Rainer Maria Rilke and Jugendstil

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Rainer Maria Rilke and Jugendstil: Affinities, Influences, Adaptations.

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III. Rilke as an Art Critic

Of all the writers of his time, none was more active as a critic than Rilke. Throughout his life, he engaged in the critical evaluation of theater productions, new books, various and sundry artists, and even an occasional concert or ballet performance. He went on lecture tours on which he discussed contemporary poetry or the merits of the works of prominent literary figures such as Detlev von Liliencron or Maurice Maeterlinck. Rilke even got involved from time to time in various social developments, school reform for example, about which he also made his considered opinion known. Some of these essays, reviews, and lectures were produced as a result of Rilke's constant need for additional funds, especially during those difficult Westerwede months. Therefore, these reviews and expressions of opinion were motivated not only by his individual priorities and preferences but also by what he thought would sell well. Others came about as a result only of his sincere desire to contribute to the understanding of a particular event or a particular work. Whatever their motivation, these works verify Rilke's considerable talent and astounding perceptivity as a critic. Because they constitute such a major portion of his writing, they must be viewed by Rilke students with much seriousness.

As has already been stated, Rilke also concerned himself in numerous essays and reviews with the various aspects of Jugendstil. These essays have become especially valuable because of their reflection of the poet's own thinking during the period. The two most crucial ventures of this sort, and probably the two most important examples of Rilke's critical writing altogether, are his essays on Heinrich Vogeler and his famous Rodin book. As widely read as they were, these works brought fame both to their subjects and to their author. Today, they provide us with the most valuable insight we have into the poet's relationship with these two artists and with the entire phenomenon of Jugendstil.

Although his approach to the works of Vogeler and to those of Rodin is as different as was his relationship with the two artists, Rilke maintained essentially the same perspective in both of these ventures, namely the recording of his own very personalized and subjective reaction to their lives, development, and individual works. With regard to his study of Vogeler, for example, he wrote: "Es wird sich darum handeln, aus dem Gesamt-Inhalt des vorliegenden Werkes und dem
Künstler, der es geschaffen hat, ein Bild zu machen, eine Welt, vor der man schauend stille steht und von der man in bescheidenen Worten spricht" (SW V, 557). Rilke never made the claim of being objective. He did assert, however, that his personal affinity for these artists and his personal knowledge of their works put him in a far better position to understand them and what they strove to accomplish than other critics. For that reason, he concluded, his views were the only acceptable ones: "Es ist rührend gewesen, was die Verehrer, die ich ihm abgesprochen habe, von Heinrich Vogeler rühmten. . . . Das war sehr rührend, aber auch sehr falsch" (SW V, 561). That these essays have retained their importance, even today, as works of genuine critical value attests to the intuitive talents on which Rilke openly relied. More important to us, however, is the fact that this personal approach reveals so much about the author himself, what he personally deemed valuable and appropriate, what he personally understood and felt about this art, and by inference, what he perhaps also found useful for his own creativity. It is from this perspective, with a view directed toward the author, that the current discussion will be conducted.

Heinrich Vogeler

During the spring of 1902, while he was still living in the village of Westerwede, Rilke wrote two different essays on the life and works of Heinrich Vogeler. The first and longest of these, entitled simply “Heinrich Vogeler,” was written for publication in the well-known Jugendstil periodical Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration in Darmstadt where it appeared in April of that same year. Rilke’s essay was accompanied by twenty-four reproductions of Vogeler’s works, nine photographs and seven vignettes and designs. The initial planning for the second essay was begun in January, but the writing itself was not completed until May 1902. It was published along with five other essays about the artists in Worpswede by the Velhagen and Klasing publishing house under the title of Worpswede. The writing of these works was motivated by Rilke’s desperate need for money, but they demonstrate nonetheless the poet’s attraction to his subject and his convictions that what he undertook was

* “The object will be to create a concept of the entire content of the current work and of the artist who created it: a world before which one stands reverently and of which one speaks in modest words.”

† “It was touching what his admirers, whom I have denied him, praised in Heinrich Vogeler . . . It was very touching but also very false.”
important. Although apparently written separately and often with a different emphasis on one point or the other, these two essays convey essentially the same ideas. For that reason, we shall consider them together, hoping thereby to get a broader and more complete view of the artist and, of course, the poet.

