

Course Code: OEFL-CFL-ERM

Course Title: Rilke and Modernity

Cross Elective

Semester: SPRING 2026

Course Information

Course Duration: 15 weeks

Credit Hours: 60

Meetings: Twice a week, 2 hours each

Location: TBD

Prerequisites: Basic familiarity with European literary trends of the late 19th/ early 20th century

Instructor Information

Instructor: DR SHRUTI JAIN

Biography: Dr. Shruti Jain is a distinguished scholar, educator, and researcher specializing in German Studies and Foreign Language Education. She holds a PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University, where her pioneering research examined the reception of Nietzsche in India. Her career bridges two domains - literature and philosophy on one hand, and foreign language education on the other. She has undergone teacher training at the Goethe Institutes in Pune, Berlin, and Munich, refining her expertise in language pedagogy, didactics, and intercultural teaching methodologies.

A recipient of prestigious scholarships, including DAAD support for research at Humboldt University, Berlin, Dr. Jain has made significant contributions at the intersection of literature and philosophy. In 2023, she was awarded a coveted scholarship by the International German Teachers' Association (IDV) and the Indian German Teachers' Association (InDaF) for *DACH: Lehrexpertise im Kontext von Plurizentrik und kulturbasiertem Lernen*, a prestigious in-service training program funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education (BMBWF), the Goethe-Institut (Germany), and Movetia (Switzerland).

Her contributions to teacher education are exemplified in her role as co-author of the *Diploma in Teaching German as a Foreign Language* (DTG) at Indira Gandhi National Open University, developed in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut and the University of Vienna. She continues to conduct workshops for school and university teachers of German as Foreign Language.

Dr. Jain has actively participated in international Nietzsche conferences, including those organized by the *Nietzsche Gesellschaft* in Naumburg, home to the renowned Nietzsche-Haus. In 2024, she was invited to speak at the prestigious 'Nietzsches Futures' conference in Weimar, organized by the Kolleg Friedrich Nietzsche of the Weimar Stiftung.

Dr. Jain is actively involved in academic publishing as a peer reviewer and editorial team member of a leading international journal in the humanities and social sciences. She has published with leading academic platforms, exploring themes such as Nietzschean philosophy and its reception in India, Gender Studies, environmental education, and multilingualism and language policy. She is also a member of the *Goethe Society of India*. At JGU, she contributes to the cultural and academic landscape of Foreign Language Education, fostering student engagement through German language festivals, cultural events, and initiatives that celebrate linguistic diversity and intercultural exchange.

Email: shruti@jgu.edu.in

Phone: 8930812346

Office: West 20, 6th Floor, Faculty Office Building

Office Hours: Subjected to prior appointment

1. Course Description

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926) stands among the most influential poets of modernity. His works bridge fin de siècle aesthetics, existential thought, mysticism, and the search for transcendence in a secular world. This course engages with Rilke's poetry, prose, and letters, situating them in their literary-historical, philosophical, and aesthetic contexts. Special emphasis will be given to *The Book of Hours*, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, *The Duino Elegies*, and *The Sonnets to Orpheus*. English Translations of the texts will be used and the discussions will follow in English.

2. Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Analyse central themes of Rilke's oeuvre: solitude, death, God, love, art, and transformation.
- Situate Rilke in relation to Modernism and Continental philosophy.
- Interpret Rilke's poetic form, imagery, and use of myth.
- Develop independent research questions on Rilke's works.

3. Academic Integrity

These will be in accordance with the norms specified in the academic rulebook. Students are required at least 75% attendance to qualify for the final examination. Active classroom participation will be appreciated.

4. Primary Texts

- Rilke, R. M. (1996). *The book of hours: Love poems to God* (A. M. F. Müller, Trans.). HarperCollins. (Original work published 1905)
- Rilke, R. M. (1996). *The notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (M. Mitchell, Trans.). Ecco. (Original work published 1910)
- Rilke, R. M. (1977). *Duino elegies and the Sonnets to Orpheus* (A. Poulin, Jr., Trans.). Houghton Mifflin. (Original works published 1922–1923)
- Rilke, R. M. (1999). *Letters to a young poet* (M. D. Herter Norton, Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1929)
- Rilke, R. M. (1985). *Letters on Cézanne* (J. Agee, Trans.; C. Rilke, Ed.). Fromm International Publishing Corporation. (Original work published 1952)
- Rilke, R. M. (1984). *New poems* (E. Snow, Trans.). North Point Press. (Original work published in 1907)

