

I: Tuesday 21st March, 2000

*Ross Mellick: 'Journey to the Fair Jerusalem of the Human Heart';
Rilke reading by Elke Neidhardt; Riley Lee playing shakuhachi*

Introduction: Michael Griffith

It's my great pleasure to welcome you all to this first RLA event of this century and I've been asked to thank, in particular, the State Library for hosting the event. But I think it is also very appropriate to thank the RLA Committee and particularly Colette Rayment and her team for all their hard work to get this series together.

This series of four lectures is exploring the relationship between the arts and mysticism and this is a theme that is at the heart of the Religion, Literature and Arts Society's program in its search for ways to cross boundaries of all art forms, between various religious and sacred traditions and especially between the arts and religion itself. Since its inception RLA has been a force in helping to create an animating discourse across these different fields in an age of increasing specialisation.

It is therefore particularly fitting that Ross Mellick with Riley Lee and Elke Neidhardt have been invited to open this first of the century's gatherings. These contributors will help to synthesise the worlds of the visual and plastic arts, music and poetry in the context of a discourse on the relationship between the spiritual and the mythical in contemporary art.

Elke Neidhardt graduated from the Stuttgart State Drama and Opera School and in 1977 joined the Australian Opera as Resident Director. She is currently directing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the Bell Shakespeare Company. Riley Lee is Australia's only Grand Master of the shakuhachi and one of the few outside Japan. He has performed internationally at venues such as the Lincoln Center in Washington and the Roundhouse Theatre in London. Ross Mellick I think is an especially good choice for

this event for two reasons. First, he's been a long time friend and enthusiast of RLA. RLA's fourth international conference entitled *A Grain of Eternity* was held partly at the Museum of Contemporary Art in conjunction with the exhibition, *Spirit and Place – Art in Australia* which was curated by Ross and Nick Waterlow. And the fifth RLA conference entitled *Spirit of Place – Source of the Sacred* was a continuation of that conversation that had been initiated through the dialogue with Ross.

But Ross Mellick is also the embodiment of the synthesis of specialisation which RLA is itself pursuing. He is an artist and a curator who is represented in National and State collections. He is a neurologist practising in Macquarie Street and teaching at the University of New South Wales and holds a PhD from the University of London in neurobiology. He is also a seeker of the spirit who feels the vital importance of trying to join areas not easily joined and who is himself, through his various expressions, addressing the fragmentation of knowledge and interest that is so much a part of our times. Would you please welcome Dr Ross Mellick.

Ross Mellick

Thank you very much, Michael, for your wonderfully generous comments. I would like to thank Dr Colette Rayment for the invitation to be here tonight and I would also like to acknowledge Marie Anderson, who was the animateur at a valuable study weekend at Barbara Blackman's, Indooroopilly, last year when a group of us met and studied Rilke. Some of what you will hear tonight has come from that meeting.

I stand before you tonight with a sense that I have a very difficult task to accomplish. It is not difficult for those who love art and literature to talk about it. The difficulty arises because I feel the need to invite a sense of the spiritual to be here and to attempt something more than an arm's length talk and hope that, by interweaving various elements in the form of the evening, poetry first, the talking and slides second, and then the concert, that some associative connections may be facilitated in the audience so that we might for a short time travel the pilgrim's path of imagination together.

Rilke's poetry and life provide a transparent example of a pilgrim seeking an inner homecoming. The first of the *Duino Elegies* is the first definite step on the journey marked by his poetry.¹ We will hear it read by Elke in a few moments. I will then speak for about thirty minutes about art, myth and the spiritual and my very happy collaboration with one of Australia's most celebrated composers, Ross Edwards, and Grand Master of shakuhachi, Riley Lee, in the production of a work of sculpture which was also an inner journey. Riley Lee will then bring the proceedings to a close near to seven o'clock with a performance; first with a short traditional piece of shakuhachi, *Empty Sky*, which has relevance to part of what will follow, and then the wonderful work by Ross Edwards, *Raft Song at Sunrise*,² which had its world premier at the opening of the Sculpture and Music Installation at the Art Gallery of New South Wales on the 27th of January 1996.

Here is a slide of Riley playing on that occasion.

Now Elke:

[Elke Neidhardt read from Rilke's First Elegy which is cited in part below:]

Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels'
 hierarchies? and even if one of them pressed me
 suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed
 in that overwhelming existence. For beauty is nothing
 but the beginning of terror, which we still are just able to
 endure,
 and we are so awed because it serenely disdains
 to annihilate us. Every angel is terrifying.