Because Vogeler, when he was still a relatively young man, was just at the point of becoming known in Germany, Rilke devotes much of his efforts in his essays to Vogeler's background and artistic development. He recounts the artist's studies at the academy in Düsseldorf and his trips to Amsterdam, Italy, and Belgium. After telling of these extensive trips, which were filled with Vogeler's experimentations and imitations of the works of others, Rilke describes how Vogeler decided finally to settle in Worpswede for good. There, Vogeler gave up his tendency toward imitation, having learned in comparison to others what his own talents were and what his own personality required of him, and proceeded now, closed off from the outside world, to realize the promise of his own inner being: "Dieses ist der Sinn und die unausgesprochene Absicht seiner Reisen gewesen; unter dem Einfluß fremder Dinge hat er erkannt, was das Seine ist und wenn etwas an dieser Entwicklung überrascht, so ist es der Umstand, daß er so früh schon sich zu verschließen begann, zu einer Zeit, wo andere junge Leute erst recht aufgehen und sich ziemlich wahllos den Zufällen hingeben, welche ihnen begegnen" (SW V, 119).* In his comments, Rilke reveals several very personal emotional reactions to Vogeler. First, we observe his sympathy with the manner in which Vogeler sought to define the limits and the attributes of his own talent. Rilke himself was engaged in just such a search—in fact his interest in Jugendstil art might be considered one phase of it. Second, he displays his admiration and even envy that Vogeler so early in his life had been able to complete his goal of self-realization. Rilke certainly had not. Third, he reveals the basis for his obvious attraction to Vogeler, which is the same foundation upon which Rilke built all of his relationships with artists: his need in times of personal uncertainty and change for a stable, self-confident, and productive mentor from whom he could derive strength. In Worpswede, Vogeler played such a role.

Rilke then turns his attention to that aspect of Vogeler's life to which he felt particularly attracted—the artist's style of life and especially the

* "This was the purpose and the unexpressed intention of his trips; under the influence of foreign things, he recognized what was his own, and if anything is surprising in this development, it is the fact that he began so early to isolate himself at a time when other young people first begin to open themselves up and give themselves over, rather haphazardly, to those chance events which confront them."
physical surroundings in which he lived, his garden and house. Vogeler had bought an old farm house, the Barkenhoff, upon his move to Worpswede and had spent much of his time planting a garden and trees, caring for them, and remodeling and refurnishing the house with furniture and appointments of his own design. Vogeler’s garden and house became for Rilke a symbol for a type of earthly paradise into which he believed Vogeler had withdrawn from the distractions of a disturbing world, much the same as a monk might retreat into a monastery to find peace. Within his walled-off paradise, Vogeler created, then, an environment that provided him with the stability and strength of life with which to grow and develop. Here he could hear the “murmuring of his soul”: “Da haben wir ein Leben, welches sich mit Mauern umgeben und darauf verzichtet hat, sich über diese Grenzen hinaus auszudehnen. Ein Leben nach Innen. Und dieses Leben verarmt nicht. Inmitten schiffbrüchiger Zeiten scheint es die Zufluchtsstätte aller Reichtümer zu sein und wie in einem kleinen zeitlosen Bilde alles zu vereinen, wonach die Tage draußen ringen und jagen” (SW V, 120).* The qualities of self-sufficiency and confidence, and the reverence for and devotion to artistry that this way of life conveyed to Rilke were immensely appealing to him. They especially attracted him since he saw himself still torn and distracted by the superficial and divisive forces of the modern world with no inner reality to which to retreat.

Vogeler’s garden and house became for Rilke, in addition, an apt metaphor for the artist’s own organic growth in style and technique:

* “Here we have a life that has surrounded itself with walls and has declined to extend beyond these limits. A life directed inward. And this life thrives. In the middle of shipwrecked times, it seems to be the sanctuary of all riches and seems to unite, as in a small timeless image, everything which the days outside struggle for and pursue.”

† “Thus he lives his life there in the garden, and there he seems to concentrate on a hundred things and to grow in a thousand ways. In this garden he writes his feelings and
Just as the garden grew and developed and increased in complexity, his works met the challenge of ever more difficult tasks. As the vegetation became more and more lush and strived to fill out the space in the garden with new leaves, limbs, and branches, the organic lines of the artist sought also to fill in the available space in the work, becoming increasingly varied and convoluted: “Seine Liniensprache, welche auf den frühen Radierungen nur wenige Ausdrücke, rhythmisch . . . wiederholte, entnahm dem dichteren Garten tausend Bereicherungen. An Stelle des Lockeren und Lichten, das seinen Blättern und Bildern im Anfang eigentümlich schien, tritt immer mehr das Bestreben, einen gegebenen Raum organisch auszufüllen” (SW V, 126–27).* In this vivid metaphor with which he compares Vogeler’s constantly increasing decorative tendencies and his intensified utilization of the Jugendstil undulating line to the increasing lushness of the garden, Rilke at once captures two of the primary stylistic characteristics of Vogeler’s works and of the works of the Jugendstil artists in general. He justifies these characteristics with a type of theoretical basis—the idea of recreating the complexity and the essence of organic nature—which indeed lay in the minds of many of the artists of the day. In addition, he demonstrates his own understanding of some of the more abstract axioms of Jugendstil art while revealing his admiration for the movement.

