

WHITE WORK

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PLASTER IS MIXED AS A POWDER WITH WATER, POURED INTO MOULDS AS A slurry or modelled with the hands as a paste before it warms, thickens and sets. It expands as it heats then shrinks and cools. As it solidifies drops of clear water weep from its surface. In its final state plaster remains soft enough to carve with simple metal tools and abrasives.

Plaster possesses extraordinary forensic properties to reproduce and imitate form, surfaces and textures. Life casts and death masks are used to preserve the image of the living and the dead. These casts replicate the features as well as the finest details of the face and body, including the pores, lines, scars and hair follicles of the skin. Plaster casts also preserve the various stages of clay sculpture before casting into bronze or carving in marble. Plaster is a medium of empathy and mimesis.

But plaster also possesses the most poetic of qualities in its delicacy and subtlety. When poured it shrouds and veils forms in an opaque liquidity. It mutes the dissonances between shapes, conceals imperfections, melds and elides surfaces and planes. It coats, clings and adheres. In intense light plaster appears as an opaque and impenetrable surface yet at certain liminal moments, such as at dawn and dusk, plaster glows as though illuminated from within. At these times the articulation of surface detail and shadow subsides, giving way to a faint and even whiteness.

Plaster breathes. It respire, becomes damp to the touch absorbing and re-absorbing moisture in the atmosphere yet becomes crisp, parched and brittle when the humidity drops. It calcifies, fossilizes, and vitrifies.

The lime in plaster burns and peels the skin. But the lime also purifies and bleaches, distils sediment in liquid, and draws out impurities and residues. Water-based colour forms a chemical reaction with fresh plaster, which holds pigment as a deep skin of crystalline carbonate lime. In a fresco the image, as colour, is embodied, absorbed and held within the thickness of the plaster.

The ancient Greeks made plaster so exquisite in quality that it was equivalent to an artificial marble. It could be polished, Vitruvius tells us,

till it would reflect the beholders face as in a mirror. And fine translucent sheets of polished plaster were used as windows in their temples. Water from the rivers, lakes and ponds, lagoons and bays was mixed with dry plaster. Thus, the once living water was stilled, set and frozen within a white calcification.



As a sculptor I have experimented for many years with the forensic and poetic qualities of plaster and have been intrigued by historical accounts of how others have used this medium. Rainer Maria Rilke's beautiful writing on Auguste Rodin's casting and working practices has been like a secret scripture for my own work. And when I started reading Maurice Blanchot some years ago, I could not help but be struck by his interest in images of casting and sculpting as well as by the apparent connections between his writing and that of Rilke. These connections were particularly evident in Blanchot's conceptualisation of textuality where the metaphor of the text as cast or death mask connects to an understanding of reading as a form of resuscitation or resurrection. Indeed, these links between the two writers prompted work I made for an installation entitled "Peel,"¹ as well as a current project which links skin patterns of jellyfish with the death mask of an unknown woman who drowned in the Seine, known as *L'Inconnue de la Seine*.² Both Rilke and Blanchot wrote about her death mask.³ This essay, therefore, is prompted by my own interest in the materialization of textual metaphor through sculpture. It is an investigation of possible connections between the studio processes of Rodin as observed and written about by Rilke and the influence this had on Blanchot's understanding of textuality.

On display and in the reserve of the Rodin Museum in Paris are many of Rodin's plaster sculptures. They are often partial figures, fragments of bodies including arms, hands and feet, works without dates, without titles and without histories of enlargement, bronze casting or carving. They were not exhibited, seldom photographed or commented upon by visitors to the studio and critics. They were the unknown works of Rodin, the white works of plaster. Traditionally in sculpture, plaster marks an interval, a temporary and intermediary site between the living plasticity of the clay and the frozen permanence of the bronze cast or marble carving. Yet the processes that Rodin employed in making and remaking the works in plaster, including dipping them in liquid plaster, was his way of resuscitating and breathing new life and meaning into the

remnants and the fragments that had belonged to his other sculptures. The liquid plaster had the effect of concealing discrepancies in proportion and the identity of sexual parts, and allowed even violent gestures to appear imprisoned within the form itself. It created a sense of the image withdrawing or turning back into the form, beneath an opaque veil.