5. Suggested Secondary Literature

- Boney, E. E. (2013). The concept of being in Rilke's *Elegien*. *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*. Advance online publication. <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vsym20>
- Bridge, H. (2006). Time and space in Rilke's *Neue Gedichte*. *Orbis Litterarum*, 61(4), 263–290. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0730.2006.00420.x>
- Bridge, H. (2004). Rilke and the modern portrait. *The Modern Language Review*, 99(3), 681–695. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3738995>
- Calhoon, K. S. (2000). The eye of the panther: Rilke and the machine of cinema. *Comparative Literature*, 52(2), 143–156. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1771564>
- Castelvedere, A. (2010). Neither religion nor philosophy: The language of delicacy in Rilke's poetry. *German Life and Letters*, 63(2), 206–222. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0483.2010.01538.x>
- Fickert, K. J. (2010). Form and meaning in Rilke's Sonnets. *Kentucky Foreign Language Quarterly*. Advance online publication. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vzfq20>
- Fischer, L. (2015). *The poet as phenomenologist: Rilke and the new poems*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Gass, W. (2004). Rilke's Rodin. *The Georgia Review*, 58(1), 9–31. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41402379>
- Graff, W. L. (1961). Rilke in the light of Heidegger. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 17(2). <https://doi.org/10.7202/1020008ar>
- Grosholz, E. (1982). Angels, language and the imagination: A reconsideration of Rilke's poetry. *The Hudson Review*, 35(3), 419–438. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3851407>
- Heep, H. (1995). Rilke and religion: A European battle. *History of European Ideas*, 20(4–6), 837–843. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-6599\(95\)00052-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-6599(95)00052-5)
- Heidegger, M. (1971). *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter. Harper & Row.
- Hillard, D. (2006). Rilke and historical discourse or the "histories" of *Malte Laurids Brigge*. *German Studies Review*, 29(2), 299–313. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27668036>
- Hutchinson, B. (2006). *Rilke's poetics of becoming*. Modern Humanities Research Association & Routledge.
- Ittner, J. (2003). Becoming animal? Zoo encounters in Rilke, Lispector, and Kronauer. *KulturPoetik*, 3(1), 24–41. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40621657>
- Kaufman, W. (1955). Nietzsche and Rilke. *The Kenyon Review*, 17(1), 1–22. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4333538>
- Koch, M. L. (2012). Rilke's early angels' connections to corporeality and language. *German Life and Letters*, 65(4), 460–478. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0483.2012.01589.x>
- Lautermilch, S. (1978). Rilke's Orpheus: The twin kingdoms. *Pacific Coast Philology*, 13, 36–43. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1316362>

O'Meara, J. (2023). *Rilke in the making: A comprehensive study of his life and work from 1897 to 1926* (3 vols.). Heart's Core Publications.

Minden, M. (2014). Modernism's struggle for the soul: Rainer Maria Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* and Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina*. *German Life and Letters*, 67(3), 367–383. <https://doi.org/10.1111/glal.12047>

Mood, J. I. L. (2014). *Rilke on love and other difficulties: Selections from letters and essays in English; poems in English and German*. W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1975)

Peters, H. F. (1963). [Review of the book *Rilke, Europe, and the English-speaking world*, by E. C. Mason]. *The German Quarterly*, 36(3), 299–301. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/402557>

Rilke, R. M., & Arndt, W. (1988). *Experience of death / Todeserfahrung*. *The Threepenny Review*, 35, 14. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4383702>

Schmidt-Ihm, M. (1952). Rilke's conception of poetry: With special reference to the *Sonnets to Orpheus*. *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, 4, 61–71. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41802632>

Scholza, F. M. (2013, September 5). Rilke, Rodin, and the fragmented man. *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*. Advance online publication. <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vsym20>

Thorlby, A. (1983). Rilke's *Orpheus*: A myth revived. *History of European Ideas*, 4(1), 61–72. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-6599\(83\)90006-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-6599(83)90006-3)

Webb, K. E. (1978). *Rainer Maria Rilke and Jugendstil: Affinities, influences, adaptations* (UNC Studies in the Germanic Languages and Literatures, No. 90). University of North Carolina Press. https://doi.org/10.5149/9781469658599_Webb

Webb, K. E. (1972). Rilke, Rodin, and Jugendstil: The poet as an art critic. *Orbis Litterarum*, 27, 254–263. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0730.1972.tb00142.x>

Wood, F. (1939). Rainer Maria Rilke: Paradoxes. *The Sewanee Review*, 47(4), 586–592. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27535608>

6. Assessment

- Class Participation – 20P
- Creative/ Paragraph submissions (2 × 500 words) – 30P
- Presentation – 20P
- Final Written Examination – 30P

7. Course Plan (15 Weeks / 30 Sessions)*

Week 1 – Introduction: Rilke and the Crisis of Modernity

Session 1 (Instructor-led opening)

- Overview of course aims and themes
- Rilke's life and contexts

Session 2 (Discussion seminar)

Guiding Questions:

- What does “modernity” mean around 1900?
- How do art, religion, and selfhood change when transcendence collapses?
- What kind of poet might emerge from such a world?

