

'REMBRANDT, GENET, DERRIDA'

PORTRAITURE. A collection of papers on the visual construction of identity,
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REMBRANDT / GENET / DERRIDA

'It is this, the text, (Genet) that traps, fleshes, reads the reader, judgment, criticism. Like Rembrandt. Paradigmatic scene.'

Jacques Derrida, Glas, 1974.ⁱ

A portrait is not only both object and representation. It exists during its creation, as perception and in memory, in reproduction, in description and as text; in its own time, through time and beyond time. And as writing, as literature, as a text, it may enter other texts. The case of the French playwright Jean Genet, looking and writing about Rembrandt, while writing and posing for Giacometti, generated a nexus of texts which in turn entered the writing of Jacques Derrida - as a paradigmatic instance of deconstruction.

Genet's encounter with Rembrandt's portraiture and his experience of portraiture as both interlocutor and model for Alberto Giacometti, was for long a lost moment in both art history and the exclusively literary arena of Genet studies.ⁱⁱ

A lost moment, too, in the history of deconstructivist thought and method - it was an experience stolen (in a Promethean mode), then simultaneously celebrated with overwhelming pomp and circumstance and buried in Jacques Derrida's two texts called Glas, of 1972-4.

Derrida's pitting of Genet against Hegel in the second published version of Glas symbolised, he claimed, the tolling bell (in French 'glas') of all certitudes - moral, ethical, semantic. 'What is left of absolute knowledge? Of history, philosophy, political economy, psychoanalysis, semiotics, sexuality, linguistics, poetics? of work, of language of sexuality, of the family, religion, the State etc.,?' Derrida would ask.ⁱⁱⁱ The burial within this text of Genet's encounter with Rembrandt (and hence Giacometti) is not only a burial of a primary source but a burial of the problematic relationship between word and image that Derrida himself had broached gingerly, via Plato and Mallarmé, in 'La double séance' (the text which sits between Genet's 'Rembrandt' and Glas). Glas celebrates the triumph of the

Text, the supremacy of the Word, in a timeless ravelling of sources, without beginning or ending, a Pyrrhic celebration which envelops and thus sacrifices the individuality, visuality, the Catholicism, the sexual anguish and the recollection of lived experiences in real time that once were those of Jean Genet.

Genet travelled to London in 1952 and Amsterdam in September 1953 to study Rembrandt's work.^{iv} There had been a major Rembrandt retrospective at the Orangerie des Tuileries, Paris, in 1947; details as to Genet's first encounter with the artist and subsequent museum visiting are frustratingly scarce. Did he visit 'Rembrandt et son temps' at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, or the Rembrandt drawings show in Paris in 1955?^v 1956 marked the 350th anniversary of Rembrandt's birth, with a major joint retrospective in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, his engravings shown at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and exhibitions in Moscow, Leningrad, Budapest, Weimar, Berlin. More museum visiting on Genet's part took place during later peregrinations around Northern Europe with his tight-rope dancer boyfriend, Abdallah Bentaga, during 1957, when in November he went on a pilgrimage specifically to Amsterdam, Antwerp and the Hague: Rembrandt's Holland, its light and landscape were as important to know as his works.^{vi} The first published text, 'Le Secret de Rembrandt' appeared in the newspaper L'Express, on September 4th, 1958; during several months in London (and Norwich) he worked on the Rembrandt book again in 1962.

Why the unlikely fascination with Rembrandt? Genet's story was that of the illegitimate, adopted, changeling boy, institutionalised at the age of fifteen, who created a universe of homoerotic love and meaning out of the degradation of prison life. As literature his experiences became one of the most powerful and most subversive 'oeuvres' in postwar France. The relationship between beauty, desire, incarceration, orgasm and death are central to Genet's writing; besides writing itself, photography and film played important roles in his work. A tension was constantly and deliberately generated between the low - the utterly abject - and the styles and genres of high culture. Just as the literature of Ronsard, Racine, Corneille and Victor Hugo, discovered as a boy in prison libraries, transformed Genet's writing, so his pursuit of Rembrandt involved a curious self-identification,

and his `transposition d'art' - the transmuting of portraiture into literature - would have deeply autobiographical overtones.

How Genet first encountered Rembrandt is not recorded - yet instantly he perceived, I would argue, besides the `picture of an age' and Rembrandt's technical mastery, a physical resemblance with himself: soft eyes, the rounded nose and the promise in Rembrandt's later portraits of Genet's own physical decay. The affinity between Genet and Rembrandt as self-portraitist is striking. `Perhaps for the first time in the history of art, a painter posing before the mirror with an almost narcissistic self-satisfaction, has left us, parallel to his other work, a series of self portraits in which we can trace the evolution of his method and the action of this evolution upon man.'^{vii} Rembrandt, famously, traced the growth, the `hardening', the eventual decrepitude of his own face. As for Genet: `Genet had been measured... throughout his life; (his body was virtually an official document, as much a record as his accumulated crimes and sentences).'^{viii} The relationship was constant between Genet's changing image and officialdom. Haute Surveillance was the title of a play of 1947.^{ix} Strict surveillance of criminals was essential - from the pan-opticon like structures of prisons such as the Petit Roquette, to mug shots used as part of the police identification process. Genet's L'Enfant Criminel, 1949, (initially a banned radio broadcast), reproduces one such image of the child Genet on the first page, while the autobiographical Journal d'un Voleur, 1949, specifically describes two mug shots of Genet the thief, taken at sixteen and thirty years old. The first reveals a pure, oval-face, a broken nose, a warm but blasé, sad and solemn gaze; the second shows a hardened face, an accusing jaw, a dangerous look - despite the eyes, still gentle, but almost obliterated by the rigidity of the determined pose.^x