The carefully tended garden provided Vogeler, in Rilke’s opinion, with a further artistic opportunity so vital to the art of Jugendstil and to Rilke himself. In caring for his garden and in watching it grow and mature, Vogeler came to know and feel the true source of life, that all-pervasive Lebensstrom (life’s force) which the artists of the period believed was present in all things but invisible and incomprehensible to those living in the over-cultured and superficial society of the time. One of the main goals of the artists of the movement was to rediscover this force and reveal it in their works. Vogeler’s garden gave him such insight: “Er weiß in das Leben der kleinsten Blumen hineinzublicken; er kennt sie nicht von Sehen und vom Hörensagen. Er ist in ihr Vertrauen

moods as in a book; but the book lies in the hands of nature. . . . Thus he planted a tree or made an arbor because of spring; and he made the tree slender and delicate and the arbor loose as it was meant to be in spring. But the years pass, the tree and the arbor change. They grow more dense, broader, more shady, the entire garden gets thicker and rustles more and more. . . . With the garden and the ever increasing challenges of its bushier trees, Heinrich Vogeler’s art grew; here always new and always more difficult tasks were given, tasks which slowly from year to year became more complicated and demanding.”

* “His language of lines, which in the earlier etchings repeated only few rhythmical expressions, . . . took from the more lush garden thousands of enrichments. In place of the lesser and lighter elements, which seemed in the beginning to be characteristic of his sketches and pictures, the tendency organically to fill out any given area appears.”
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As a result of his reunification with the Lebensstrom, Vogeler, in Rilke’s view, arrived at a point where he was genuinely in a position to portray this inner and hidden reality in his works:

Ich habe noch nie eine Wirklichkeit gesehen, die so reich ist und zugleich so tatsächlich und wirklich in jedem Augenblick. Die Wirklichkeit im Leben der Bauern erscheint uns so .... Da sind alle Verrichtungen natürlich und notwendig, einfach und gut; und wie aus diesem Leben, ganz von selbst, die Ernten kommen und das Brot, so kommt aus dem Leben Heinrich Vogeler's von selbst eine Kunst, die von seinem Heimats-Lande abhängig ist, die gute und schlechte Jahre hat, die seinen Fleiß, sein Vertrauen und Kraft und Liebe seiner Hände braucht, als ob sie sein Feld wäre und er Saemann und erntender Schnitter dieses Feldes (SW V, 564).

Rilke then leaves the topic of Vogeler’s garden temporarily in order to discuss the other aspect in the artist’s life which to that point he felt had exercised an equally profound influence on Vogeler’s artistic impulses. This experience was his stay in Munich in 1900 where he served as an illustrator for the Insel publications. While there, Vogeler was taken into the elitist circle of artists and writers gathered around Rudolf Alexander Schröder and Alfred Walter Heymel and thus came into contact with many of the important figures of the Jugendstil world, including such luminaries as Aubrey Beardsley. These associations opened his eyes to further possibilities in his art and reinforced his own natural predilections:

Es ist natürlich nicht der reifere Garten allein, der das alles gemacht hat. Die "Insel" ist gegründet worden, die Raum und Anregung bot, die Zeichnungen von Beardsley brachte, welche für Vogeler eine Offenbarung waren und die ihm endlich auch die Bekanntschaft mit Menschen vermittelte, deren große Kultur ihm wohltat und deren Wesen ihn, weil es, gleich dem seinen, auf Verwirklichungen gestimmt war, mit fremdartiger Verwandschaft nahe berührt (SW V, 569).

* "He knows how to penetrate into the life of the smallest flowers; he doesn’t know them only from observing and from having heard about them. He has gained their trust, and like the small insect, he knows the depths and inner foundation of the calyx."

† "I have never yet seen a reality that is so rich and at the same time so factual and real at every moment. The reality in the life of peasants seems like that to us .... There, all activities are natural and necessary, simple and good; and just as the harvest and the bread come from this life, of their own accord, from Heinrich Vogeler's life comes an art, of its own accord, which is dependent on his homeland and has good and bad years, needs his diligence, his faith and strength, and the love of his hands as if it were his field and he the sower and the reaper of this field."

‡ "It is, of course, not only the more developed garden that has wrought all this. The
The *Insel* group encouraged Vogeler’s earlier interest in the applied arts and taught him how to use glass, cloth, and silver so that the “inner voice” could be heard and the “inner reality” understood. In other words, they intensified Vogeler’s search for the *Lebensstrom* and helped him to discover it and reveal it in this instance not in organic form but in the objects he created:

“Im Kreise der “Insel” wuchs er in diese Aufgaben hinein unter jungen Freunden, welche die Stimmen aller Stoffe kannten und die schönen Melodien, zu denen Silber und Damast und Seide und Glas zusammenklangen, zu komponieren wußten. Dort lernte er die Seele des Silbers verstehen ... lernte in Silber Dinge dichten, und Lieder schreiben, die das Silber mit seiner glänzenden Stimme sang. ... Denn die genaue Betrachtung und Kenntnis eines Materials führt zu der Erfahrung, daß keine Stelle daran leer ist und jede anders als die nachbar­liche, daß es keine Pausen und Lücken und Verlegenheiten, sondern nur Aus­druck gibt, und daß in diesem Reichtum, in diesem Überfluß der große Zauber schöner Dinge beruht und ihre Bedeutung für das Leben (SW V, 570).”

