung a horrible dance out of him into the midst of the crowd. For he was already surrounded by people, and I could no longer see him” (70-71). “The victim’s desperate attempt to hide what victimizes him is a form of vanity or shame, a pretense at being what he is not...” (Sokel 182).

Contrast this scene with the earlier appearance of a “tall, thin man” (17), carrying a crutch. He holds his prop out in front of him, hitting the ground with it now and then as if testing it, as if trying to discover some alternate use for it. Then we are told of his extraordinarily light step “filled with memories of an earlier walking” (18). Seemingly, this

other man is looking for new ways to use the crutch, since he no longer needs it to help him walk. In contrast, the emaciated man uses his cane prop in a new way as well. Role-playing allows one to test new uses for things, to explore new ways of conducting oneself, to find new possibilities of being.

The throwing off of pretense, even if involuntarily, in the scene of the man with St. Vitus's Dance implies something additional:

In the context, it is a liberation from the constant burden of having to suppress what is strongest in oneself...the simile 'like a natural force' counteracts all associations of denigration and negativity implied by the idea of the nervous disorder, and elevates that which the conscious will sought to repress to the rank of a force that not only overwhelms man, but is also in accord with, and part of, nature. (Sokel 184)

That this emaciated man cannot maintain his role of normalcy does not necessarily mean he has failed. Only when his natural force breaks through does he gain an audience. In this way, he becomes another example of Bates' "actor-shaman." Traditionally, an individual must be figuratively reborn to become a shaman and be able to tap into other "worlds" and "powers." "The destruction of the individual thus appears as the reverse side of a tremendous expansion and elevation. Destruction becomes, as it were, the necessary precondition for the release of elemental power" (Sokel 184). Ironically, the St. Vitus dancer approaches a model of what Malte wishes to be — a real being without disguise (231). While the man tries to disguise himself, Malte wants to be in touch with an elemental force that will define his self. Malte is used to playing a role. He wants to discover and express what lies beneath his makeup and costume.

The reaction of the crowd which finally surrounds the St. Vitus dancer can only be guessed at. Perhaps they jeer and laugh as the errand boy and clerk do (66). It is also likely that the crowd is fascinated by the expression of the natural force they are witnessing, which they suspect exists, but with which they are no longer familiar. This scene is reminiscent of the Paris shop with its public display of death masks, which “know” (76), and to the music of Beethoven which rises “invisible and joyous, out of all things, and ascends and floats and forms the heavens...” (76-77). These images remind us of the elemental part of our humanity which has been hidden and forgotten, the expression of which is no longer socially promoted or acceptable. As with Malte, the roles we are expected to play can be frustrating and limiting and prevent us from discovering our true role in life, which perhaps should be no role at all.

4.4. Rehearsing

Rehearsals bring together the results of seeing, remembering, and role-playing. The actor draws upon these results and, by using his imagination, begins the process of building a character. Ideally, this character should not be a mere imitation of another person, but must be an expression of what the actor finds within himself.

The rehearsal process, though it brings together people to work toward a common goal, can be frightening and lonely for an actor. Though he may draw support for himself and his character from his fellow actors, he alone is responsible for his own performance. Malte, working as he does with no prepared script (that we are aware of), who is only sporadically able to accept help from others, does not even have a director to guide him or to turn to for support. The director functions as a mirror, reflecting the actor's work back upon him. He also "temporarily comes to represent significant figures in the actor's life, in particular, mother and father" (Aaron 19). God, arguably director of the superhuman drama, works in too inscrutable a fashion to be of help to Malte. Any relatives Malte calls upon through his memories are only as helpful as Malte can make them. Society is no longer cohesive enough to act as a guiding force. Essentially, Malte directs himself. In addition, a written script may not be so crucial after all. David Mamet's advice to actors is, "You have to learn the lines, look at the script *simply* to find a simple action for each scene, and then go out there and do your best to accomplish that action....For to you, to the actor, it is not the words which carry the meaning — it is the actions " (62).