The direct observation of the making of these unknown works had a profound influence on Rilke, who at the age of twenty-eight worked for some months as Rodin's private secretary. Two years after Rodin's death, Rilke wrote: "these fragmentary posthumous works are permanently assured of a link with their surviving *oeuvre*."⁴ These posthumous works were the collected remains, the "acres of fragments" from the major commissions and other exhibited works.

In a letter to his wife Clara, herself a student of Rodin, Rilke provides a description of a large pavilion of plaster casts in Rodin's garden at Meudon:

It is a tremendously great and strange sight, this vast white hall with all its dazzling figures looking out from the many high glass doors like the denizens of an aquarium... You see, even before you have entered, that all these hundreds of lives are *one* life, – vibrations of one force and one will.⁵

The luminosity of the figures framed within the glass enclosure suggested some strange aquatic accretion comprised of hundreds of smaller organisms. This impression must have been most compelling at those times of the day, when in subdued light, plaster gives the appearance of emitting a glow. This glow has the effect of dissolving all surface detail and incident into a unified form. Such moments would have magnified the illusion of a singular though multifaceted organism contained behind the glass of the pavilion. Rilke recorded seeing some of the enormous glass-windows filled entirely with the fragments from the *Porte de l'Enfer*, Rodin's interpretation of Dante's *Inferno*. These works, submerged within the light of their environment, were the embodiment of dissolved suffering and unhappiness, as though plaster itself materialised all the images of fateful destiny, despair, death and suicide.

For Rilke the whole scene was "indescribable":

Acres of fragments lie there, one beside the other. Nudes the size of my hand and no bigger, but only bits, scarcely one of them whole: often only a piece of arm, a piece of leg just as they go together, and the portion of the body which belongs to them. Here the torso of one figure with the head of another stuck onto it, with the arm of a third.⁶

This scene must have looked like some haunting collection of calligraphy, a raw and primal alphabet comprised of body parts whose words, syntax, lexicon, grammar and rules were still being negotiated. The particular poignancy of this scene would not have been lost on a young poet struggling to find the originary elements of a language which could form the structure of his work. Here was the sculptural equivalent to language laid bare, stripped of all convention, ornament and artifice. But it was a language that could be held, grasped, stuck together, made to speak in its own way according to its own laws – a language of infinite generation and regeneration, that would endure all the grafting, shaping, wounding, breaking, scratching and carving performed by the sculptor. And the sea of whiteness laid out across the studio floor must have reminded the poet of his obligation to the page, the white ground of his work.

Throughout his monograph on Rodin, Rilke made frequent reference to these works, to their materiality and to their mystery:

Here beside me is another work, a quiet face to which belongs a hand expressive of suffering, and the plaster has that transparent whiteness . . . and now I find myself among objects all of which are new and nameless . . . they keep no count of time. (*R* 67)

He described another work as: “A small thing whose name you have forgotten, made out of a white shining embrace which holds together like a knot” (*R* 50). What was “nameless” and what was “forgotten” in language nevertheless emerges in a stark materiality. This failure of language, its aphasia or poverty, stood in contrast to the apparent fluidity and eloquence of the small sculptures.