....

¹ *Ahead of All Parting: The Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed. and trans. Stephen Mitchell, Modern Library, New York, 1995, 331.

² *Tall Poppies*, TP127.

Voices. Voices. Listen, my heart, as only
saints have listened; until the gigantic call lifted them
off the ground; yet they kept on, impossibly,
kneeling and didn't notice at all:
so complete was their listening. Not that you could endure
God's voice – far from it. But listen to the voice of the wind
and the ceaseless message that forms itself out of silence.
It is murmuring toward you now from those whose died
 young.

Didn't their fate, whenever you stepped into a church
in Naples or Rome, quietly come to address you?
Or high up, some eulogy entrusted you with a mission,
as, last year, on the plaque in Santa Maria Formosa.
What they want of me is that I gently remove the appearance
of injustice about their death—which at times
slightly hinders their souls from proceeding onwards.

Of course, it is strange to inhabit the earth no longer,
to give up customs one barely had time to learn,
not to see roses and other promising Things
in terms of human future; no longer to be
what one was in infinitely anxious hands; to leave
even one's own first name behind, forgetting it
as easily as a child abandons a broken toy.
Strange to no longer desire one's desires. Strange
to see meanings that clung together once, floating away
in every direction. And being dead is hard work
and full of retrieval before one can gradually feel
a trace of eternity.—Though the living are wrong to believe
in the too-sharp distinctions which they themselves have
 created.

Angels (they say) don't know whether it is the living
they are moving among, or the dead. The eternal torrent
whirls all ages along in it, through both realms
forever, and their voices are drowned out in its thunderous
roar.

....

[Ross Mellick continued]

It is particularly fitting to be speaking about art at the State Library because it is not sufficiently appreciated that works of art are clothed in literature and stories and although it is not necessary to read the surface to experience the work, knowledge of it assists to close the distance between the viewer and the work and make the work more accessible. It is also not sufficiently realised either, that every work of art is essentially incomplete when it leaves the artist's hands and awaits completion by the viewer in the act of looking at and experiencing the work, which therefore undergoes transformation as it is looked at and experienced in the privacy and silence of the inner world. Art, therefore, exists out there as object and simultaneously in the inner world of the viewer at the moment of the encounter. There are many different types of art, the differences depending upon the great diversity of artistic intention. Sacred art shares knowledge of specific sacred books and perhaps shared religious practice, such as prayer, with a special audience and therefore represents a special category of art. So I will say little about it. Art otherwise, in the west, seeks to copy the natural world, to decorate, to educate, to make a political statement, to be a commodity. However, the work that interests me particularly, and I expect you, because you are here tonight, is the art that is situated between these categories and seeks to explore inner consciousness.

On occasions when looking at an art object, the viewer will experience something unique and wonderful in the encounter. That is, however, a rare event – as unusual as forming a long and intimate friendship. The great significance of the art experience is about the depth of the rare encounter, not so much in multiple, superficial attachments. Also, as with deep friendship, shared stories with artworks are commonly

fragmentary, more poignant and potent sometimes because of that, each associative response lighting up corners of consciousness which may then fade with promise of a return later.

The stories of life, of art and of friendship are not long sequences. Multiplicities coexist, coming in and out of focused awareness. A welcoming openness is the best way to encourage entry to the meaning of a work of art. Sometimes one is a little bruised by the encounter, then one simply turns away and moves towards another. To use Kafka's wonderful metaphor of frozen sea a little differently we, in a sense, can be thought to walk on a frozen sea – the hidden region of our non-conscious mind. On occasions a frozen surface cracks. Not because we break it – it breaks up from within in response to inner poorly understood pressures, exposing hidden wonders. Imagine walking on such a frozen expanse towards a distant horizon and suddenly, in front of you the ice cracks, bursts from underneath, and a great blue whale surfaces, pauses for just a moment, looks at you and crashes down into the sea again and disappears. A small event in a sense, yet the world is forever altered. The art experience for the artist, and for the viewer, may rarely occur in that way.