We can regard the Notebooks as a rehearsal up until Malte begins to discuss the story of the Prodigal Son. Early on, when Malte has various opportunities to work on a scene, as when he encounters the poor, the dying man at the *crémèriè*, or the propped-up apartment house wall, he shies away. This behavior is acceptable in the early stages of rehearsal. “A rehearsal is the place for controlled experimentation and research, a time to try out any and all ideas and impulses within the framework of the given circumstances. Rehearsals are the place to make mistakes, and actors often find out what’s right by intentionally doing something that’s wrong” (Aaron 16). At some point, however, the actor must begin to focus in on his character and make choices. He must fight the impulse to laugh or back away and must pay attention to learning to respond to what is going on in the scene. When Malte encounters the man with St. Vitus’s Dance, he is able to do exactly that, ignoring his practiced “slight fear” (66) and the intuition that warns him to cross the street. He improvises, in a way, as he does not run off when the inner warning sounds, but follows his empathic urge instead and sees this scene through to its end.

Through improvisation, which is often part of a rehearsal process, the actor learns to “discover his own resources, to allow body and mind to be free to move in any appropriate direction” (Yarrow, “Neutral” 4). The desired result of improvisation is something which Yarrow calls “armed neutrality” (“Neutral” 5), a mental state in which the actor is, without fear or preconception, prepared for anything (Yarrow, Neutral 4). When Malte goes to look at the blind news seller in an attempt to “intimidate and neutralize” (210) his wretched mental picture of the man, he is in just such a neutral, armed frame of mind. Though what

he sees “almost simultaneously” (211) is in total worse than he ever imagined, the scene ends with a sense of elation, in contrast to when Malte is left empty after following the man with St. Vitus’s Dance. Here with the news seller, Malte acts without fear, and while he looks at the man, “a deeper level of perception is activated, a level on which the object out there and self of the observer are in intimate, spontaneous communication; Malte *feels* ‘that he was wearing another hat and a cravat that was undoubtedly a Sunday one’ He did not foresee these details” (Carvill 66). By reaching a state of armed neutrality, Malte achieves “a liberation from the habitual and an initiation into what lies beyond” (Yarrow, “Anxiety” 229).

The repetition of rehearsal, the practicing again and again of word and movement, is not part of the Notebooks. We are aware that emotion is tapped and that a sort of journey is made from fear and confusion to confidence and understanding. It is evident that Malte, to his own satisfaction, identifies what had been a major block to his progress, which is the effect that familial, egocentric love has had upon his personal development. Eventually, Malte can tell the difference between the role imposed upon him by that love, and the ever-stronger, ever-more-aware self which he develops independently from that role. That self is willing to cope with whatever lies beyond, to improvise, create, and adapt. Healthy actors know the difference between acting and not-acting. It is something that Malte must learn as well.

5. Special Effects

5.1. **Deus ex machina and Maman**

Deus ex machina is a convention from Greek theater: "...in Situationen, wo menschliches Handeln in eine Aporie geführt hat, erscheint plötzlich ein Gott hoch über den Streitenden und erzwingt durch sein Machtwort eine Lösung des Konflikts oder zumindest ein Arrangement" (Blume 71). This appearance was made by means of a crane-like apparatus swung out over the performing area from which the god was suspended. The god's main purpose was, when the situation was most dire, to solve the problems which the humans could not solve themselves. Over time this term has also come to mean "A power, event, person or thing that comes in the nick of time to solve a difficulty...especially in a novel or play" (Oxford).

A deus ex machina appears three times³ in Malte's Notebooks, inspired by the person of Malte's Maman, who was instinctively theatrical. "If she had been born into a religion with expressive, complicated observances, it would have been bliss for her to remain kneeling for hours, to prostrate herself and make the sign of the cross with broad, emphatic gestures on her breast and shoulders" (110). Maman, who was unluckily born into the restraint of Protestantism, nevertheless possesses almost mythic powers in the eyes of young Malte.

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A fourth reference to deus ex machina, to "Monseigneur Saint Michael" on the edge of the scaffolding, appears on page 230 of the Notebooks.