Upon his return to Worpswede, Vogeler found, according to Rilke, that the new knowledge and experience gained in Munich converged with that which he already possessed from his Worpswede garden, thus providing him with an even stronger harmonious foundation upon which to build his future artistic career.

In the essay *Worpswede*, Rilke then defines one further stylistic aspect of Vogeler’s art which, because of its significance in the entire *Jugendstil* movement and because it again indicates Rilke’s thorough knowledge of that art, deserves special consideration. This characteristic is Vogeler’s unique use of color. Earlier in his works, Rilke observes, Vogeler had used colors in much the same simple, uncomplicated fashion as he had originally used lines. Both had served the single function of lending contour and body to the subject being portrayed and had therefore played an important yet secondary role to the theme:

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"Insel“ was founded and offered space and stimulation, published sketches by Beardsley—which were a revelation to Vogeler—and provided him [Vogeler] eventually also the acquaintance with people whose great culture was a blessing to him and whose being, because it was directed toward materializations like his, touched him with a strange harmony.”

* "He grew into these challenges while under the influence of the “Insel” circle and among young friends who recognized the voices of all materials and knew how to compose the beautiful melodies in which silver, damask, silk, and glass could be harmonized. There he learned to understand the soul of silver ... learned to write things in silver and to compose songs which were sung by silver with its glittering voice. ... Because the careful observation and study of a material leads to the understanding that no place in it is empty and each different from its neighbor, that there are no pauses, gaps, or
Die Farbe auf den frühen Bildern Heinrich Vogelers entspricht in gewissem Sinne dem Kontur der ersten Radierungen; sie ist dünn und fließt hell in den Ufern der Umrisse hin. Wie er sich bei dem ersten Wandteppich mit Applikation größerer Seidenstücke bedient, so finden sich auf jenen Bildern gleichmäßige, breite Farbenflächen, welche summarisch und gleichsam im Sinne des einfachen Kolorierens gesehen sind (SW V, 130).*

As effective as some of these works were, they did not express the artistic complexity which was to appear later as Vogeler changed and developed his color techniques. In the later works, the colored surfaces, as in the case of the energized lines, no longer had any subordinate function to perform. They acquired a connotative value all of their own and became independent, self-sufficient, and vital elements in the work: "Die Bilder, die nun folgen, sind Versuche, bewegte und lebendige Farben zu malen, Farben, die nichtmehr wie ein Überzug über den Dingen liegen, sondern sich wie fortwährende Ereignisse auf ihrer Oberfläche abspielen" (SW V, 131).†

After having explored Vogeler's life, the major factors in his development, and the overall character of his work, Rilke then turns his attention to several of the individual works. There he discovers all of the attributes which he had earlier recounted. It is clear from these rather lyrical and subjective descriptions just how much the poet identified with the works and saw his own artistic aspirations realized in them. The first to be described is the painting "Mai-Morgen." It is a picture of the Barkenhoff at sunrise, and the house, the trees, the vegetation all seem to come alive as the contours and the colors vibrate in anticipation of the rising sun. In the earlier essay, Rilke writes:

Man betrachte, wie da die Luft gemalt ist, wie die Konturen der Dinge zittern in der frischen frühen Kühle des Sonnen-Aufgangs, wie alles voll Erwachen ist und Atem und Freude. Man glaubt, in dem Rhythmus der Umrisse das Schwingen der vielen Vogel-Stimmen zu fühlen, ... man glaubt zu sehen, wie die Farben immer mehr Licht empfangen und voller und dunkler werden, und dabei behält man doch das Bewußtsein des Bildes, das Gefühl von einem Bild-Moment, einem Moment der Ruhe, einem Höhepunkt, gleichsam dem embarrassment, only expression, and that in this richness, in this abundance, the great mystery of beautiful things resides along with their meaning for life.”

* "The color in Heinrich Vogeler’s early pictures corresponds in a certain sense to the contours in the first etchings; it is thin and flows bright within the boundaries of the lines. Just as he appliquéd larger pieces of silk on his first tapestry, one finds in these pictures regular and broad color surfaces that are to be viewed actually as a type of simple coloring.”