From Genet's Chant secrets, which celebrated the face and the body of Maurice Pilorge guillotined in March, 1939, literature as a practice was ineluctably conjoined to commemoration, death, the `dépouille funèbre' - funereal remains. Genet's Notre-Dame des Fleurs, 1944, begins with the extraordinary scene of the `chappelle ardente' - chapel of love. Photographs of beautiful men and boys form a shrine of faces torn from illustrated papers, representing the now

decapitated, guillotined heads of the previous inhabitants of the cell, where as Genet said: 'I raised egoistic masturbation to the dignity of a cult.'^{xi}

In August, 1953, he embarked on a project 'La Mort' aiming 'to synthesise all literary genres' which was later abandoned. This project on death would nonetheless have lingered in his mind when he began to think and write about Rembrandt, while, coincidentally, Genet, the man eternally 'measured' by police and State, witnessed that process dialectically inverted, transformed into art, as he sat for the gaze and the brush of Alberto Giacometti from 1954 to 1957.^{xii} From 1947 onwards, Giacometti's work had been received and perceived in both Paris and New York through 'existentialist' eyes - those of his prefacer, the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. Now a triangular relationship developed between the three men, of a distinctly passionate, if not homoerotic nature.^{xiii} Genet's writing, not Sartre's, would preface Giacometti's third solo show at the Galerie Maeght in June 1957. Published in a luxurious, large format edition, his text was illustrated with lithographs of Giacometti's soft, almost evanescent drawings (very different from the small book with striking black and white photographs by Ernest Scheidegger of 1958: L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti.)^{xiv}

For Giacometti the experience of confrontation with the phenomenological reality of the sitter was posited against the impossibility of depicting that reality: a deadlock between art and life. As for Rembrandt, the most important models for Giacometti were closest members of his family, his wife Annette, his brother Diego, or those with whom he had had sexually-charged relationships of a kind, such as the Japanese professor Yanaihara or the prostitute Caroline, those he knew intimately, who transcended the merely physical or technical role of model. Moreover, the sitter's presence was pitted antagonistically against Giacometti's will to establish his portraits within an autonomous tradition of depictions, an ancestry of precursors stretching back from Cézanne back to the old masters, where, paradoxically, in the halls of fame, individual likeness may become eventually obliterated by the style and the name of the artist: the portrait becomes 'a Rembrandt', 'a Giacometti'. Since the late 1930s, when Giacometti abandoned Surrealism, there had been a visible dialogue in his work between **njears**, always,

locked in a struggle with Giacometti's rage of lines, seemingly seeking their own obliteration. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological essay of 1945, 'Cézanne's doubt' reinforced Giacometti's dialogue with the past, giving a philosophical lineage to the tropes of failure and heroic enterprise that were central to much of the most powerful work of the postwar period.^{xv}

In 1948, Sartre described Giacometti's work as collapsing time between the Lascaux cave paintings and the vanished flesh of Buchenwald victims. In contrast to the philosophical or historical tropes of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, Genet, the intrusive author, insisted upon a more subjective 'real'. He saw portraiture as an experience fraught with the contingencies and the absurdities of 'real time', translated by snatches of conversation, *obiter dicta*, while his paragraphs were separated by eloquent blanks ('blancs'), representing passages of silence, of censure, of the times of writing. While approaching a 'truth to experience', a putative 'realism' here, Genet himself had been deeply influenced by the literary devices of the Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, in particular his mysterious abstract 'play', *Igitur* (c. 1867-70).^{xvi} *Igitur* stood as the invisible prototype behind Genet's declaration 'Fragments', published in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1954, which Giacometti would read with great care. Sartre had spoken of Mallarmé and the simultaneous cancellation of reader and writer in 'Saint Genet'; 'Fragments' (towards a poem'), written in blocks, in columns, with notes and inserts, is a Mallarméan riposte to Sartre, a tragic apologia for homosexuality, not as the 'choice' which Sartre proposed, but as an ineluctable destiny, embracing solitude and the perversion of language.^{xvii} Sartre claimed that life choices were reflected in art; Genet refuted him in his texts on Giacometti, Rembrandt and 'Le Funambule' (the tightrope walker), which constituted an artistic triptych; it was the 'metier', art itself, he argued, which drew life along with its own demands.^{xviii}