The truth of myth reflects inner structures of mind which remain essentially unaltered over the millennia. Thus, the great myths are timeless and speak of a perennial yearning in the human soul; most often for a form of love, or union with an absent beloved, played out in the intensity of lived experience; a throbbing need in the human heart for completion. Thomas Merton has written of the spiritual journey in myth, in prehistoric religion and in the Judeo-Christian tradition. He writes that: '...it is second nature for the human to go on pilgrimage in search of a center, a source...his heart seeks to return to a mythical source, a place of origin, a home...'.³

Jerusalem was, and is, a place of pilgrimage like countless other sites in Australasia, the Americas, Africa, in Asia and in Europe. Merton drew attention to a novel type of pilgrimage undertaken by Celtic monks in Ireland in the sixth century, closely relevant

³ Thomas Merton, *Ways of the Christian Mystics, Essays from Mystics and Zen Masters*, Shambala, Boston, 1994, 1.

to Rilke's pilgrimage and to the journey which occurs sometimes when making and looking at art. They were then unable to take the traditional route to the holy city of Jerusalem because of an obstructing army. The Irish pilgrims set out, therefore, not to a named, known, sacred place but in search of solitude, as an exercise in aesthetic homelessness – an inner journey seeking a spiritual homecoming. They cast themselves upon the sea in boats, coracles and rafts and simply floated off, abandoning themselves with trust and faith to winds and currents in the hope of being led one day to the place which the hand of providence would pick for them. It was a journey to a mysterious unknown but divinely appointed place. Merton writes: 'It was in profound relationship with the inner experience of continuity between the natural and the supernatural, between the sacred and the profane, between this world and the next...the true reality is that which is manifest obscurely in symbol, sacrament and myth...the deepest and most mysterious potentialities demanded to be worked out on a spiritual and human level'.⁴ Their pilgrimage was not merely a restless search of an unsatisfied romantic soul, but a profound existential tribute to realities perceived in the very structure of the world, of man, the animals, and the living and non-living things in it. A dialogue between man and creation and the interweaving of the spiritual and the corporal, an interweaving beautifully illustrated in such illuminations as *The Book of Kells* and *Durrow* and the *Durham Cassiodorus*, made by those monks. Here the Judeo-Christian tradition, the pagan and worldliness are joined.

This is a slide of King David as a musician.⁵

The Irish pilgrims' experience was an example of a pilgrimage of self transformation. Remember Meister Eckhart's wonderfully direct and simple '...if it doesn't arise in me then what use is it to me...?' However, it might be asked, can making art and writing poetry in our time have any relationship with these deep things? Stephen Mitchell asks in his introduction to Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* '...how many readers today and how

⁴ Thomas Merton, 15.

⁵ Slide – King David as a musician; *The Durham Cassiodorus* fol 81v.

many poets consider poetry as a spiritual practice...?⁶ The same question may also be directed at those who make and experience art. The relationship between the art object and the spiritual quest has been close, even during the most materialistically orientated period in art history – the last 200 years in the west – and no less so in the period of contemporary art since the close of World War II. The horrendous events of the 1930's and 40's in Europe, however, once more bear witness that studying the humanities does not necessarily humanise. Something more, some joining to humanising process or practice seems necessary.

I will now show seven slides which will serve to establish an art historical context for my work, and much that has been made in the west in the past 200 years. All the works I am about to show were painted during the time of the European Enlightenment from about 1770 to about 1835.

Samuel Palmer, one of the small group of artists who visited the aging Blake at Number Three, Fountain Court, The Strand, regarded the doorway to Blake's poor room in a shabby court as being the threshold of princes. He painted this image embodying a sense that there was, above the canopy of stars, a God, essentially caring and ordering of the world.⁷ Ross Edwards remarked of this image that the figure could have been Hildegard of Bingen, singing in her garden.⁸

The next image by Samuel Palmer shows the human in an ordered, transparent and holy world.⁹ These works may be seen as expressing a firmly centred faith.

The next shows a shift towards uncertainty. Caspar David Friedrich painted this quite

⁶ *The Sonnets to Orpheus*; Rainer Maria Rilke, translated and introduced by Stephen Mitchell; Shambala, Boston, 1993, xiii.

⁷ Slide – Samuel Palmer, *In a Shoreham Garden*; circa 1830, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

⁸ Personal communication.