From his detailed observations of Rodin’s studio practice, Rilke saw that what lay at the origin of the sculptors’ achievement was a commitment to the observation of objects and processes located in the everyday. He identified a form of perception, a way of seeing, that enabled Rodin to treat the living and the dead, the organic and inorganic, as a singular substance, entity and “surface”:

There is only one single surface which suffers a thousand changes and transformations. It was possible to think of the whole world for a moment under this conception, so that it became simple, and was placed as a task in the hands of a man who so thought of it. For the endowment of an object with life of its own does not depend on great ideas but upon whether such ideas can create a metier, a daily labour, something that remains with one to the end. (*R* 49)

Through his efforts to understand what the sculptor had done and how

he had succeeded in finding a daily process of working, Rilke came to understand what he himself had to do as a young poet and how he had to proceed as a maker of poems: “I must follow him, Rodin... Somehow I too must get down to the making of things; not plastic, written things, but realities springing from some handcraft.”⁷

In exploring the possibilities for literature, Blanchot enters into dialogue with several writers including Rilke.⁸ What Blanchot comes to term “the space of literature” is this ontological investigation of the experience from which art comes. Indeed, he describes Rilke’s poetry as “the lyrical theory of the poetic act” (“The Disappearance of Literature”, *BR* 139). Given Blanchot’s fascination with the origins of art and his use of metaphors of death, dying and resurrection in his fictional as well as critical works, it is perhaps not surprising that he would be influenced by Rilke’s accounts of the sculptors’ studio. And one would imagine that Rilke’s descriptions of the plaster fragments and processes of dipping and casting found particular resonance with Blanchot’s sensibility. Indeed, Blanchot makes reference to both the forensic and poetic qualities of plaster in *Death Sentence* and in *Thomas the Obscure*. Furthermore, one could argue for deeper, underlying connections between Blanchot’s aesthetic and understanding of textuality, and Rilke’s descriptions of Rodin’s sculpture, particularly the works in plaster. Perhaps the most fundamental connection is that writing, like plaster, has the capacity to take on a shape, to hold and set events in time with an exacting attention to the detail and texture of things. Writing allows time to coagulate around objects, spaces and events, setting them within the white opacity of the page.

Death Sentence embodies something of this congruence between writing and the process of plaster casting. The narrator in *Death Sentence* describes casting as “a process which is strange when it is carried out on living people, sometimes dangerous, surprising...” and there the sentence concludes with three dots leaving the reader to ponder what exactly Blanchot had in mind (*SHR* 183). The cast, whether as a plaster death mask or as a form of words in a text, becomes a simulacrum of the events it seeks to record. Impressions and sequences of events are captured and set as images within the work, just as the images of the two women in *Death Sentence* are set within the plaster casts. Furthermore, as J. Hillis Miller argues in *Versions of Pygmalion*, the cast of the story can be given an extended life through holding the text in our hands and reading. This act of reading is likened to a form of prosopopoeia, like Pygmalion giving life to the ivory sculpture.⁹ Thus events that take place

in time are cast in words, and then resuscitated or brought back to life through the act of reading.

An enactment of this process occurs in *Death Sentence*, with the “very beautiful” plaster cast of J’s hand made by a sculptor who is later referred to as X. The narrator comments he cannot describe J’s hands “although at this very moment I have them under my eyes and they are alive.”

Their lines seemed to me altogether unusual – cross hatched, entangled, without the slightest apparent unity. . . . Moreover, these lines grew blurred sometimes, then vanished except for one deep central furrow . . . that line did not become distinct except at the moment when all the others were eclipsed; then the palm of her hand was absolutely white and smooth, a real ivory palm, while the rest of the time the hatchings and wrinkles made it seem almost old. (*SHR* 137)

Here the hands themselves become the face or the image of the text. The “blurring” and “vanishing” cross hatchings and wrinkles are like a biological calligraphy, a text of the skin susceptible to disease and wounding.