Sexual tension dominates Genet's Giacometti preface, a tension displaced from that of the intense relationship between the two men. Abruptly, Genet evokes the Osiris sculpture in the Louvre crypt as he thinks of Giacometti's *Women of Venice*. Explicit about the transformation from prostitute to model in

the studio, the hieratic immobility of the Women of Venice series fill Genet with terror and estrangement; millennial and familiar, created for the dead not the living, they are, above all 'a victory for bronze'. Studio conversations between artist and writer are reported as such (Genet sat for over forty days for the largest of the portraits now in the Centre Pompidou collections); so are Giacometti's comments on Genet's notes and drafts. Walks in Paris, jokes between artist and model, all are described as part of the 'séance', creating a new decorum for the text. Then, brusquely, the dynamics of the reciprocal gaze of artist and model, the expression and simultaneous extinction of personality in the work of art, are related to Genet's experience, four years previously, of seeing 'un épouvantable petit vieux', a grubby old man, on a train. This is the passage that would be transposed as the epiphanic 'other moment' of Genet's second published work on Rembrandt: 'Suddenly I had the dolorous, yes dolorous feeling that each man is worth exactly the same as another.... Anybody can be loved, I said to myself however ugly, wicked or stupid.... A question of recognition which Giacometti has seen for many years and restores to us.' Reciprocally, Giacometti comments that Genet is beautiful: like everyone else, neither more nor less. 'Comme vous êtes beau. ...Comme tout le monde - hein? Ni plus ni moins.'^{xix}

The revelation in the train, a profoundly humanistic moment, had important consequences. It finally entailed Genet's abandonment of the novel for the play, of dandyism and the frivolous social world of Cocteau for the humility and self-abnegation of Giacometti's universe.^{xx} In this light an autobiographical dimension may now be seen to inhabit Genet's description in 'Le secret de Rembrandt' of the artist's abandonment of pomp, and worldly trappings, parallel to the broad statements with which he begins L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti, (1958): 'Giacometti's work makes the universe even more intolerable for me; the artist knows how to remove all impediments from his vision in order to discover what's left of man when all artifices are stripped away.' 'Beauty has no other origin than the individual wound, hidden or apparent, which each man keeps within himself.'^{xxi}

The three oil portraits that Giacometti made of Genet from 1954 to 1957

were an act of mutual recognition involving the paradoxes of intersubjectivity, representation, 'resemblance' and commemoration. Genet, the 'captive scribe', was depicted by Giacometti in the pose of a priestly Egyptian scribe in the Louvre sculpture halls, a play of the here and now with an immemorial humanity.^{xxii} Writing was thus signified as an extra dimension of the portrait, as it was when Genet posed with books in the later drawings. The Galerie Maeght catalogue indicated that Genet's preface was part of a larger study-in-progress on Giacometti; similarly 'Le Secret de Rembrandt' as it appeared in L'Express of September 1958 - between analyses of the Algerian war and ladies fashions - pointed to another major publication, commissioned by his publisher Gallimard that was never to appear in Genet's lifetime.^{xxiii}

A prestigious piece, 'Le Secret de Rembrandt' was severely edited by the newspaper, who were responsible for the illustrations, captions and layout. The nine portraits reproduced were uniformly cropped, focussing on the heads: 'his son Titus', 'his mistress Saskia', 'his mother reading', 'his second wife, Hendrijke, and then the self portraits: 'Youth' 'Age', 'his final self portrait'. 'Agreeable to the eye or not decrepitude is. Therefore it is beautiful.'^{xxiv} Genet equates the cruelty of Rembrandt's most precise analyses - the decomposing face of Madame Trip in London's National Gallery for example - with the artist's greatest love. The Rembrandt before 1642 is described as 'in love with splendour' - a theatrical, Biblical, Oriental splendour which would become transformed into its dialectical opposite through self-knowledge. 'All of his figures have been hurt, and take refuge in pain...' Genet says. 'Saskia is smothered in gold and velvet... She dies.'^{xxv} And the process of recording decrepitude begins. Rembrandt subsequently 'attempts.. to destroy, both in his work and himself, every old sign of his vanity... He seeks both to represent the world.... and to render it unrecognisable at the same time.' But Genet also imagines the Rembrandt of the last portraits: 'a phantom going from the bed to the easel, from the easel to the toilet - where he must have scribbled again with his dirty fingernails.' By the time of his last self portrait, all passion spent - all possessions passed to Hendrike and Titus, 'Rembrandt no longer even possesses the painting he paints. A man has just passed entirely into

his work.' Again Genet posits here the extinction of personality of the artist and with him the sitter as a person, that he would develop in his subsequent Rembrandt texts.^{xxvi}