⁹ Slide – Samuel Palmer, *The Valley Thick with Corn*; pen, brush, gum; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

alarming image.¹⁰ This image is the wonderfully ambiguous wanderer above a sea of fog. Here one recalls Pico della Mirandola's great oration,¹¹ ringing down the centuries from 1486, drawing upon a neo-Platonic heritage when he imagines these words coming from a Divine source: '...You are confined by no limits and shall determine for yourself, you own nature, in accordance with your own free will, into whose hand I have placed you. I have set you at the centre of the world so that from there you may more easily survey whatever is in the world. We have made you neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal, so that more freely and more honourably the moulder and maker of yourself, may fashion yourself in whatever form you shall prefer. You shall descend among the lower forms of being. You shall be able to be reborn out of the judgement of your own soul, into the highest beings which are Divine...?'

Here the figure is represented as almost a giant, looking down at the landscape. From another perspective, from another viewing point, for example the mountain or the hill, this giant then becomes less than an ant. The figure stands on the edge of an abyss.

And here,¹² an alarming image – the crucifix is small and there is a sense that it is almost overcome by the vastness of the natural world – by the same painter. Even for those not of the Christian faith, it is difficult to avoid a sense of alarm at the feeling that something is ebbing away from the world.

Wright of Derby painted two images of scientific inquiry. Note, in the first,¹³ the light suffuses the faces of those here. There is little in the way of shadow.

¹⁰ Slide – Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer Above a Sea of Fog*, 1818; oil canvas; Hamberg Kunsthalle.

¹¹ *Pico della Mirandola's Oration*, translated by Mary Martin McLaughlin; *The Portable Renaissance Reader*, edited by J. B. Ross and M. M. McLaughlin, Penguin, New York, 1977, 21.

¹² Slide – Caspar David Friedrich, *Morning in the Riesengebirge*, 1811; oil on canvas; Staatliche Schloss und Gout Schloss Charlottenberg.

¹³ Slide – Joseph Wright of Derby, *A philosopher giving a lecture on the Orrery*, oil; circa 1764-66, Derby Museum Art Gallery.

However, the next image,¹⁴ by the same painter, is very different. The difference arises primarily because here, another scientific experiment, we have the presence of life and death. The bird has been taken out of the cage and placed in the bell jar, the air extracted from the bell jar, the bird collapses; the air is then returned and the bird returns to consciousness. It is a demonstration of the life-giving properties of the invisible component – the air. Note the interplay of the individuals in the room. The play of light and dark in the crucible on the table that the man on the right is looking at very intently. Note how the young woman looks at her companion as though seeing the experiment through his eyes. Notice how the little girl can't bear to look. Perhaps it's her bird. And finally note the beautiful detail – the window on the right, through which you can see the cloudy night sky, a reminder of the vastness of uncontrolled nature outside this small room in which there is ordered experiment.

The forces of light and darkness in the human soul are the subject of this next image.¹⁵ Two children fighting, seemingly over an orb of light. Such violence in these young bodies. You see in the foreground the back of one child who reaches up and pulls the right ear of the other.

All these works express relationship and duality, the human and the Divine, the Divine and nature, science, reason and unreason, the divided nature of the human soul.

And finally, look at this work from Japan,¹⁶ done at about the same time. Note the sense of space and emptiness. The only human presence here is the materiality of the brushstroke which has a character like that of the abstract expressionists who represented the last great wave of the spiritual project in art, in the west, in the immediate post World War II period. Here we see in this image, a bracketed moment. One wave is being sucked back into the vast sea at the moment another wave crashes. The ebb and flow depicted here evokes the evanescence of the individual human life. Two short heartbeats, or perhaps inspiration and expiration, and the timelessness

¹⁴ Slide – *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump*, oil; 1767-68, Tate Gallery, London.

¹⁵ Slide – *Two boys fighting over a bladder*, oil; 1767; Charles Rogers; Coltman Collection.

¹⁶ Slide – Japanese brush painting; Anonymous; late 18th Century.

which flows through and onwards into emptiness.

In a few minutes you will hear *Empty Sky*. It opens us to an emptiness which is not relative to fullness, but an emptiness which is a quality in itself. Dualities are strong constants in western art. There is a very ancient legend which holds that on the first day of creation, the sun and the moon were created and, at first, enjoyed equal power and privilege. On the fourth day a conversation took place between the moon and God. The moon asked: 'Is it possible for two kings to share the same crown?' God replied: 'In the future I will restore your light, so that your light will again be as the light of the sun.' This very ancient story was a very early attempt to grapple with notions of duality, the sun and the moon representing complementary modes of being, in some sort of system of relativity or conflict, with a third presence of quite a different quality of being.