† "The pictures that now follow are attempts at painting agitated and enlivened colors,
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Gipfel des Morgens, von dem es nun abwärts geht in das Tal des Tages (SW V, 571-72).*

In a more specific but still subjective description from the Worspwede essay, Rilke evaluates some of the techniques Vogeler used in this work to create the particularly vibrant effects of the light and colors: “Indem er [der Garten] dichter wurde und sich immer mehr anfüllte mit Formen und Farben, veränderte sich auch das Licht, das ihn umgab. Es fiel nichtmehr breit durch das großmaschige Netz zahlbarer Äste auf die Wiesen; die Blätter, die Blüten, die Früchte, die Flächen von tausend aneinandergedrängten Dingen fingen es wie kleine Hände auf und spielten damit, glänzten, dunkelten und glühnten” (SW V, 131-32).† In both passages, the fundamental qualities of Vogeler’s works and of Jugendstil are clearly emphasized: the energized lines of the contours, the colors, the emotionally charged atmosphere, and the interplay between color and surface plane.

Two other paintings are subsequently described in the essays. Both of these works, “Melusinen-Märchen” and “Verkündigung,” demonstrate the basic types of themes Heinrich Vogeler preferred. Throughout his early creativity he continually returned to the fairy tale, mythology, or biblical stories as subjects for his works and was, as a consequence, generally considered a late romanticist by the general public. In the passages pertaining to these paintings, Rilke emphasizes once more Vogeler’s prevalent stylistic traits: the detailed organic forms, profuse decoration, and expertise in the use of color and surfaces. He also underscores the prominence of the emotional aura in the works, which is conveyed not only by the lines and colors but also by the stance and the gesture of the figures. About the “Melusinen-Märchen,” he writes:

... auch hier ist die Aufgabe, einen Raum organisch auszufüllen, gelöst, diesmal freilich im farbigen Sinne. Wie ein Mosaik in Grün und Gold ist dieser colors that no longer serve only as a covering over things but also as perpetual events which take place on the surface.”

* “Notice how the air is painted, how the contours of the things tremble in the early, fresh coolness of the sunrise, how everything is full of awakening, breath, and joy. You think you perceive in the rhythm of the lines the vibrations of the many birds singing, ... you think you see the colors absorbing more and more light and becoming richer and darker; and at the same time you retain the consciousness of the picture, the impression of a moment in time, a moment of peace, the high point, the peak of the morning from which one proceeds downward into the valley of the day.”

† “As it [the garden] got thicker and filled more and more with forms and colors, the light which surrounded it also changed. It no longer fell broadly on the meadows through the large-meshed net of innumerable branches; the leaves, the blossoms, the fruit, the surfaces of a thousand things joined together captured it like small hands and played with it, glistened, grew dark, and glowed.”
In his discussion of “Verkündigung,” Rilke particularly emphasizes the emotional aura. Here it is created by the position of the two figures relative to one another, by their facial expression, and by the luxurious lines of the angel’s robes: “Der Engel, der die Botschaft bringt, erschreckt sie nicht. Er ist der Gast, den sie erwartet hat, und sie ist seinen Worten eine weitoffene Flügeltür und ein schöner Empfang. Und der große Engel steht über sie geneigt und singt so nah, daß sie keines seiner Worte verlieren kann, und in den Falten seines reichen Kleides steht die Bewegung noch, mit der er sich zu ihr niederließ” (SW V, 133).†

As his final point in the essays, Rilke gives his own interpretation of Vogeler’s use of the fairy tale, mythological, or biblical themes and their significance. Severely misunderstood by the general public in Rilke’s opinion, these themes had little to do with their original sources and certainly were not designed to effect a revival of the romantic age. Rather, they became the vehicle for Vogeler to portray symbolically the qualities of his all-important, isolated “garden” world:

Man hat sie [die Märchen] lange für die Träume eines späten Romantikers gehalten. . . . Aber weder die “Schlangen-Braut”, noch das “Frosch-Königs-Märchen” sind aus vorhandenen Märchen-Stoffen heraus entstanden, und die “Sieben Raben” sind nur eine Maske, hinter der sieben schwarze Vögel ungestört ihr Wesen treiben dürfen. . . . Das war kein naiver Romantiker, der diese Blätter schuf, die er lange nach ihrer Vollendung mit dem zunächstliegenden Märchen-Namen verkleidete, das war ein Mensch unserer Zeit. . . . Ein Mensch mit einer schon ganz bestimmten, aber sehr eng begrenzten Wirklichkeit um

* “. . . here too the challenge of organically filling out a space is met, this time, to be sure, in the sense of colors. This forest wilderness is seen as a mosaic of green and gold from the glimmering depths of which the surprised face of the maiden looks toward the simple iron man who stands hot and helpless in his armour. . . . Perhaps the most unforgettable thing about the picture is how the figure of the Melusina-maiden is woven into this confused myriad of things so that one cannot say where she begins or if it perhaps isn’t the anxious eyes of the forest itself that, curious and at the same time disquieted, open up in front of the stranger.”