In March, 1964, in the wake of the tragic and dramatic suicide of Abdallah, Genet underwent a second severe crisis, and 'renouncing literature', subsequently tore up the bulk of his remaining manuscripts. Miraculously, he had already sent some extract of his work on Rembrandt to his translator, Bernard Frechtman. 'Something which seemed to resemble decay...' a text in two sections, quite distinct from 'Le Secret de Rembrandt', was published in English in a Lausanne-based review in the same month as the suicide, and in the Italian review, Il Menabo 7^{xxvii}. It would reappear with Genet's bitter, sensational new title: 'Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt déchiré en petits carrés et foutu aux chiottes' (What is left of a Rembrandt torn into four equal pieces and flushed down the toilet) in the structuralist periodical Tel Quel in 1967.^{xxviii} Utterly iconoclastic, the conflation - destruction - of the visual (Rembrandt) and the textual is immediate. The Tel Quel title was literal: the published piece was but the vestiges, the 'dépouille' (mortal remains) of the longer Rembrandt manuscript, effectively flushed down the toilet, for Genet systematically destroyed his manuscripts in this symbolic manner.^{xxix} With the textual 'remains' that were left him, Genet contrived a solution of inestimable importance, resolving to some extent the intrinsic absurdity of criticism as an activity and the anguishing problem of the banality, the fixity, the linearity of any text attempting to structure the constellation of his visual impressions, memories and reflections upon the Rembrandt experience. Under Genet's instructions, the two texts were typeset as two columns, two separate vertical texts, one in italics, sharing one title, and functioning on the principle of interference.^{xxx} The left hand column expanded the train episode into a larger narrative, again posited on the identity and irreducibility of all men, concluding 'Rembrandt was the first to expose me. Rembrandt! That stern finger which thrusts aside the finery and show... what? An infinite, an infernal transparency.'^{xxxi} Yet this larger, human identity, unerotic as unindividual, is undercut by the column's final vision of a 'congested eager penis, standing erect in a thicket of black curls,

and what constitutes it.... lastly the eyes, which cry out for the transports of love as if asking to be saved or annihilated.' Genet ends with a question: '- and does all of this fight against the fragile gaze which is perhaps capable of destroying that Omnipotence?'^{xxxii} Opposite, the right hand text is principally concerned with the artist, but this 'main' text is relegated, in italics, to the traditional position of the commentary or Biblical gloss. This Rembrandt is modified irrevocably by Genet's insistence upon Rembrandt the man. Genet in effect scatologically 'penetrates' Rembrandt's art with words. He imagines the bust-length portrait of Hendrijke in Berlin extended: she stands on a dungheap: he evokes the smell under her skirts, the cunt of the Jewish Bride, concluding 'Rembrandt had to recognise himself as a man of flesh, of meat, of hash, of blood, of tears, of sweat, of shit, of intelligence and tenderness... And I need hardly say that Rembrandt's entire work has meaning - at least for me - only if I know that what I have just written is false.' The words 'faux' and 'truquée' (contrived) coincide in the two columns at this point, recalling the opening lines of the left-hand: 'a work of art should exalt only those truths which are not demonstrable, and which are even 'false'.^{xxxiii}

And Derrida? He was key contributor to Tel Quel and part of the group in the 1960s who thought to republish Genet's 'Rembrandt'. Many of the concerns of the 1940s would be given more explicit voice in Tel Quel after the reflections of more than a decade: the interface between phenomenology and classical philosophy, the problems of intersubjectivity and intertextuality, a continuing analysis of the writings of Antonin Artaud for example. And the exploration of Mallarmé in terms of textuality, visuality and semantics was crucial.^{xxxiv} Yet it is my contention that without the Genet text on Rembrandt and its interference principle, Derrida would not, perhaps, have devised, via Mallarmé alone, the spatial juxtaposition of texts which give rise to the crucial reflections of 'La double séance, 1970. Just as with Genet's 'Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt...', one text (Mallarmé's 'Mimique') effectively deconstructs the other (Plato's Philebus - Socrates' reflections on mimesis). The play between session or seminar ('séance') and portrait sitting here is perhaps the secret acknowledgement of an absent (primary) text: Genet on Rembrandt as 'Le Secret de Derrida'.^{xxxv} Derrida was the

first to recognise in Genet, his contemporary, how Genet's subjective and textual anguish was at once confirmed and contradicted by the solution of abstraction and spatiality offered in Mallarmé's writing; he evidently delighted in Genet's additional 'perversion' of Mallarmé via the phallicism of the double column system; both factors confirmed for Derrida, in addition, Genet's status as an 'anti-Sartre', a status, moreover, fit to vie with Hegel, in Glas.

Glas (tolling bell, death knell) appeared first in the special Derrida number of the review l'Arc of early 1973 beginning with a 'mimique': 'Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt...: 'What is left of a Rembrandt torn into regular squares and flushed down the toilet is divided into two. 'Comme le reste' Like the rest. 'Two unequal columns, they say distyle [*disent-ils*], each of which - envelop(e)(s) or sheath(es), incalculably reverses, turns inside out, replaces, remarks, overlaps [*recoupe*] the other.'^{xxxvi} It is an homage to Genet, an etymological investigation of the words 'catafalque', 'balcon', a discussion of the column of text as a vertical coffin and so on. A two-column principle is set up imitatively (although in l'Arc, these read consecutively, not in parallel).^{xxxvii} As illustrations, Derrida offered a branch of 'genet', the golden flowering broom of Morvan with which Genet identified, and which became a transmutative metaphor for Genet's abject prison world in Notre-Dame des Fleurs, and in counterpoint, the image of the guillotine, engine of death, which cuts the heads off Genet's pin-ups (just as the easel/guillotine slices up the body in portraiture).