In 1912 the poet Apollinaire, at a lecture at the Salon de la Section d'Or in Paris, named a small group of artists 'Orphists'. With his interest in the Greek world, and a poet's sensitivity to the inner world, he discerned that these artists exhibited commonality in process and purpose, even though their works looked very different. They were, themselves, quite unaware of the similarities. He linked them to the Orphic cult of ancient Greece and, accordingly, joined their work to myth and music. Spate wrote about the great differences between these artists. Kupka, the most mystical of them all, immediately rejected Apollinaire's designation. Léger was simply not interested. Duchamp was described as having been amused and Delaunay accepted it but immediately tried to exclude all the others, believing that the label was most suitable for his type of painting alone. Spate wrote that they all sought an inner consciousness and believed that what they sought would have relevance beyond those who simply admired their work.¹⁷ They also found the consciousness they sought through the process of painting itself – the act, the action. They made their pilgrimage in their art. Each brushstroke, each picture, was a part of a focused path towards an inner homecoming.

¹⁷ V. Spate, *Orphism: The Evolution of Non-figurative painting in Paris 1910-14*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979, 4.

Now I would like to introduce my own work which, in its own small way, also was an expression of a journey conducted on the painted surface, and later, through the production of three-dimensional work which culminated in a collaboration with Riley Lee and Ross Edwards. Graeme Sturgeon wrote of my work at the time of the *Sculpture Triennale* at the National Gallery in Victoria, in 1985, in *Australian Sculpture Now*: 'For some time he has been producing individual works which, at least initially, have no necessary or consciously intended relationship. Subsequent considering of the evolving work has revealed a surprising and consistent chain of meaning. Taken together the various works made up a cycle which, in its entirety, illustrates the stages of a symbolic journey of which the works themselves are relics. The works represent a movement from imprisonment and enclosure, towards freedom and lightness...'

The first work of the series grew out of the need to re-establish the human form in work which had previously been wholly abstract or non-objective. Abstract art expresses state of mind, disengaged from the actual material presence of the human in the world. *Garment No.1* had been a freely painted abstract work which, on sudden impulse in 1979, I cut into a simple garment-like shape – a little like the capital letter 'T'. Clothing lying on chairs or hanging, is part of everyone's experience and is strongly evocative of the absent individual. The device of cutting the canvas into this form returned to the work a strong sense of the material and of human presence (Art Gallery of New South Wales).

The next garment had a heavily encrusted surface like a primal landscape (National Gallery of Australia). These two works were presented in shallow boxes to be hung on a wall.

The third garment in the series moved out of the airless box and, although freed in that sense, was nevertheless enclosed in a large bamboo cage. It was to be viewed in the round and the back of the work was as significant as the worked on surface, as the marks and stains there bore little relationship to the conscious intention responsible for the front of the work.

The next works were entirely sculptural with no painted surface at all. The cage was incorporated into the form of the works which were made of slender bamboo slats. The cage, being incorporated into the work, had been neutralised. These works hung freely and were like long slender baskets. They were filled with curled hair and had a primal hominid presence.

The next work shown at *Australia Perspecta* in 1985 was a yurt-like form made of fine bamboo, eight feet in diameter and seven and a half feet high. Inside was a large cone of hair. It explored the interplays of the shelter, as a place of protection, but also being an enclosure, a potential prison.

The next pair of works, shown with installations by Robert Owen and Noelene Lucas in 1991 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, were entitled *Bird Boat* and *Egg Raft* and introduced new elements. Here there is an evocation of air and water and the prospect of an actual journey. *Bird Boat* strains to free itself from the tyranny of gravity and the earth, while the *Egg Raft* seeks the open seas. *Bird Boat* has a cargo of soft curled hair, which has moulded in a nest-like form, inviting the presence of an occupant or passenger. There was also an arching antenna which reached back towards the unseen, non-visible occupant, like the antenna of an insect. The antenna also suggested a steering device implying that the direction of the journey to be made would be determined wholly by this sensing apparatus and what it was able to discern of the unseen occupant. This work aches to fly, however, it never will. It is bound to place, like the preceding works, by weight and gravitational pull.