Week 2 – Inner Dialogues: The Book of Hours and the Modern Soul

Session 3 (Close reading workshop)

- *Book of Hours*, selected poems (“I live my life in widening circles,” “You, my God, who first breathed me”).

Session 4 Close reading workshop continued

Week 3 - The Sacred Without God: Rilke's Spiritual Modernity

Session 5 (Comparative Discussion) Nietzsche's “The Parable of the Madman” (The Gay Science, §125)

Discussion: Nietzsche and Rilke on God: What kind of sacredness remains possible after the “death of God”?

Session 6 (Small-group discussion): Is Rilke's God inward, absent, or transformed?

Week 4 – The Crisis of Modernity: The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge I

Session 7 (Lecture–seminar)

- Themes: Fragmentation, death, memory, and the city.
- Text: Opening passages of *Malte*.

Session 8 (Student discussion)

- How does Malte's vision reveal the modern self's disintegration?

Week 5 – The Crisis Deepens: The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge II

Session 9 (Close reading workshop)

- Focus on passages about illness, poverty, and the gaze.
- Discussion: How does Rilke's prose enact poetic seeing?

Session 10 (Reflective session)

- Guiding Question: Can art redeem suffering?

Week 6 – Seeing and Form: Rilke and the Visual Arts

Session 11 (Close reading workshop)

- Text: *Letters on Cézanne* (selected excerpts).
- (Lecture) “Rilke and Rodin – The Poetics of Seeing.”

Session 12 (Art-writing lab)

- Describing an artwork using Rilkean *seeing as transformation*.
- Group sharing and reflection: What does it mean to “see phenomenologically”?

Week 7 – Rilke and The Art of Living Poetically

Session 13

- Close reading: *Letters to a Young Poet* (letters 4–6).

Session 14 (Seminar)

- Heidegger, “*What are Poets For?*” (excerpts) & Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Prologue, “Of the Poets”)

Week 8 – Objects and Perception: The New Poems

Session 11 (Text workshop)

- *New Poems*: “The Panther,” “The Archaic Torso of Apollo.”
- Discussion: What is a “thing poem”? What does Rilke see that others miss?

Session 12 (Collaborative interpretation)

- Small groups analysis of different poems
- Activity: “Translating seeing into saying” - how the poem makes perception into presence.

Week 9 – Thresholds: Entering the Duino Elegies

Session 15

- Contextual introduction to *Duino Elegies*; the story of Duino Castle.
- Close reading: First Elegy - the angel and the difficulty of existence.
- Discussion: Is the angel an image of transcendence or crisis?

Session 16

- Readings: Fourth and Eighth Elegies
- Discussion: The unhomely, the Open, and poetic dwelling.

Week 10 – Orphic Poetics: Song and Metamorphosis

Session 19 (Close reading workshop)

- *Sonnets to Orpheus*, Part I (“A tree rose up...”, “Be forever dead in Eurydice”).
- Discussion: Orpheus as figure of transformation.

Session 20 Close reading workshop continued

Week 11 – Guest Lectures

Session 21 Guest Lecture I

Session 22 Guest Lecture II

Week 12 –

Session 23 Guest Lecture III

Session 24 Guest Lecture IV

Week 13 – Student Presentations

Session 25 (Student Presentations I)

Session 26 (Student presentations II)

Week 14 – Student Presentations

Session 27 (Student Presentations III)

Session 28 (Student Presentations IV)

Week 15 – Conclusion: The Afterlife of Rilke

Session 29 (Final reflections seminar)

- Revisiting key question: *What is modernity according to Rilke?*
- Collaborative synthesis on Rilke's idea of being, art, and transformation.

Session 30 (Wrap-up & Course Evaluation)

- Roundtable on learning experiences, favourite poems, and resonances.

*The sequence and pacing of the course are flexible and may vary according to the learning dynamics of the class and the scheduling of guest lectures.