Yet whereas Genet's double columns paradoxically restore Rembrandt, actualising and subjectivising the artist, the process of portraiture, the problem of style versus individuality, of looking, of everyman's interior, private narrative, Derrida's first Glas - albeit a larger critical project - abolishes that primary, progenitive experience. The non-verbal aspects of the experience of portraiture, with its power to arouse 'bovine', stupid or alternatively transcendent emotions is never refuted by Genet. Derrida, however, ignoring Plato's questions in Philebus about the eidetic or painted representation (see 'La Double Seance'), was well on his way to transform everything into the Word - his own Mallarméan Oeuvre - the apotheosis of which was his massive publication, the second version of Glas of

1974.

Here, the twin columns are constituted by Hegel on the left, Genet on the right of each page: 'two colossi in their double solitude' (a solitude molested by Derrida at every possible moment). While Genet's pioneering status for the twin column is acknowledged implicitly only; Rembrandt both as progenitor and as oeuvre progenitor has disappeared in all but name (Abraham prevails). Yet the Hegel/Genet juxtaposition can obliquely comment on the concerns of the portraiture it suppresses. As Derrida demonstrates, Hegel's edifice of abstract, law, right, morality, ethics, is posited on the stability of the family, law and state: those very portrait commissioners which structured Rembrandt's life. Hegel's thought is structured by the Family, Trinity, the Judeo-Christian tradition, sourced in Saint John: 'In the beginning was the Word'. Yet just as Mallarmé 'undid' Plato in 'La Double Séance', Hegel is 'undone' by Genet, the man without a family, hostile to the bourgeoisie, Church and State. It was Genet who in his twin encounters with Rembrandt and with Giacometti, released portraiture into subjectivity, into privacy, into obscenity even; released it from its prisoners, from commissioners, from pomp and circumstance; Genet who posited the extinction of personality as paradoxically the authorial presence itself. Genet's whole oeuvre - as was his life - was posited upon the act of theft (as distinct from plagiarism or appropriation) and its links with mourning, with writing as death. His double text is in itself a 'funeral rite' shot through with Eros and Thanatos. Yet there is no Eros in Glas; and Hegel's Protestantism, Derrida's Judaic filiations and even botany are deployed to overwhelm the intense Catholicity of the author of Notre Dame des Fleurs.^{xxxviii} Should Glas be read as an homage or a theft? Does Derrida come to bury Genet or to praise him? Genet himself appreciated Derrida's immense subtlety in writing and interpretation, indeed he declared the necessity for all true texts to hide their compositional devices, their 'règle du jeu'.^{xxxix} Should one, more generously, see Genet's 'Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt...' as the invisible [double] text to which half the enterprise of Glas refers, via the trope of absence and the 'mise-en-abyme' - the double mirror principle of infinitely receding reflections, a metaphor for the mind of which Derrida was so fond?

Derrida's act of homage in Glas is twinned with his clairvoyant theft of method. As reader, how should one hope to comprehend Derrida's amazing, bewildering, ingenious, text-invaded subjectivity - that, like Genet's reflections on Rembrandt and portraiture, cannot ever be completely shared or conventionally communicated?^{xl} Indeed Derrida's texts in Glas, 1974, form a mosaic of borrowed or elaborated constructs, whose origins mingle Mallarméan syntactical conceits and the modernist principle of textual collage^{xli} with the far older Jewish, Old Testament tradition of the 'melitzah',^{xlii} the Revelation as the Word; the abhorrence of images - Derrida's Jewish origins shed much light on the original principle of his work.^{xliii} As Jean-Bernard Moraly also concluded of Glas: 'The book is also an homage to the Talmud. From the Talmud Derrida had borrowed the pagination, the confrontation of texts (Michna / Guemara), and the imbrication of several discourses which seem to tattoo the page.'^{xliv}

Yet as in Genet's plural Rembrandt, with its insistence on Genet himself as subject, his artistic rights to subjectivity, Derrida's Glas is essentially autobiographical. Derrida wrestles in Glas with the Judeo-Christian heritage in its entirety, with the tradition of the Talmud, of the Biblical gloss and exegesis, with Hegel and [as] the 'end of history', with writers of the brilliance of Mallarmé, Genet, Georges Bataille and implicitly Sartre - so many angels for one Jacob.^{xlv} Derrida finally made his confession during a subsequent confrontation with visuality and representation. In his introduction to Visions d'Aveugle, L'Autoportrait et autre Ruines, the exhibition he selected and prefaced at the Louvre in 1990, he revealed that his sense of a 'secret election' to writing as a vocation was directly related to his brother's prowess at drawing. His own efforts were pitifully clumsy: thus a substitution took place; a deliberate strategy of fratricide. 'My hypothesis for work also signified a work of mourning. Throughout my life I have never drawn again, never even attempted to draw.'^{xlvi} Painting, a 'degenerate and superfluous expression' as it is called in 'La Double Séance', is subsumed in portraiture, a practice Derrida extravagantly, metonymically, immemorially, represented by the trope of blindness...^{xlvii} For Genet seeing, intersubjectivity, recognition of another and of oneself in another, in representation,

in Rembrandt's self-portraits was the ultimate demonstration of the artificiality, of the limits of writing, of the text, of the Word: 'It is this, the text (Genet) that traps, fleshes, reads the reader, judgment, criticism. Like Rembrandt. Paradigmatic scene.' Derrida's monolithic column system in Glas beckons a second Samson; in his homage to Genet he was afraid to allow himself to be undone.