In his essay entitled “Reading” Blanchot privileges the isolation and resistance of sculpture over the book. He writes:

The plastic work of art has a certain advantage over the verbal work of art in that it renders more manifest the exclusive void within which the work apparently wants to remain, far from everyone’s gaze. (*SHR* 430)

Blanchot sees the act of reading as the book writing itself, writing itself “this time without the writer as intermediary” (*SHR* 431). The book unburdens itself of the “sometimes terrible, always dangerous” weight of the author. He writes:

Reading endows the book with the kind of sudden existence that the statue “seems” to take from the chisel alone: the isolation that hides it from eyes that see it, the proud remoteness, the orphan wisdom that drives off the sculptor just as much as it does the look that tries to sculpt it again. (*SHR* 431)

Here is Blanchot’s desire for the book as a work. As a work it must stand isolated – a thing in the world but not of the world – with its own laws and structure, its own cold hardness and self assuredness that will allow it to resist the gaze of anyone even the writer who tries to undo or tamper with what has already been set in place.

Blanchot's description of Rodin's *Balzac* as a work "without gaze, a closed and sleeping thing, absorbed in itself to such a degree that it disappears" (*SHR* 431), closely echoes Rilke, who in a note from 17 November 1900 writes:

A sculpture which shares the same atmosphere with the viewer, must be better at "looking away." This means: it must be totally occupied with itself. This, too, Rodin has achieved to perfection: No viewer (not even the most conceited) will be able to claim that a bust by Rodin, say *Rochefort* or *Falguière*, let alone the inspired *Balzac*, has looked at him! (*R* 73)

And a few weeks later on 2 December 1900 he writes:

There are sculptures which carry the environment in which they are imagined, or out of which they are raised, *within* themselves, they have absorbed it and they radiate it. The room in which a statue stands is its foreign land – it has its environment *within* itself, and its eye and the expression of its face relate to that environment concealed and folded within its shape. (*R* 74)

Here Rilke is describing the way in which Rodin's sculptures exist within a perfect continuity within their own space, their own "foreign land." This continuity is never breached by any intrusion of the gaze of the sculpture looking out of this land.

Blanchot characterizes the space of sculpture as:

This decisive separation, which sculpture takes as its element and which sets out another, rebellious space in the centre of space – sets out a space that is at once hidden, visible, and shielded, perhaps immutable, perhaps without repose – this protected violence, before which we always feel out of place. (*SHR* 430)

This is a space of "complete self absorption" (*SHR* 430) that resists the gaze of the viewer as much as it frees the work from the maker. There is an absolute distance. The work is always facing the other way, back to an empty site. It stands isolated from its environment, from the viewer and the maker, within its own space, its own "foreign land." Rilke offers a similar account of this rebellious space in those ancient sculptures in whose hieratic gestures "the restlessness of living surfaces was contained like water within the walls of a vessel" (*R* 14). However violent and turbulent the movement contained within a sculpture, and from wherever it comes, "it must return to the marble," Rilke writes, "the vast circle must be closed, that circle of solitude within which a work of art exists" (*R* 15).

Blanchot pursues the comparison between sculpture and the book by reference to burial, which is not so much an archaeological reference as an allusion to death and resurrection.

The statue that is unearthed and displayed for everyone's admiration does not expect anything, does not receive anything, seems rather to have been torn from its place. But isn't it true that the book that has been exhumed, the manuscript that is taken out of a jar and enters the broad daylight of reading, is born all over again. (*SHR* 430)

The literary text in Blanchot's understanding requires the act of reading to come into existence. The burial of a sculpture, sometimes for centuries, creates a rich patination on the work of bronze or stone, the result of its coming into contact with the chemicals in the soil. Burial also preserves the work, protecting it from violence and harm. But whereas sculpture endures as in hibernation and thus emerges sacrosanct in its form and meaning, the written text diminishes in appearance and suffers indecipherability and illegibility. Its marks, notations, alphabets and syntactical structures and hence its meaning must be revealed, resuscitated and brought into living language.