As a child, Malte looked upon his mother as the only one, the only power, who could dispel his fear. She took the ominous stillness of the night upon herself and became that stillness, struck a light and made everything familiar by her luminous presence. She had the power to put any of Malte's monstrous fears behind her, and he trusted that she could transcend any of his future fears as well. (Painter 184)

The love Malte identifies with regard to his mother is of a different quality from the love given by people in general. Malte's mother-love is selfless and non-judgemental. It eases pain and fear, and leaves in its wake a balm of peace and reassurance. It nurtures. All other love, except for that from God, is egocentric, whether from a lover, a friend, or a family group. It tends to destroy the object of its regard.

Malte describes Maman's unexpected return home from a dance one night when he was young, as he frets and screams under the effect of fever and the Big Thing. She appears in his room, a magnificent vision in silk, fur, flowers, and jewels. Her embrace and kisses calm him immediately, and she holds him until his father forces her to leave again once Malte's conflict has been eased. The only proof that Maman was there at all remains in her forgotten dance card and some white camellias left on Malte's blanket, with which he covers his eyes to cool them (97).

A second appearance comes with a prayer of thanks. "O mother: you who are without an equal, who stood before all this silence, long ago in childhood. Who took it upon yourself to say: Don't be afraid; I'm here....Does any power equal your power among the lords of the earth?" (75). This invocation, written in Malte's Paris room, acknowledges the mother-figure rather than Maman herself. A sense of calm is present at the completion of that particular

written passage, which begins with visions of torture-chambers and agony. As Rebecca Painter recognizes, “There is a saviour somewhere in all this despair” (184).

Deus ex machina comes into play a third time through someone else’s mother, but Malte still takes comfort from her presence. Malte is kept awake by the stamping and rolling noises in the apartment next door. He has been again offering his strength, his will, to calm the person on the other side of the wall, and again it is not enough. “I know I was wondering how much longer things could go on this way, on the very afternoon when someone walked up to our floor” (179). Malte does not know if it really is the neighbor’s mother who has arrived or not. All he knows for certain is that someone entered the room next door, and then there was quiet. “And now...now everything was absolutely silent. Silent as after a severe pain stops. A strangely feelable, prickling silence, as if a wound were healing” (180). Awe at the power of the arrival to create such silence holds Malte still, wondering who wields such power. “Good God, I thought, his mother is here....Ah, that this could exist. A creature like this, before whom doors give way as they never do for us. Yes, now we could sleep” (181). It does not matter if Malte really hears a female voice through the wall, for the convention has already been established. Only the mother-figure, the deus ex machina, through her capacity to love selflessly, can calm Malte’s fear with such ease.

As positive as this theatrical effect may seem, it is something that Malte must overcome if he is to recognize himself as an independent character. Louise Kaplan’s observation is appropriate: “Each time his mother joins him or responds positively to his wooing gestures the toddler staves off the full realization that he is alone in the world as a

separate person who is expected to stand on his own two feet and do everything on his own” (188). Malte is certainly no toddler, but he evidently still wishes Maman were present. However, these three Notebooks entries, here sequenced according to time, do show Malte’s gradual distancing from Maman. The first is an actual memory, the second is a general reference to childhood experience, and the third is only an imaginary maternal presence. Progress, certainly, but when viewed alongside Malte’s initially alarming relationship with his aunt Abelone, we might suspect that it will be hard for Malte to give up his desire for a mother-figure. “[Abelone] is the woman on to whom he transfers his erotic love for his mother” (Brokoph-Mauch 473). Abelone, who is discussed in the next section, is not his ultimate mother-figure. Painter explains:

One is drawn to see a solution to Malte’s problem in the natural process of maturing. One assumes that he need only make a connection between his mother’s capacity to love and his own. This personal growth could have removed the alien quality of salvation from fear, placing that power rightfully within his individual self. Unfortunately, Malte never reaches that stage. Instead of accepting his mother’s ability to love (and to overcome fear) as his own birthright, he transfers his childhood reverence for — and separateness from — her to all women He does not observe that some men love well, thereby demonstrating that other men can. (184-185)

By the end of the Notebooks, it may be possible for Malte to develop the maturity to love and accept love in whatever form it is offered.

