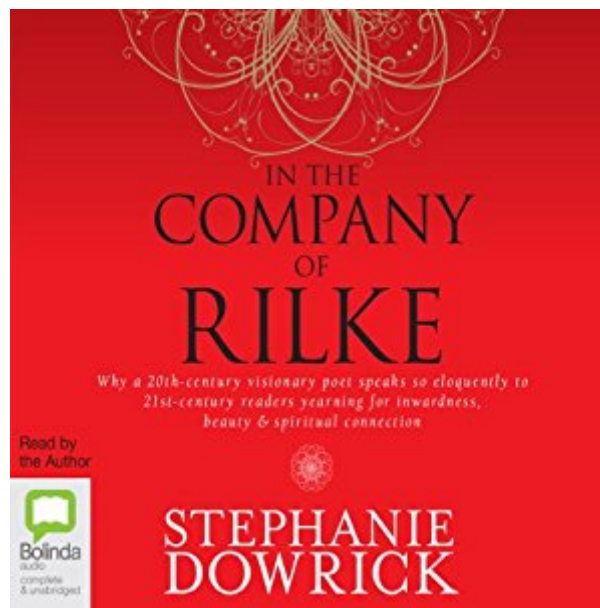


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In The Company Of Rilke: Why A 20th-Century Visionary Poet Speaks So Eloquentlly To 21st-Century Readers



Synopsis

Rainer Maria Rilke was a giant of twentieth-century writing who remains a rare visionary voice for our own time. This audio edition of Dr. Stephanie Dowrick's acclaimed book allows you literally to "hear" how and why Rilke's extraordinary words continue to captivate readers, not least through his profound understanding of the depth and beauty of human existence. Drawing on her deep understanding and appreciation of Rilke's writing, as well as her own personal spiritual and literary journey, Stephanie Dowrick offers an intimate, highly accessible appreciation of this astonishing writer, his fascinating life, and his transcendent work.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book starts with a leap of the imagination that takes it somewhere quite new in the realms of literary commentary on Rilke. So much has been written about Rilke. Biography, literary analysis, cultural context... this book offers elements of these, but with an added dimension: a focus on Rilke's relationship with his readers - or rather, vice versa. Sometimes traditions of scholarship become so engrossed in their own intensive conversations they fail to notice that they are sharing the room with an elephant. In this case, the elephant is the general reader - the non-specialist who seeks out the company of Rilke as an ongoing personal relationship. Stephanie Dowrick has a mature respect for such readers, and focuses on that vital capacity in Rilke to offer an imaginative connection to anyone who is open to it. In the Company of Rilke is itself a marvellous companion.

I was a little apprehensive on reading the reviews of this book. I already have Dowrick's "Choosing Happiness - Life & Soul Essentials" which might be described as a sort of bible on the subject. I have not had much experience of poetry, but am finding Stephanie's commentary and elucidations have great clarity. I guess you would have to describe this book as deeply spiritual but you may be amazed at how much you appreciate and agree with. I have not yet finished the book because I am savouring it just a few pages at a time. So I would say to anyone who is hesitating in purchasing that it is not too difficult to read and that you will probably find something quite beautiful and precious.

This is a complex and deeply thoughtful book, having begun its life as a doctoral dissertation. *In the Company of Rilke* represents a lifelong engagement with that sensitive but sometimes difficult poet. And it reads like the intellectual but spiritually-infused relationship that it is. In many ways it is more challenging than Dowrick's other books, but it rewards a careful reading. It speaks to anyone who is interested in poetry, in the expressions of human love and in the reflective possibilities of reading and writing. My own reading of the book was slow and even painstaking - it was, for me, more of an exercise in *lectio divina* than in the more standard consumption of text.

Even though my mother tongue is German, which of course is the best way to appreciate Rilke I find it wonderful that Stephanie Dowrick introduces him to the huge English speaking readership. She gives examples from different translators, she compares, she explains finely with great sensibility and understanding. To read, understand and appreciate Rilke you need Intelligence of the heart. Dowrick has it and can share it with the reader. Thank you Stephanie Dowrick. I love your book and I love Rilke. Brigitte Grolig, Tucson Az.

I have been trying on and off for a decade to get into Rilke. His manner is captivating - refined and mysterious -, but what is he talking about? Not about the external world, but some mental realm of his own, esoteric and indefinable. It is a formidable task to make this intelligible, but Dowrick takes it up with verve and an infectious enthusiasm. Her book is intended to get one into Rilke, and with me, at least, it has succeeded. She does not take one through the various stages of Rilke's development, or even offer a close reading of a single poem; but instead she presents a general take on the poet's mind and aims. According to her presentation, Rilke was, above all, a seeker after God - not the God of the dogmatic religions, the transcendent law-giver, but a God who is impersonal and immanent in the world, a God to whom we can attain only through an attentive

waiting, and an openness of the spirit to transformation, to seeing everything in a new way. This is, in effect, to give priority to the Rilke of his early volume 'The Book of Hours', but there is also much in later Rilke that, as Dowrick shows, picks up the same themes. Much of this book could be described as a New Age spirituality, illustrated by reference to Rilke, supplemented by references to other gurus, such as Rumi and Bede Griffiths. But Dowrick is disarmingly frank, and gives her reader plenty of ammunition to support other views of her favourite poet. Her treatment of Rilke's life and personal relationships will give support to those who dismiss him as incorrigibly self-centred, Narcissistic, snobbish, feline and manipulative, and as someone who guarded his privacy with no respect at all for the most basic social duties - such as visiting one's mother or attending one's daughter's wedding. An objection to Dowrick's interpretation that will occur to some who are, like her, admirers of the poet is that even the Rilke of the Books of Hours is arguably not a theist at all: his 'God' needs us just as much as we need him, and is perhaps best interpreted as a higher, generally unconscious level of the human spirit. - But I have no wish to pick holes in this book: it has enabled even me to get into Rilke, as I found on turning back from it to the German volumes. This is quite an achievement!

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