The intersecting themes of burial and exhumation are referenced in *Thomas the Obscure*. Blanchot describes Thomas digging, for the seventh time, a hole in the earth. With his bare hands he moves aside the soft earth to fit his own shape. But as he does so the hole offers a resistance as if already filled by not so much a corpse of a man as an assemblage of gestures, hands and limbs. Blanchot writes:

And while he was digging it, the hole, as if it had been filled by dozens of hands, then by arms and finally by the whole body offered a resistance to his work which soon became insurmountable. The tomb was full of a being whose absence was absorbed. An immovable corpse was lodged there, finding in this absence of shape the perfect shape of its presence. (*SHR* 73)

This grave, like the six dug previously, serves as a mould of Thomas's body, as, Blanchot writes, it is "exactly his size, his shape, his thickness." But the grave is already filled with Thomas's precise form, though this form is less the shape of an individual man than the assemblage of many parts of men. This recalls Rodin's practice of assembling numerous fragments of his figures to form a singular, but unknown and unnameable organism. Rilke writes:

A hand laid on the shoulder or limb of another body is no longer part of the body to which it properly belongs: something new has been

formed from it and the object it touches or hold, something . . . which is nameless and belongs to no one. (*R* 19)

As Thomas struggles to bury himself within this shape filling the grave, he finds a body a “thousand times harder than the soil.” The mould of his grave is already cast, just as the graves of the dead of Pompeii, who, buried in darkness for centuries, had the negative form of their incinerated bodies filled with liquid plaster. During the excavation of this ancient city, plaster poured into cavities solidified all the strange combinations of hands, gestures, knotted limbs and contorted bodies that had, until then, existed in only in their absence.¹⁰

The description of Thomas’s grave “filled by dozens of hands, then by arms” is suggestive of the many plaster hands and limbs kept amassed in drawers and on shelves in Rodin’s studio. Rilke described these hands as independent from the body, yet alive with their own identity and history. He wrote of:

Criminal hands weighted by heredity. Hands that are tired and have lost all desire, lying like some sick beast crouched in a corner, knowing no one can help them . . . Hands have their own history, indeed their own civilization. (*R* 19)

It is as though all human suffering, grief and loss could be contained within a set vocabulary of forms, and that a part of a body, even the smallest part, had a capacity for representation equal to, if not greater than, the entire body. Similar images of an accumulation of body parts and gestures occur in Rilke’s description of *The Burglers of Calais*, for in Rodin’s memory:

There rose up gestures, gestures of renunciation, of farewell, of relinquishment. Endless gestures... It was as if a hundred heroic figures rose up within his memory... And he accepted the whole hundred and made of them six. He formed them nude, each by itself, in all the communicativeness of their shivering bodies. (*R* 36)

Blanchot describes Thomas buried, suffocated and “soaked in an icy medium... that resembles plaster” – an intermediate zone “a prison where he was confined in impenetrable silence and darkness.” Thomas, though suffocated, “managed to breath again” (*SHR* 74) and comes forward to walk beneath the pale light of an indifferent sun and falling stars. He is the “opaque corpse . . . becoming ever more dense, and, more silent than silence” (*SHR* 77) who walks past other dead, “breathing them, licking them, coating himself with their bodies” (*SHR* 78). This so closely resembles Rodin’s desire to hold his work in an intermediate

state and his process for doing so by re-casting and coating his figures in liquid plaster. This coating had the effect of veiling, muting and silencing the features of the sculpture. It provided a new surface to be inscribed, etched and scratched, gouged with a knife and remarked with graphite, and it also served to conceal the strangeness of chance combinations of body parts, the co-joined heads, sexes and limbs. In Rodin's hands this process held the image in abeyance allowing for the addition and subtraction of detail. That which withdraws beneath the plaster shows itself only as a subtle play of shadow creeping over the surface. Rodin's process of dipping portraits into liquid plaster served to withdraw and conceal the nakedness of the face, to hold the image in an interval, in order to turn it back into a more powerful presence.