For artists, actors included, selfless love is a familiar thing. “Art is an expression of joy and awe, It is not an attempt to share one’s virtues and accomplishments with the audience, but an act of selfless spirit” (Mamet 24). It is love for the art that invites participation from both sides. It is love for the character that shines out from the actor to the

audience. The reflected glow of audience applause is not meant to be personal. It is generally accepted as a reward for the actor's efforts, not as a personal tribute. The audience does not really wish to know actors as the flawed people they are. They only want actors to do their job well enough to avoid causing them uneasiness and to give them their money's worth. The effect of *deus ex machina* on Malte is the same as that of a talented actor bestowing a once-in-a-lifetime performance upon an audience. It engenders awe, amazement and appreciation. It is something one may look forward to, but which, in its rarity, becomes that much more precious and unexpected. The longing Malte has for selfless love is out of proportion to its occurrence.

5.2. Abelone's Tableau

The central entry in Malte's Notebooks utilizes the tapestries of the Lady and the Unicorn as a tribute to, or a metaphor of, the love affair Malte had as a young adult with his mother's sister, Abelone. What is notable about this entry is the way it operates as an interlude which interrupts the action, thereby emphasizing its subject as a separate, treasured memory. The narrative suddenly shifts into a dreamy, slow "pan" across the scenes offered by the tapestries. This effect is analogous to the technique of *tableaux vivants*, or *lebende Bilder* – literally, living pictures.⁴ "[The] 'freeze frame' and 'stop action' techniques of film and television – all of these provide present-day versions of *tableaux vivants*..." (McCullough 1). Like the sudden cessation of sound on stage, a tableau demands the attention of an audience.

Tableaux vivants, or live models posed in static pictures, are traditionally presented on raised platforms which can move sideways, or revolve (McCullough 155-158), thus separating the tableau in space from the viewer. As the Lady on her "blue island" (127) floats upon a "subdued red background" (127), so does this entry seem to float separately and far-removed from the rest of the Notebooks' entries. The mood is peaceful, decorous, and restrained. The static thread pictures imply motion and activity, but the gestures contained therein are "never quite clarified" (131). As Malte's thoughts move from one tapestry to the

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The term *lebende Bilder* originally meant the same as *tableaux vivants*, which are described in the following paragraph. This form of theatrical presentation existed for centuries before the emerging art of cinema borrowed the term in the early 1900's, and used it to describe moving pictures on film.

next, accompanied by an imagined Abelone, his explanations of the Lady's activities do not clarify, but only hint at, the meaning these particular tapestries hold for him. This absence of explanation invites considerable speculation.

There is general agreement that the six tapestries of The Lady and the Unicorn were made in the 15th century as either a wedding gift or a tribute to a marriage of nobility. They represent the five senses, one tapestry for each, with a sixth tapestry presenting the cryptic motto, "*À mon seul désir*." Each one shows mythical and symbolic figures, the two obvious ones being the lion and the unicorn. Margaret Freeman believes that the lion symbolizes "the strength and courage of the man and the unicorn the chastity of the lady" (65). Of the oak tree behind the lion she writes, "In the language of love the strong, long-lived oak was an important symbol of fidelity" (128). The holly tree behind the unicorn is interpreted as "one of the plants known in the Middle Ages as Christ's thorn, and Hrabanus Maurus states that the *Ilex* [holly].... also could protect against evil" (Freeman 138).

The unicorn symbolizes other things as well. Because of its horn, "When symbolizing male potency, the unicorn is a fertility god...to many people he remains the untamed spirit of the wilderness" (Williamson, John 78). Hebrew scholars interpreted the unicorn "as referring to Christ, with its erotic significance attached to the Incarnation" (Williamson, Joan 215).

Sometimes at issue is the order in which the tapestries should be hung or viewed. W.G. Thomson claims that the tapestry "wherein the lady standing in front of a tent bearing an inscription "*À mon seul désir*" is about to don a golden chain, is introductory..." (125).

