A letter dated 14 July 1907 (Dieter Bassermann, Der späte Rilke, pp. 415–16) describes an acrobatic performance by the well-known French troupe of Père Rollin. Some of the description is reflected in the fifth elegy.

I have just been in the Luxembourg; in front of it in the direction of the Pantheon Père Rollin and his troupe have set up, the same carpet is there, the same discarded coats, heavy winter coats, are heaped on a chair, on which just enough room is left so that the little son, the grandson of the old man, with his serious face, can sit a little (just as much as is necessary for it to be sitting) between performances. Everything is just like it was a year ago. But Père Rollin who used to swing heavy weights about, no longer performs and doesn’t say a word. He is set on drumming. Pathetically patiently he stands there with his great strength which no longer is put to proper use, although it is still a little too much for drumming. He drums much too often, then his son-in-law whistles at him and startled, he quits and asks forgiveness with a movement of his heavy shoulders and shifts his weight ceremoniously to the other foot. But the next moment he must be whistled at again, the old man: he is drumming again. He is scarcely aware of it. He could drum forever; they shouldn’t think that he would get tired. But it is not his son-in-law who is in charge now; to be sure he performs well, there’s nothing to be said about that, and he likes to, as he must. But the one who runs everything, and *how*, is naturally his daughter, it’s in her blood. The weights have been sold, they are no longer in style, and the children are up-to-date. But they have come up with some marvelous ideas; the old man is happy. And the way she speaks, his daughter, so quick-witted and sturdy almost like him, the old Père Rollin himself, whom no one surpassed, not in wit and not in his performance. Among the spectators were some who knew him: Hey, Père Rollin! But he only nods preoccupied; drumming is important business and he takes it seriously.