The drawings which I now show, which are some of many, express thoughts about how meaningful weightlessness and lightness might be achieved in the next work. It was at about this time, in the evolution of the ideas for the final work, that I heard Riley Lee speak about the soul of the bamboo and the necessary intimacy between the bamboo and the performer, and how the performer on the shakuhachi controls the bamboo only as much as the bamboo controls the performer. I had experienced something of this. The bamboo, the material, was in a sense beginning to lead me and

to liberate itself from the subservient role it had served as cage, scaffold and yurt. The recurring sequences of nodes and internodes on its surface, and its resonance in response to percussion, generated a strong feeling of the music trapped within the material. The project of journeying towards freedom and lightness also required that the music trapped within the bamboo should also be liberated as part of that project.

Riley and I met, he agreed to a collaboration and suggested Ross Edwards might agree to join us, as he had previously expressed interest in composing for shakuhachi. Riley approached Ross, he agreed and the collaboration started.

We met in coffee shops and talked about all manner of things but not about the work in progress. Its form was not then known to me. I sent fragments of text and some images, some of which you saw earlier, to Ross and Riley. I also presented Ross with a length of beautifully patinated golden brown bamboo, of the type I was using. Ross, I understand, had it beside him when he was composing *Raft Song at Sunrise* which you will hear soon. Ross wrote, saying he was reading Coomeraswamy's *Christian and Oriental Art*. One of the first texts I sent to both was by George Steiner. I quote: 'It is, I believe, poetry, art and music which relate us most directly to that in-being which is not ours. The arts are most wonderfully rooted in substance, in the human body, in stone, in pigment and in the twanging of gut, or the weight of the wind on reeds. All good art and literature begins in imminence but they do not stop there, which is to say very plainly, that it is the enterprise and privilege of the aesthetic to quicken into lit presence the continuum between temporality and eternity, between matter and spirit, between man and other...?'

In the program that was prepared for *Raft Song at Sunrise* Ross Edwards wrote: 'I have come to regard my works as musical contemplation objects and my source of inspiration was the timeless and mysterious sound world of insects and my music for *Raft Song at Sunrise* takes advantage of the astonishingly expressive qualities of the shakuhachi to introduce the human voice into this sound world...?'

Now a brief description of the completed work. Its form combines two contradictory

synergistic elements. The sea raft is large, having been made as though for travel on the open seas, and it requires a strong stable scaffold when it is earthbound. Upon water it is weightless and must be free of the scaffold to respond to the wind and the tide. The scaffold is curious in design in that it has two very large forward and upward facing bamboos which are crossed and locked into position below by the weight of the raft when it is earthbound. The same bamboos provide the instability to free the raft. At the water's edge the tide rises up through the scaffold and at the moment the raft floats, the scaffold tips forward and to the right because of the weight of those bamboos which extend some feet above the water's surface. The scaffold collapses and the raft is freed for its journey.

The myth of Orpheus is close to the hearts of all who journey in this way. It is a quest for the beloved, for that which is absent; a quest for completion. Shortly after her marriage to Orpheus, Eurydice, fleeing from the attentions of another, trod on a snake which bit her on the foot and she died. Orpheus was heartbroken, but because he was neither fully human, nor fully divine, he had powers of both and was able to gain entry into the inner dark world of Hades, seeking his lost love; seeking what he lacked and needed. He so stirred them in those dark places with his song and his pleading that it is written that the cheeks of the Furies were wet with tears and Sisyphus, himself, ceased rolling that terrible stone to listen. His need to be reunited with his beloved Eurydice was granted on one condition – Orpheus must walk ahead and not look behind until he was out into the clear sunlight of life. However, we know from all manner of sources that the gods and the human dwell uneasily together, perhaps especially so in one frame. Those beings who inhabit both realms, like Orpheus, and like the demons and angels of other traditions, are subject to contrary forces. Orpheus walked ahead, along the dark passage, towards the daylight. Suddenly a human doubt arose in his mind. He asked himself whether he heard footsteps behind or whether he was hearing his own. He looked around.

Rilke in 1908 wrote *Orpheus, Eurydice and Hermes* [a section from which is cited below:]

Now she walked behind the graceful god

Her steps constricted by the trailing grave clothes
Uncertain, gentle but without impatience.
She was deep within herself like a woman heavy with child
And did not see the man in front or the path ascending steeply into life.
Deep within herself, being dead filled her beyond fulfillment
Like a fruit suffused with her own mystery and sweetness
She was filled with her vast death
Which was so new that she could not understand what had happened.

....