In dipping his many idiosyncratic combinations of figurative fragments in plaster, in making features disappear then reappear through gouging and scratching back into the plaster, Rodin was making shadow the determinant of form. Plaster by its nature invites the revelation of form through the slow movement of shadow over its surface. This suggests a parallel with Blanchot's account of literature as a form of turning back:

When in the depth of night, when everything has disappeared, disappearance becomes the density of the shadow that makes flesh more present, and makes this presence more heavy and more strange, without name and without form; a presence one cannot then call living or dead, but out of which everything equivocal about desire draws its truth. (*IC* 188)

Here one might think of Rodin's insistence that sculpture involve the lump and the hollow. Eye sockets and the mouths become sites where shadows form and slowly thicken. The strange vegetable-like anatomy reveals itself in the contours of darkness creeping over the white opaque surfaces. There shadow thickens about the portals framed by limbs, mouths, and folds of flesh and cloth.

And finally, Blanchot's description of Anne's embodiment in *Thomas the Obscure* bears a close resemblance to Rilke's accounts of sculpture. Anne's hardened body which "no longer cried out beneath the blows . . . made itself, at the price of its beauty, the equivalent of a statue" (*SHR* 104). As though composed of fragments, her body sustains infinite change and mutation. Blanchot describes Anne against a wall, her body having entered a pure void,

[her] thighs and belly united to a nothingness with neither sex nor

sexual parts, hands convulsively squeezing an absence of hands, face drinking in what was neither breath nor mouth, she had transformed herself into another body . . . there too was body without head, head without body. (SHR 93)

Anne's body melds with that of Thomas. In her liquefied and "melted" form she is a *mélange* of sticky bodily fluids and vapours:

Her words became moist, even her weakest movements glued her against him, while within her swelled up the pocket of humours from which perhaps, at the proper moment, draw extreme power of adhesion. (SHR 81)

She was, Blanchot writes, "flesh being grafted." Like Rodin's unknown works of co-joined body parts, sexes and assembled fragments held together in a fresh skin of plaster, Anne merges with the body of the narrator:

She saw me with my eyes which she exchanged for her own, with my face which was practically her face, with my head which sat easily on *her* shoulders. She was already joining herself to me . . . she melted in me. (SHR 117)

As though herself a work of sculpture rather than of nature, Anne is described as:

A false figure emerged from the shadows, acquiring through a useless meticulousness a greater and greater precision and a more artificial one. (SHR 87)

Through a futile but meticulous accumulation of detail, she acquires through artifice, the semblance of a living woman. Anne, who has suffered a thousand changes and transformations, becomes a work, a thing, a simple thing, or in Rilke's words:

Something that came into existence blindly, through the fierce throes of work, bearing upon it the marks of exposed and threatened life, still warm with it – to take its place amongst the other things, assume their indifference, their quiet dignity, and looked on as it were, from a distance and from its own permanence with melancholy consent. (R 47)

Anne emerges as a "thing," in the world but not of the world. Disembodied, pithed and emptied, she is devoid of a sense of proprioception. With a "greater and greater precision and a more artificial one," she emerges, adapting her gait, posture, pose and form through an exact and detailed attention. She emerges as a veiled, blanched, melancholy presence,

a presence held in reserve. Her materiality is no longer that of the modelled clay and mud of the earth, but that of a white porous and opaque vitrification bathed in light and shadow. In this sense Anne, like the two women in *Death Sentence*, is a literary equivalent to the white works of Rodin, whose aesthetic, Blanchot had so completely digested and transformed. Thus, writing desires to be the plaster cast, “that thing” that remains:

And now that thing is over there, you have uncovered it, you have looked at it, and you have looked into the face of something that will be alive for all eternity, for your eternity and for mine! Yes, I know it. I know it. I’ve known it all along. (*SHR* 185)

And in reverse and in reflection it is through the writings of Maurice Blanchot that I now know – perhaps sculptors have known it all along – that giving a face to language requires silence and the tactful touch of distance.