Joan Williamson says that the lady is actually placing her necklace back in the box after wearing it in the first five tapestries, thus turning her back on earthly things and choosing Christ as her only desire (217). This follows Williamson's reasoning that the ideal of marriage in the Middle Ages was "a mirror for the relation of the soul to Christ..." (219).

We can speculate that the order in which Malte views the tapestries is representative of his relationship with Abelone, whom the Lady embodies. In the first tapestries we are shown, the Lady is absorbed in activities befitting one of her noble station. She is assisted in them by her handmaid. In the first (Taste), the lion and the unicorn each play a heraldic role. A little dog sits hoping for recognition. In the second (Smell), the lion has disengaged from the action, but the unicorn watches and is said to "understand" (129). In the third (Hearing), the lion is agitated, "holding back a howl behind clenched teeth" (129), but the unicorn is described as beautiful and floating. The action reaches a climax in the fourth tapestry (Desire). The Lady emerges from a tent to imagined flames of lightning, flanked by the lion and unicorn who are again occupied as heraldic figures. The dog has reappeared and watches. The Lady's simple beauty surpasses that of her gown and pearls, and as the handmaid holds a casket open, she takes out a "magnificent treasure, which has always been locked away" (129). But then the motto on the tent is pointed out – "To my only desire" – and after that (in Touch), the situation seems to fall into confusion as the Lady stands alone with the animals. At last (in Seeing), a resolution seems to have been reached and accepted.

Bianca Theisen's explanation of the meaning of the Lady showing the unicorn its image in the mirror supports the theory that this tableau, for Malte, represents Abelone.

Inverting the order in which they are exhibited, [Malte]... transforms the medieval pictorial representations into a narrative that closes in on itself when the last tapestry is said to mirror the presence of an absence. It makes visible what is invisible when it shows the mirrored image of the unicorn....If Abelone's absence is made present, as, according to legend, the unicorn's invisibility is made visible in a mirror held by a virgin, what Abelone, also a virgin, is made to see in this mirroring narrative is herself, simultaneously mirrored and mirroring. Instead of blinding Abelone to make her see what cannot be seen, Malte's narration makes her see herself seeing. (122)

Though the five senses certainly come into play in an erotic love affair, here they act merely as a supportive framework within which the relationship between Malte and Abelone is only hinted at. Malte never directly refers to the five senses at all. We are left wondering. Does the progression of the six tapestries illustrate the progression of the relationship? Do the first four depict Malte's growing passion for Abelone, which is ultimately quashed when she reveals some personal truth which has never been told to anyone? Perhaps this is so disturbing that Malte abandons her, or is forced away, leaving Abelone to cling to the pole and the unicorn's horn for support, or to figuratively mourn for what could never be. Has Abelone finally recovered herself in the sixth tapestry, where "no one is allowed to come" (130), and as the lion stands guard, she bravely shows the unicorn the still-radiant beauty of itself, recalling virginity, Christ, and the Incarnation? Is Malte the handmaid or the little dog? Is his feminine side the unicorn? Perhaps Abelone's maleness is the lion, increasingly protective the closer Malte gets to her. Any of these possibilities, or all of them, could be correct, given that Malte is determined to avoid the harm that would come from telling the truth.

Gudrun Brokoph-Mauch views Abelone as a multi-dimensional combination of *femme fragile* and *femme fatale*. She identifies the unicorn as the symbol of Abelone's "introverted and narcissistic virginity" (473), which also includes the possessionless love which Malte himself later yearns for.

She represents the maternal which stands for Rilke's longing for love surpassing, however, mere motherly love. She also represents the virginal girlish and the androgynous, thereby embodying some of the main characteristics of female figures in literature of the Turn of the Century. (473)

Abelone has spent her life waiting to be found, a strength, in Malte's view, that does not exist in his modern age. She is the model for the possessionless love which Malte learns to long for. Abelone, like the Prodigal Son, has learned how to "let the rays of...emotion shine through into the beloved object, instead of consuming the emotion..." (254) which she finds therein. In this model, the beloved is enhanced, unselfishly given the spotlight, with no accompanying demands for reciprocation. Through the ages, women who become mothers learn to do this, though it tires them, as the Lady in the last tapestry is tired. God, if he truly loves, loves his people in this hands-off way. The beloved must maintain freedom and autonomy. It is difficult for the lover to learn that there may never be anyone capable of piercing the lover with rays as the beloved is pierced, for the lover's greatest terror is that "someone would respond..." (255). With response comes an obligation by the lover to conform to the beloved so as not to disappoint.