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NOTES.

Unfootnoted translations are by the author.

i. Jacques Derrida: Glas, translated by John P. Leavey Jr., and Richard Rand, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 1986, p 219.

ii. See Jean-Bernard Yehouda Moraly's: 'Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt déchiré en petits carrés bien réguliers et foutu aux chiottes ou La critique selon Genet' Le Français dans le monde special number, 'Littérature et enseignement', February-March, 1988 pp 104-109; Bettina L. Knapp, Jean Genet, Boston, Twayne publishers, 1989, pp 92-5; Thierry Dufrêne: Giacometti. Portrait de Jean Genet. Le scribe captif, Paris, Adam Biro, 1991, discusses 'Le secret de Rembrandt', p 32-3. Finally Jean Genet, Rembrandt, Paris, 1995, has been published by Editions Gallimard.

iii. Jacques Derrida: Glas, Paris, Editions Galilée, 1974, loose publicity flysheet.

iv. Writings in French on Rembrandt were abundant; before 1960 one could list those by Marcel Brion (1940), Germain Bazin (c 1940), Paul Fierens (c 1943), Tancred Borenius (1946), Otto Benesch (1947), Jean Cassou (1947, 1952, 1955) André Charles Coppier (1948) Henri Dumont (1949), E. R. Meyer, (1958), Charles Perrussaux (1960). Seymour Slive's definitive Rembrandt and his critics, 1630-1730 was published by Martinus Nijhoff in The Hague, in 1953 and in Paris by Flammarion in 1960.

v. See Rembrandt, 1606-1669, Orangerie des Tuileries, July-September, 1947; Dessins de Rembrandt, Cabinet des dessins, Musée du Louvre, June, 1955; Rembrandt et son temps, Ecole des Beaux Arts, May-June, 1955; Rembrandt graveur, Bibliothèque Nationale, Galerie Mansart, July-September, 1956; Rembrandt et son école, Institut Néerlandais, 12-30 March, 1957.

vi. See Edmund White: Genet, with a chronology by Albert Dichy, London, Chatto and Windus, 1993, pp 464, 513, 515. (c 1957 'While travelling in Northern Europe Genet was also constantly visiting museums, looking at Rembrandt, Vermeer and Frans Hals'), 515. Jean-Bernard Moraly: Jean Genet, La Vie écrite, Paris, Editions de la Différence, 1988, mentions letters to Bernard Frechtman (presently unavailable) describing Genet's wonder in front of Rembrandts in Antwerp, Amsterdam and the Hague (p 245). He worked on Rembrandt in Hamburg in June, 1958 (Moraly, p 247), and was in Amsterdam again with Abdullah in October and November 1958, just after the Express article (White, p 516).

vii. Jean Genet: 'Le Secret de Rembrandt', l'Express, September 4th, 1958, p 14, translated by Randolph Hough as 'Rembrandt's Secret' in What remains of a Rembrandt torn into four equal pieces and flushed down the toilet, Madras and New York, Hanuman books, 1988, pp 53-79.

viii. Edmund White: Jean Genet, op. cit., p 182.

ix. See Jean Genet: Haute Surveillance, Paris, Cinéastes-Bibliophiles, 1947, an erotic play with three male characters in prison.

x. See Jean Genet: L'Enfant Criminel & Adame miroir, Paris, Paul Morihien, 1949, and Journal d'un voleur, Paris, Gallimard, 1949, pp 90-93.

xi. See Brigid Brophy's beautiful essay: 'Our Lady of the Flowers', pp 69-70 in Peter Brooks and Joseph Halpern eds., Genet. A collection of Critical Essays, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, Inc, 1979, pp 69-70.

xii. Giacometti produced four drawn heads of Genet on September 1st, 1954; the small oil portrait of 1954 (Tate Gallery London); the large 'seated' portrait of 1955 (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris); two drawings of the writer seated with pen and papers, 1957, and the final, less 'finished' portrait in oils, 1957, Galerie Beyeler, Basel, all discussed in Thierry Dufrêne, op. cit.

xiii. One may see Giacometti bestowed as a gift from Sartre to Genet, an atonement, perhaps, for the act of appropriation constituted by Sartre's 'portrait', 'Saint Genet Comedien et Martyr', serialised from 1950 in Les Temps Modernes. 'On murder considered as one of the fine arts' - a title from De Quincey - was, significantly, one of Sartre's chapter headings). Saint Genet appeared as Genet's Oeuvres Complètes, vol.1, Paris, Gallimard, 1952! Genet, severely traumatised, ceased writing for six years. Sartre's alignment with the Communist Party from 1952 ideologically disqualified him from further writing on Giacometti.

xiv. See Jean Genet: L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti, Paris, Marc Barbezat, 1958. Ernst Scheidegger's photographs of the sculpture-filled studio, Giacometti at work, close ups of the Genet portraits etc., constitute, of course, a supplementary 'text'.

xv. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty: 'La doute de Cézanne', Fontaine, no 47, December 1945, and in Sens et Non-Sens Editions Nagel, 1948.