ENDNOTES

¹ An exhibition held at Éditions Galilée, Paris, January, 2004. The exhibition was based on Jacques Derrida’s text, *Chaque fois unique, la fin du monde* (Galilée, 2003), and was enacted as a work of mourning. See www.elizabethpresa.com/peel.html

² An installation entitled “Moon Water” which comprised of photos of the moon over the Seine in Paris, and the plaster and gauze moulds made of hundreds of jelly-fish (medusas). The plaster was used to make visible the variety of lines and patterns of skin of the normally translucent sea creatures. (“He had studied Paracelsus fairly seriously and devoted himself to conducting experiments that were sometimes outrageous and sometimes childish . . . he was, it seems to me, a great deal more reliable in his diagnosis than most”, *DS* 136.) The photos and moulds bring together a nocturnal scene between two hemispheres; between the sky and the water, and the river and the sea. The alchemist and astrologer Paracelsus believed that the moon impregnates the substance of water with a noxious influence, and that water, which has been exposed to lunar rays for a long time, remains poisoned water. He wrote that “the moon gives to those whom it influences a taste for water from the Styx.”

The plaster moulds become vessels of white opaque skin – small sepulchres for the delicate remains of creatures that once swarmed in the moonlight. Each takes on the lunar roundness of a face – an inversion and disfigurement that exposes with the hard resistance of eyes without protection, what is softest and most uncovered. See www.elizabethpresa.com/moonwater.html

³ Rilke wrote about the death mask of “L’Inconnue de la Seine,” the name given to the death mask made of a young girl found drowned in the Seine at the quai du

Louvre in the late nineteenth century. During the first decades of the twentieth century copies of a young woman's death mask were widely sold in France and in Germany and hung on the walls of many houses. In Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* the young narrator passed the mask everyday. "The mouleur, whose shop I passed everyday, has hung two masks behind his door. The face of the young drowned woman, which they took a cast of in the morgue, because it was beautiful, because it smiled, because smiled so deceptively, as if it knew." Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Random House, 1982), 76. Rilke also writes of her in the third of the *Duino Elegies*.

Blanchot kept a cast of the famous death mask of "L'Inconnue de la Seine" in the room he used most often at his small house at Èze, where he lived from 1947. He describes it as "une adolescente aux yeux clos, mais vivante par un sourire si délié, si fortuné . . . qu'on eût pu croire qu'elle s'était noyée dans un instant d'extrême bonheur [an adolescent with closed eyes, but enlivened by a smile, so relaxed, so rich . . . that one may be lead to believe that she died in a moment of extreme happiness]." Maurice Blanchot, *Une voix venue d'ailleurs* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 15. (*A Voice From Elsewhere*, trans. Charlotte Mandell, SUNY Press, forthcoming.) I thank Christophe Bident for drawing my attention to this passage.

⁴ Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Rodin Book", *Rodin and Other Prose Pieces* (London: Quartet Encounters, 1986), 71. This volume hereafter cited parenthetically as *R*.

⁵ Rilke, *Selected Letters 1902–1926* (London: Quartet Encounters, 1988), 5

⁶ Rilke, *Selected Letters 1902–1926*, 5.

⁷ Rilke, Letter of 10 August 1903 to Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Selected Letters 1902–1926*, 36.

⁸ See for example "The Essential Solitude" in *SHR* and "Artaud (1956)", in *BR*.

⁹ J. Hillis Miller, *Version of Pygmalion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 186–7.

¹⁰ Jean Genet offers the following description, published in 1958, of Giacometti's plaster and bronze figures: "His statues seem to belong to a former time, to have been discovered after time and night- which worked on them with intelligence – had corroded them to give them that both sweet and hard feeling of eternity that passes. Or rather, they emerge from an oven, remnants of a terrible roasting. Giacometti tells me that he once had the idea of molding a statue and burying it. . . . Would burying it be to offer it to the dead?" Jean Genet, "The Studio of Alberto Giacometti", in *Fragments of the Artwork*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 53.