The Danish singer in Venice, who reminds Malte of Abelone, has the same "calories of...magnificent emotion" (249) as Abelone. When she acquiesces to the hostess and sings

the conventional Italian song, her effort fails. It is when her voice rises with the unknown German song which no one expects that her directionless emotion engulfs the crowd. Her song reflects Malte's unconventional outlook on love. Her voice creates confusion, then silence. Her performance, against expectation and directed at no one, except God perhaps, fills her with "vast confidence" (249), and her listeners are left stunned. Eleanora Duse, whose "heart rose ceaselessly toward an immense reality..." (235) onstage, had the same effect on her audience. We suspect that, in contrast, Abelone never quite achieves what the Danish singer does. According to Malte, "Abelone didn't direct toward God the calories of her magnificent emotion....Didn't she know there was no reason to be afraid that he would love her in return?....Was she afraid that, detained by him halfway along, she would become a beloved?" (249-250). Though the potential is there, fear of reciprocation holds her back. The Lady in the tapestries seems also to be Malte's model of what Abelone could be. The Lady directs her love toward God, who is embodied in the unicorn. Though she is willing to wait forever for a response, none is really expected.

6. The Prodigal Son

“It would be difficult to persuade me that the story of the Prodigal Son is not the legend of a man who didn’t want to be loved” (251). So writes Malte in the final scene of the Notebooks. The reason for his not wanting to be loved is simple to explain. The love he would usually be subject to is egocentric, binding, and restrictive. It lays obligations and expectations on the beloved. Unless the beloved is aware of the danger and can resist it, this love will shape him in ways that turn him into someone unrecognizable to himself, someone who is obliged to please everyone, but in doing so is bound to disappoint.

Some critics view the Prodigal Son as a separate character from Malte, or as a character that illustrates Malte’s state of mind. Judith Ryan, in keeping with her explanation of Malte’s “hypothetisches Erzählen,” discusses “den hypothetischen Charakter dieser Ausführung....” (“Hypothetisches” 370) which separates Malte from the Prodigal Son. Lorna Martens suggests, “The parable of the Prodigal Son can be, and often has been, taken as a kind of oblique summary of Malte’s progress thus far that indicates the point he has reached at the termination of *Die Aufzeichnungen*” (244). According to McRaith, “Malte holds the Prodigal Son as his model, his hope that transformation can occur. Indeed, it is difficult to discern in some of the passages on the Prodigal Son whether Malte is reflecting on the Prodigal Son or projecting himself...” (45). The Prodigal Son passage in the Notebooks, which coincides with McRaith’s third stage of mask development, illustrates Malte’s recognition that the mask is unnecessary (McRaith 43), that he has reached a “high level of consciousness and self-assurance [which] accepts the true existence of both the inner and

outer realities for what they are, a constant flow of love and death” (McRaith 31). Manfred Engel declares that the Prodigal Son displays “alle wesentlichen Aspekte des Subjektivitätsentwurfs...” (192) and combines them “zu einer idealtypischen Biographie...” (192). Engel’s definition is more in keeping with the view of this paper, that the Prodigal Son is a character Malte takes on, not by choice, but because his family, the audience that matters, would see him in no other guise. However, his wish to take his childhood memories upon himself again, now that he can more calmly recall them, can only be done alone in his imagination. The family home has been sold and we do not know what has become of the remaining relatives.

All the work Malte has done throughout the Notebooks, from thinking through and designing a technical background, to learning and perfecting his acting skills, culminates in the performance of the Prodigal Son character. The final passage in the Notebooks reviews and summarizes the mental process which Malte has gone through to strengthen his self and be able, through the filter of time, to at last come to terms with the childhood which shaped him. Malte wishes to “see,” if you will, his childhood again with the empathy he can now control, which he can now use to his advantage.