xvi. Stéphane Mallarmé: Igitur ou la Folie d'Elbehnon, Paris, Gallimard, 1925; conventional narrative (absent), has to be 'reconstituted' by the reader. It contained the first ideas for Mallarmé's masterpiece, 'Un Coup de Dés...', (A Throw of the Dice...) 1897, which exemplified Mallarmé's revolutionary 'orchestral' or 'stellar' disposition of words across a double page. Robert Cohn's Yale doctorate of 1949 appeared as L'Oeuvre de Mallarmé. Un coup de dés, Paris, Librairie des Lettres, 1951. 'Igitur can be read as a fictional counterpart to Hegelian philosophical oppositions such as negation and synthesis'; see Edmund White, op. cit., pp 446-9).

xvii. Jean Genet: 'Fragments', Les Temps Modernes, August, 1954, pp 193-217 (first republished in Fragments...et autres textes, Paris, Gallimard, 1990, pp 67-97); apparently conceived as an 'open letter to Decimo', Genet's lover he believed to be dying of tuberculosis. In 1954, Jean-Jacques Pauvert announced Enfers as a forthcoming publication incorporating 'Fragments.'

xviii. Genet: 'Le Secret de Rembrandt', 1958, p 14: '... c'est son métier qui l'exige ou plutôt l'amène avec soi'. See Moraly, op. cit., p 114.

xix. Jean Genet: 'L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti', Derrière le miroir, no 98, June, 1957, Paris, Editions Pierre à Feu,, A. Maeght, p 25. Moraly (Le Français dans le monde, 1988, p 105) dates the train episode to 1952 or 1953, and implicitly to July 1952, when suffering from writer's block, Genet tore up his manuscripts, attempting suicide.

xx. See White, op. cit., p. 464. The train episode continues to appear, in , for example Alberto Giacometti and Tahar Ben Jalloun, Paris, Flohic Editions, 1991 and Jean Clair: 'Le résidu et la ressemblance. Un souvenir de l'enfance d'Alberto Giacometti', Albert Giacometti, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1991.

xxi. Jean Genet: L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti, Paris, Marc Barbezat, 1958, unpaginated.

xxii. See Thierry Dufrêne, 1991, op. cit., pp 5-6.

xxiii. 'Le Secret de Rembrandt', L'Express, September 4th, 1958, pp 14-15, and Oeuvres Complètes, Paris, vol. 5, 1979, pp 31-38, republished in Peinture, no 18-19, 1985, pp 57-64.

xxiv. Jean Genet: 'Rembrandt's Secret', op. cit., p 58.

xxv. Compare Genet's reflections on Saskia , desire and death with Derrida on the 'hymn' in 'La double séance' I, Tel Quel no 41, Spring 1970, p 27 - 'confusion between the present and non-present.. the between of desire and fulfilment, perpetration and memory...'

xxvi. Jean Genet: 'Rembrandt's Secret', op. cit., pp 54, 62, 64, 73-4, 77, 79.

xxvii. See Bernard Frechtman, 'Something which seemed to resemble decay', Art and Literature, Lausanne, March, 1964, pp 77-86 (the twin texts published consecutively); reprinted in Antaeus, no 54, Spring 1985, pp 108-16. Paule Thevenin recalled in her posthumous article 'La Poésie, la mort', Contretemps, no 1, Paris, Winter, 1995, p 39 note 7, the collapse of a project for an international review (Italian, German and French) to which the two texts were sent, appearing only in Italian, consecutively, with the arbitrarily-given titles: 'Il mio antico modo di vedere il mondo' and 'Il nostro sguardo' (Il Menabo 7, Una rivista internazionale, 1964, Einaudi). Consecutive publication of the texts remained the norm, in 'What remains of a Rembrandt...' (copyright 1985), in What remains of a Rembrandt torn into four equal pieces and flushed down the toilet, op. cit, 1988, pp 9-49. See also Jean Genet: Rembrandt. Wat overbleef van eenin kleine, heelregelmatige vierkantjes gescheurde en in de plee gemikte Rembrandt, preface by Matthijs Bakker, Arena, Amsterdam, 1990 (the two texts arranged on facing pages, in italics on the right).

xxviii. I prefer this to White (op, cit p 460): 'What remains of a Rembrandt torn into little squares of the same size and flushed down the crapper.' See Jean Genet: 'Ce qui est resté...', Tel Quel no 29, spring, 1967, pp 3 - 11, republished in Oeuvres Complètes, volume IV, 1979, pp 21-31.

xxix. Edmund White confirmed with Genet's friend, Monique Lange, that Genet phoned her from Milan, on April 9th, 1964, recounting the destruction of the Rembrandt manuscript and two plays 'down the toilet', op. cit., p 544 - possibly the fate of a far greater oeuvre.

xxx. See Paule Thevenin, op. cit, 1995. The literary executor of Antonin Artaud and friend of Genet and Derrida, she procured the two texts from Denys Mascolo, an editor of Il Menabo 7. Thévenin asked the reluctant author permission to publish the original French, and at his express request established the two-column version for Tel Quel.