† “The angel who brings the message does not startle her. He is the guest whom she has expected, and she is a ‘wide open door’ for his words and a lovely welcome. And the great angel stands bending over her and sings so closely that she misses none of his words and in the folds of his rich cloak are still the movements with which he came down to her.”
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sich, zu der alles in Widerspruch stand, was er als Erlebnis oder Stimmung empfing. . . . So entstanden diese Märchen, seine eigenen Märchen, Erlebnisse, die über seine Wirklichkeit hinausragten, und die er mit den wenigen Mitteln dieser Wirklichkeit auszusprechen sich bemühte (SW V, 560–61).*

In another passage, Rilke writes: “Die Anregung zu der Radierung von den sieben Schwänen kam nicht von dem Märchen her, und die Entwürfe dieses schönen Marienlebens sind nicht über dem Lesen der Bibel gereift. Es war wieder die Wirklichkeit, die sich diese Bilder schuf, und der Garten Heinrich Vogeler’s, in dem sie sich irgendwo ereigneten” (SW V, 574).† Rilke touches here upon one of the main characteristics not only of Vogeler’s thinking but of the thinking of Jugendstil artists in general. Just like Vogeler, most of these artists sought to withdraw from their unsympathetic contemporary surroundings, and they usually portrayed this retreat thematically in some form in their works. Vogeler, as Rilke explains above, had retreated in real life into his garden paradise; in his works, his retreat was represented by the subjective world of the fairy tale and by personal variations on Biblical or mythological figures.

In his essays on Vogeler, Rilke created a vivid picture of the artist’s development and a description of the fundamental qualities which form the basis of his works. He emphasized throughout his essays those qualities which are peculiar to Vogeler but also intrinsic to the entire Jugendstil movement. Furthermore, it becomes increasingly apparent that Rilke, through his subjective approach, really arrived at his judgments by means of a strong personal affinity for the artist’s work and for the movement at large.

Auguste Rodin

Rilke first became aware of Rodin and his work through conversations he had with Paula Becker and Clara Westhoff while still in Worps-

* "The fairy tales were considered for a long time as the dreams of a late romanticist. . . . But neither the "Snake Bride" nor the "Frog King" arose from the fairy tale material, and the "Seven Ravens" are only a mask behind which seven black birds can live out their natural inclinations undisturbed. . . . The one who created these sketches, to which he gave the handiest title long after they were completed, was no naive romanticist. He was a man of our time. . . . A person living in an entirely defined but very narrowly limited reality to which all of his experiences and impressions stood in conflict. . . . This is the origin of his fairy tales, his own fairy tales, experiences which were projected beyond his reality and which he attempted to express with the limited means of that reality."

† "The stimulation for the etching of the seven swans did not come from the fairy tale, and the sketches of this beautiful life of Mary did not mature from reading the Bible. It was
wed, and he was most impressed by their opinion. Although his interest in Rodin continued, it was not until the spring of 1902, after the successful completion of the Vogeler essays and again primarily as a result of severe financial distress, that he decided to undertake a critical investigation of the sculptor’s works. He consequently began negotiations with Richard Muther for the writing of a monograph which he hoped to have included in a series of monographs on various artists to be published by the Julius Bard press in Berlin. Upon the completion of these negotiations early in the summer of 1902, the poet wrote Rodin, apparently received encouragement, and began his background investigation. In September of that year, armed with his considerable experience in critical writing and his continuing enthusiasm for the art of Jugendstil, Rilke arrived in Paris prepared to initiate the actual study. A few days later, he met Rodin for the first time. Although Rodin spoke no German and Rilke’s French was less than adequate, a cordial relationship between them ensued which included among other things a series of conversations about art and sculpture and the personal philosophy of the master. Though overwhelmed, Rilke felt an immediate and profound affinity for Rodin and set out with astonishing zeal and dedication to commit his observations and ideas about the sculptor to paper. By Christmas, his work was finished and by the following spring, the monograph had already appeared.

The book’s evaluation of Rodin’s works was revolutionary for its time and is surprisingly valid even in our day. More than half a century later, it has retained its position of respect among art historians and appears in all of the major Rodin bibliographies. Albert Elsen writes, for example:

The memorable sentences of the poet, R. M. Rilke, who served for a time as Rodin’s secretary and remained one of his most loyal friends and admirers, stands apart with lithic durability from the glutinous sentimentality and inflated chauvinism that characterizes much of the literature of the sculptor and his art. In Rilke’s penetrating essay . . . one finds many statements unsurpassed in the depth and lucidity of their insight.