The summary preceding the Son’s arrival at home refers to incidents and characters previously presented in the Notebooks, which are again reviewed, and once again filtered through the mirror of time. The passage of time has allowed Malte to emotionally separate from what he has written and has given him the opportunity to develop the self which lies behind the mask. The self-assurance McRaith mentions is what allows Malte to safely carry

out this review. Also, Malte is strong enough to return to his family, even if only in thought, and attempt to “finish” his childhood. “[All] its memories had the vagueness of premonitions, and the fact that they were past made them almost arise as future” (259).

In the Prodigal Son passage, Malte appears to be speaking of someone else altogether. It is the same way that an actor talks when discussing a character he plays. Though the actor portrays the character, and the character arises out of the actor, the actor normally knows which traits belong to the character and which are personally his own. This separation of self from character is healthy and carries through into performance. It is common during a performance for an actor to feel as if he is sitting on his own shoulder, watching himself act, able to monitor and register what is happening on stage and in the audience, while still being involved in the interplay between characters. Stephen Aaron describes this state of mind as

the adaptive split in the ego which the actor must maintain between the observing ego [the self] and the performing ego [the character]. During their finest performances, for example, actors tend to feel that the character (the performing ego) has taken over in the sense that it is not the actor who is making things happen; it is the character who reacts spontaneously and truthfully. (111-112)

“The gifted Florence Eldridge, actress-wife of Fredric March, calls acting ‘a schizophrenic experience. You’re working on two levels. You try to recapture fantasy each night. And then the editorial part of your mind begins to function, coolly monitoring the fantasy part of you and making intellectual comments on your performance” (Little and Cantor 120). This is the frame of reference Malte uses when he writes of the Prodigal Son’s arrival at the family house. The meta-distancing of Malte from this character is illustrated by the intrusive

mention of “Those who have told the story” (259) as well as by the passive voice reporting that one of the dogs howls (Ryan, “Hypothetisches” 370). Then Malte’s observing ego, the editorial part of his mind, takes over the storytelling.

An actor acts in relation to the other actors on stage, enhanced by costumes and makeup, setting and lights, and driven by words spoken which explain the action. This all combines to create the illusion of character, but that character is cemented only by the reception, perception, and reaction of an audience. In Malte’s imagined homecoming, the recognition which breaks through “in one old face” (259) is what begins Malte’s transformation into the Prodigal Son.

Briefly, Malte’s character is identified as “the one who was recognized” (259), who spontaneously reacts with a gesture of supplication⁵ to fend off the egocentric love. But then, the love with which the family-audience surrounds him turns the one who was recognized into the Prodigal Son, and, relieved, Malte realizes that “they all misunderstood him....every day he recognized more clearly that their love, of which they were so vain and to which they secretly encouraged one another, had nothing to do with him....it was obvious how little they could have him in mind” (260). Thus, Malte’s hard-won self, ironically, is allowed to exist because of another mask, this one created by his family’s “distorted perceptions and their lack of understanding” (Kleinbard 52). Because Malte can simultaneously observe the reaction of his audience and still stand calmly before their onslaught of love, ready to deal

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This mirrors the gestures of Duse, who tries to hide from the audience which she believes is gnawing on her face (235).

with anything, proves that he has progressed as both an actor and an individual. More important, however, is Malte's declaration that he "was now terribly difficult to love" (260). By implication, his self is whole, and possessive love can no longer pierce him, which leaves him free from obligation. The chances of God ever displaying love are slim, but Malte has developed patience. Because Malte believes "He was not yet willing" (260), Malte is like the Lady in the tapestries who will wait forever without expectation.

Behind the protective mask created by his family, Malte may now be able to live freely and without makeup. He can draw support from, and is backed by, his familiarity with the great human drama wherein, though just a minor character, he can now play his role any way he chooses.