xxxi. Jean Genet: 'Ce qui est resté...' Tel Quel, 1967, op. cit, p 10, Frechtman translation, (1964), 1988 op. cit., pp 29-30.

xxxii. Ibid., p 33.

xxxiii. Ibid. pp 48-9.

xxxiv. Following Cohn, 1951 (see note 16), Jacques Scherer's Le 'Livre' de Mallarmé, Paris, 1957, concerned the Oeuvre or Livre by Mallarmé that would be the apex of his life' work subsuming 'Un Coup de Dés'. It involved discussion of the imagery of the tomb, box and block crucial for Derrida. Cohn's Mallarmé's Masterwork appeared in 1966, before 'Le double séance'.

xxxv. See Jacques Derrida, 'La double séance' I, Tel Quel, Spring, 1970, no 41, p 3-37

and 'La Double séance' II, Tel Quel, Summer, 1970 no 42, pp . Two points, however, are crucial: Plato's text from Philebus (into which Derrida inserts Mallarmé's 'Mimique') specifically introduces the painter of visual images after the notional 'writer' who 'fills up the book of the brain' and hence mental images of the past, present and future. (See Derrida: 'a discourse on the relationship between literature and truth always comes up against the enigmatic possibility of repetition within the framework of the portrait' I, p 12 note 4). The insert of a block of text, Mallarmé's 'Mimique' introduces as well as the jump in time, space and culture, movement, dance, the trope of murder: the one-man mime show of a Pierrot tickling his wife's feet to the death - undercutting Plato's discussion of truth and representation - and finally comes Derrida's realisation that the short scene in its entirety refers to another, absent, text: an invisible palimpsest (cf. the absence of the bulk of Genet's 'Rembrandt' in Glas, 1974).

xxxvi. Jacques Derrida: Glas, (translation), op. cit., 1986, p 1.

xxxvii. Jacques Derrida: 'Glas', L'Arc, no 54, special Jacques Derrida number, 1973, pp 4-15. The novelist and writer Catherine Clément was responsible for the layout of the issue.

xxxviii. See Mairead Hanrahan's essay: 'Sentir / penser la différence. Notre Dame des Fleurs de Jean Genet' with its emphasis on Catholicism and its own deliberate splitting into two columns half way through, in Mara Negron ed. Lectures de la Différence Sexuelle, Paris, Editions des Femmes, 1994, pp 169-183.

xxxix. Genet to Jean Ristat in 'Une lettre de Jean Genet', Les Lettres Françaises, no 1429, 'Hommage à Jacques Derrida', March 28th, 1972, p 14 (Genet was reading Derrida's Le Pharmacie de Platon).

xl. Glas has been 'explicated' in the scholarly equivalent to an exegesis of James Joyce's Finnegan's Wake; Derrida's demands on the (putative) reader are similar and similarly beside the point. See John P. Leavey Jr. Glassary, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 1986.

xli. Compare Genet in 'Fragments', op. cit., p 205, note 6: 'Detached from the language of words, with my cold scissors, complete blocks [of text] are also tombs.'

xlii. See Yosef Hayim Yarushelmi: Freud's Moses, Yale University Press, Newhaven and London, 1991. The traditional 'melitzah' (as used by Freud's father) is discussed p 71ff.

xliii. See Derrida on his origins in Le Nouvel Observateur, 1983, reprinted in Robert Wood and Robert Bernasconi eds., Derrida and Différance, Evanston, 1988, and the broader discussion and references in Martin Jay: Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought, Chapter 9: 'Phallogocentrism': Derrida and Irigaray', pp 493-542.

xliv. The Michna is the sacred text; the Guemara the commentary. Moraly explains in his article of 1988 (p 109, note 10): 'the Talmud, principal object of study in Jewish colleges is a mosaic of absolutely contradictory texts, united on the same page in different languages and characters. The two principal texts transcribe dialogues... utterly different opinions on the same subject.'

xlv. The element of lex talionis, revenge as displacement, muddies any notions of purely textural chiasmus in Glas. Certainly Derrida's own struggle to displace Sartre - via Genet -as doyen of Parisian letters was crucial. See Moraly, op.cit., 1988, p 308. My epigraph appears within a block of text refuting Georges Bataille's proposition of Genet's 'failure': 'L'echec de Genet' - a critique of Sartre's Saint Genet, from La Littérature et le Mal, Paris, Gallimard, 1957, pp 143-5.

xlvi. Jacques Derrida: Mémoires d'Aveugle, L'Autoportrait et autres Ruines, Paris, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, (exhibition, Musée du Louvre), 1990, pp 40-41. The trope of blindness traditionally used to represent the synagogue is deliberately reversed (hence representation is a 'Christian heresy'). Derrida's La Verité en Peinture Paris, Flammarion, 1978, republished texts on painting after Glas and prior to the Louvre show, including the Glas and Genet-impregnated reflections on the artist Gérard Titus-Carmel ('Cartouches', 1977-8).

xlvii. See note 45, and 'La double seance' op. cit., p 12 (analysing Plato), where painting is classed as a 'supplement to discursive thought', something 'which can reveal the essential picturality of the logos, its representativity'....