When the book was first published in English, the editors for The Connoisseur wrote:

Slight as this book is, it is rich in content. . . . Besides being a fervent disciple, [Rilke] is a poet of real sensibility, and further, his book has the merit of obvious sincerity. . . . Unlike so much fashionable criticism of to-day, it is full of under-
Rilke and Jugendstil

standing and sane observations finely expressed. . . . He has looked intelligently as well as admiringly at Rodin's works and is able to interpret to others the mastery he finds in them.  

Rilke scholars also have studied the Rodin book with great interest. To them it is a clear indication of the profound effect Rodin was to have upon the future of the poet in his attempts at gaining control over his creative impulses, for example, and in his struggle to surmount the subjective self. These critics have failed, however, to consider the book in relation to Rilke's past and to the persistent influence that Jugendstil exercised on him. It is, however, this movement which formed the real basis for Rilke's analysis of Rodin's works and the true perspective from which his monograph was written. It becomes evident upon careful scrutiny of the book that Rilke, without ever saying so explicitly, considered Rodin's works in many respects as a continuation of the Jugendstil tradition.

Based on this fact, the Rodin book assumes special importance in our current study. Not only must Rodin be considered in a new light, since, with the exception of his early works, he is not generally viewed as a representative of the European Art Nouveau; but, more significantly, Rilke's own activities in Paris at the time he wrote the book take on new and unexpected ramifications. No longer can Rilke's period in the French capital be thought of exclusively as the startling beginning of a new period in the poet's life in which he completely suppressed the past and courageously confronted the future. The Rodin book testifies from beginning to end to the lingering influence of the past and also to the fact that the transition between his earlier and his middle periods of creativity was only a very gradual one. The Jugendstil movement continued to color Rilke's life even in Paris despite (or perhaps because of) the harsh realities of the big city and modern life.

The poet approached the Rodin book in much the same fashion as he had written about Vogeler. He sought no scholarly objectivity nor did he claim to be an impartial observer. Rather, he openly admitted to a bias toward Rodin, and, as with Vogeler, he believed that this personal approach enabled him all the more to penetrate to the essence of the works and arrive at a more valid and truthful statement than might otherwise have been possible. The language of the book is as lyrical as that of the Vogeler essays, and Rilke once more sought not only to provide an external description of the works but to capture their inner reality as well.

In the initial section of his monograph, Rilke recognizes in Rodin several major characteristics that he had also seen in Vogeler and that he knew to be fundamental to the Jugendstil movement. Rodin too, in
Rilke’s opinion, had isolated himself from a hostile world and, alone with his soul and oblivious of the non-artistic and divisive forces outside his protected enclave, had determined his own development and future. As a result of his personal isolation, his works assumed the same ambience of self-sufficiency and separation from outer surroundings that Vogeler’s had demonstrated: “Was die Dinge auszeichnet, dieses Ganz—mit—sich—Beschäftigtsein, das war es, was einer Plastik ihre Ruhe gab; sie durfte nichts von außen verlangen oder erwarten, sich auf nichts beziehen, was draußen lag, nichts sehen, was nicht in ihr war. Ihre Umgebung mußte in ihr liegen” (SW V, 159).* As early as the fall of 1900, shortly after Rilke first became interested in Rodin, he had written:

RODIN: Das macht seine Plastik so isoliert, so sehr zum Kunstwerk, welches wie eine Festung ist: sich selbst beschützend, wehrhaft, unzugänglich, nur solchen, die Flügel fühlen, durch ein Wunder erreichbar: daß sie meistens sich befreit hat von der Abhängigkeit von Umgebung und Hintergrund, vor ihrem eigenen Stein, wie zögernd, stehen geblieben ist, auf den Lippen des Gebirges, das angefangen hat zu erzählen (SW V, 249).†

It is obvious that Rilke’s views did not change when he personally met the artist and when he observed his works firsthand.

In his art, Rodin too, according to Rilke, had sought to rediscover the underlying and unifying Lebensstrom, so vital a part of Jugendstil theory. This search the sculptor undertook with his repeated artistic experimentations during which he struggled to eliminate the superficial, artificial, and lifeless elements from his works while at the same time attempting to rediscover the essence of life. Only after years of toil was he successful in this task. Now in his works, particularly in his portrayal of the human body, Rilke observed an unmistakable expression of the primordial power. In Rilke’s view, this quality formed one of Rodin’s predominant characteristics. He writes: “Wenn man ihn [den menschlichen Körper] jetzt aufdeckte, vielleicht enthielt er tausend Ausdrücke für alles Namenlose und Neue, das inzwischen entstanden war, und für jene alten Geheimnisse, die, aufgestiegen aus dem Unbewußten, wie fremde Flußgötter ihre tiefenden Gesichter aus dem Rauschen des

* “That which distinguished the objects, that element of being entirely caught up in itself, is what gave his sculpture its quietude; it was not permitted to look for or expect anything from outside itself, to establish a relationship with anything that lay outside, to see anything that was not in itself. Its surroundings had to be within itself.”