She was no longer a woman with blue eyes who once had echoed through the
poet's songs
She was already loosened like long hair
Poured out like fallen rain
Shared like a limitless supply.
She was already root and when abruptly the god put out his hand to stop her
Saying with sorrow in his voice "He has turned around"
She could not understand and softly answered "Who?"

Now picture Rilke, a young man of twenty-two, in the same year as Apollinaire gave his lecture at the Salon de la Section d'Or, standing on a high cliff above the Adriatic in a raging storm, thinking about a business letter. Suddenly, without bidding, he described a sense that a voice called to him out of the roaring gale: 'Who if I cried out would hear me among the ranks of the angels...?' This anguished question arose from a soul at the beginning of a long journey and became the first line of the first *Duino Elegy* that you heard earlier.

Six years before, he wrote that he looked at his face in a mirror and felt that there was a major work in progress. The feeling was with him from that time onwards and it was only at that moment, in the middle of the storm, that the first material step, transmuting the inner journey into poetry, occurred. Six years after that experience, on the cliffs above the Adriatic, Rilke had written only four elegies. The certainty of his task remained, yet was sadly incomplete. His geographic journey had taken him from

Prague to Moscow, Spain, Scandinavia, Italy, Egypt, France and Switzerland.

Ten years later, in January 1922, his lover left him at Muzot. She had come across a postcard reproduction of an Italian Renaissance drawing of Orpheus, sitting under a tree, playing to an assembled group of animals. She tacked it up on the wall opposite his desk before she left. At about that time Vera Knoop, a nineteen year old daughter of a Dutch friend died. He barely knew her, yet he was profoundly shaken by the news of the young woman's death. Suddenly, on the 2nd of February, the poems began again.

There followed a remarkable period of creativity. In two weeks he had written four poems, *The Young Workman's Letter*, and then completed the entire set of ten *Duino Elegies*, as well as composing sixty-four sonnets to Orpheus. He wrote in a letter to Princess Marie von Thurn-und-Taxis, translated by Jack Herbert: 'Everything accomplished in a few days: it was a nameless storm, a hurricane of the spirit, just like that time in Duino. Everything that's tissue and fibre in me cracked...' and later '...the elegies and sonnets continually bear out each other and I see an infinite grace in my having been allowed to fill both these sails with one breath...'

Coomeraswamy, from the eastern tradition, holding hands with Meister Eckhart, said 'The angel we worship, is the angel we become...'. The poems were written without revision; simply transcribed, one after the other – a torrent. At the end of his long journey there had been a fusion. He had become Orpheus, or the gods' scribe, for a short while. Myth arises out of the intensity of human biography.

On 13th November 1925, Rilke, in response to a questionnaire from his Polish translator Witold von Hulewicz, regarding the meaning of the elegies and sonnets, and quoted in J B Leishman's version of the sonnets published in 1936, wrote: '...they reach out infinitely beyond me...affirmation of life and an affirmation of death is, as is here learned and celebrated, a limitation that in the end excludes all infinity. Death is a side of life that is turned away from us. We must try to achieve the fullest consciousness of our existence which is at home in the two unseparated realms, inexhaustibly nourished by both. The true figure of life extends through both domains.

The blood of the mightiest circulation drives through both. There is neither a here, nor a beyond, but a great unity in which those creatures who surpass us, the angels, are at home. And further, we of this earth and this day are not for a moment hedged in by the world of time, nor bound by it. In the widest open world, all are. The things we are moving among and use are provisional and perishable but so long as we are here, they are our possessions and our friendship, sharing the knowledge of our grief and gladness, as they have always been the confidantes of our forbears. Hence, it is important not only not to run-down and degrade everything earthly just because of its temporariness which it shares with us...'. Rilke went on: 'and we ought to grasp and transform these phenomena and these things in a most loving understanding. For our task is so deeply and so passionately to impress upon ourselves this provisional and perishable world that its essential being will again arise invisibly in us...'. The *Elegies*, he concludes, show us at this work. 'The work of these continual conversions of the beloved visible and tangible into the invisible vibration and animation of our nature which introduces new frequencies, new vibrations, into the spheres of the universe...'.

And now, the last slide, which is a view from the raft of the horizon, across the open sea, as it would be seen by a passenger.

And now for the concert. I introduce Riley Lee.

[After Ross Mellick concluded his lecture Riley Lee played shakubachi.]