From another viewpoint, the intrusion of the Prodigal Son into the Notebooks acts as more than a distancing effect. Though the prolonged review of the Biblical story, as told from Malte's point of view, eases the shock of the appearance of this unexpected character, the fact that the Son comes out of nowhere at the end of the novel creates a situation which resembles Nietzsche's definition of *deus ex machina*, that it "took the place of metaphysical comfort" (109) in later Greek tragedy. This is in keeping with the other incidents of *deus ex machina* in the Notebooks, when the mother-figure appeared to ease Malte's fear. The Prodigal Son exists to clarify Malte's concept of a distant God, and, if it is now hereby possible to regard the Notebooks as a new kind of theater, it is an appropriate "earthly resolution" (Nietzsche 108) to Malte's play.

7. Conclusion

Rilke's Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, by its very structure and by virtue of its subject matter, represents the early modern period and can itself be dubbed a "modern" novel. It draws from the time in which it occurs, the early twentieth century, and incorporates contemporary attitudes toward psychoanalysis, performing arts, literature, and film, among other things. It is a novel that connects to its era while it depicts Malte's efforts to connect to his.

Offered here is a proposal that the novel is a model for new theater appropriate for the modern period. By setting his own stage, learning how to perform, and utilizing special effects, Malte makes his way from confusion and fear, through a process whereby he balances the concept of his self against what and whom he sees around him. The impressions thereby made upon Malte act to help him position his more solidified self, where he can then turn and face the childhood and family from which he ran. Malte subjectively and imaginatively makes use of traditional theatrical techniques to create his own role. Because of this accomplishment, I consider the ending of the Notebooks to be a positive one. Nowadays it is expected that we must each find our own way if we are to realize ourselves as functioning adults in modern society. Malte's pioneering effort, done alone without example, instruction, or guidance, is a significant accomplishment.

Rilke felt that the naturalistic theater of his day proved that the traditional art of storytelling was lost. Stories reflect the culture they stem from. Rilke's culture was in chaos,

and any sense made of it, in his opinion, resulted from a subjective, individualized effort, again, as depicted in the Notebooks.

Nietzsche's implication that God is dead is reflected in Rilke's Maltean measure of the great distance that God keeps from modern society. That Malte uses the deus ex machina technique and prays to a mother-figure for release from fear can be explained in two ways. One is that, because God is now so very distant and aloof, it is necessary to grasp at any comforting substitute, even though it may be a man-made convention. The other is that Malte may be instinctively reaching back into his unconscious, primordial self where the natural god-figure was originally regarded as female.

Except to merely mention it, or imply that it is another type of mask, I have purposely avoided defining or discussing the "Big Thing" as it appears in the Notebooks. This phenomenon has gone unmentioned by many critics. It is so strange that a myriad of explanations are possible. To a Freudian it could represent a phallus. It has been likened to an involuntary sexual response (Schoolfield 165), described as a "metaphor of being invaded, swollen, of struggling desperately to accommodate a vastness of sensation..." (Yarrow, "Anxiety" 225), and presented as a fear which shows Malte's "inability to determine the bounds of the self" (Rugg 49). Its apparently negative characteristics would serve it well as an antagonist to the nurturing mother-figure of deus ex machina.

Not addressed here is what Malte means by the word "action." By writing the Notebooks, Malte takes action against fear (16). He uses the term when talking of his failed play (20-22), when musing over King Charles VI of France (229), and with the observation

that we want to remove our makeup and “become real” (231). However, pinning down the meaning of “action” might be better accomplished by someone studying the philosophy of theater.

Also intriguing within the frame of theater would be a more in-depth exploration of the relationship between the actor-shaman as proposed by Bates, the St. Vitus Dancer as presented by Rilke, and the possibility that Malte himself is an actor-shaman figure. By this I mean that his self is metaphorically destroyed but he is re-born as the Prodigal Son within his imaginary theater.

The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge is a condensation of one character’s story within the vast drama as represented by the theater at Orange. Theatrical presentations act as a mirror upon the world, distilling lives, events, and people to their basic essence and reflecting them back to us where we may find connection, assurance, or release. In that drama we are, as Malte is, forced to cope as best we can. Imagination as an aid in that struggle serves us well.

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