† “RODIN: That is what makes his sculpture so isolated, so very much a work of art that is like a fortress, defending itself, combative, impregnable, only reachable through a miracle by those who perceive wings—it has usually freed itself from a dependence on its surroundings and backdrop, and has, as if hesitating, remained standing before its own stone on the brink of the mountain that has begun to speak.”
Rilke and Jugendstil

Blutes hoben” (SW V, 146–47).* The references to the “old mysteries” which rise “from the subconscious like strange river gods from the pulsations of the blood” are so typical of phrases used by Rilke in his own poetry to portray the forces of the Lebensstrom that it is clear just what he was attempting to describe in Rodin’s work. Particularly in the preliminary studies for Rodin’s momentous “Gates of Hell,” Rilke discerns a rediscovery of this primordial power: “Er [Rodin] fand die Gebärden der Urgötter, die Schönheit und Geschmeidigkeit der Tiere, den Taumel alter Tänze und die Bewegungen vergessener Gottesdienste seltsam verbunden mit den neuen Gebärden, die entstanden waren in der langen Zeit, während welcher die Kunst abgewendet war und allen diesen Offenbarungen blind” (SW V, 170).† Here it is the gestures of the primeval gods, the beauty of the animals, and the ecstasy and frenzy of the primitive worship which reveal the forgotten “life’s force.” The more “civilized” and superficial gestures of the recent past, which are also present in these studies, stand in stark contrast to the more “vital” ones. The ones of the recent past are confused, disordered, and meaningless:

Diese neuen Gebärden ... waren ungeduldig. Wie einer, der lange nach einem Gegenstand sucht, immer ratloser wird, zerstreuter und eiliger, und um sich herum eine Zerstörung schafft, eine Anhäufung von Dingen, die er aus ihrer Ordnung zieht, als wollte er sie zwingen mitzusuchen, so sind die Gebärden der Menschheit, die ihren Sinn nicht finden kann, ungeduldiger geworden, nervöser, rascher und hastiger (SW V, 170).‡

Rilke discovers other major Jugendstil characteristics throughout Rodin’s works as well. One of these is the typical dichotomy between vitalism and resignation or between asceticism and bacchanalianism. This feature he finds particularly evident in the work “Everlasting Idol”:

* “If it [the human body] were now revealed, perhaps it would contain a thousand expressions of everything that is nameless and new that has come into being in the meantime, of these old mysteries which, having risen from the subconscious, raise their dripping faces like strange river gods from the pulsations of the blood.”

† “He [Rodin] discovered that the gestures of the primeval gods, the beauty and suppleness of animals, the ecstasy of old dances, and the movement of forgotten worship ceremonies are strangely related to the new gestures which arose during the prolonged period in which art had turned away and was blind to all of these revelations.”

‡ “These new gestures . . . were impatient. Like someone who has been looking for something for a long time and becomes more and more frustrated, confused and harried, who creates great disorder around himself, a great pile of things which he has taken from their ordered places as if he wanted to force them to search with him—just so, the gestures of humanity, that cannot find its purpose, have become more and more impatient, nervous, impetuous, and hurried.”
Und man glaubt plötzlich in der Haltung, in die dieses junge Mädchen aus Trägheit, aus Träumerei oder aus Einsamkeit verfiel, eine uralte heilige Gebarde zu erkenennen, in welche die Göttin ferner, grausamer Kulte versunken war. Der Kopf dieses Weibes neigt sich ein wenig vor; mit einem Ausdruck von Nachsicht, Hoheit und Geduld, sieht sie, wie aus der Höhe einer stillen Nacht, den Mann hinab, der sein Gesicht in ihre Brust versenkt wie in viele Blüten. . . .

Etwas von der Stimmung eines Purgatorio lebt in diesem Werke. Ein Himmel ist nah, aber er ist noch nicht erreicht; eine Hölle ist nah, aber sie ist noch nicht vergessen. Auch hier strahlt aller Glanz von der Berührung aus; von der Berührung der beiden Körper und von der Berührung des Weibes mit sich selbst (SW V, 166–67).*

Combined in the figure of this woman are a certain pensiveness, reserve, and loneliness on the one hand and the surging passion of primeval emotion on the other. Both “heaven” and “hell” find expression. The “Gates of Hell” incorporate the same extremes: “Hier waren die Laster und die Lasterungen, die Verdammnisse und die Seligkeiten, und man begriff auf einmal, daß eine Welt arm sein mußte, die das alles verbarg und vergrub und tat, als ob es nicht wäre. Es war” (SW V, 169).†

A second characteristic is the typical “sanctified” air of the Jugendstil work. Rodin’s sculptures, according to Rilke, often assume the qualities of altar pieces, and the initiated observer is compelled by their power to display a worshipful reverence and devotion before them: “Und doch mußte es sich irgendwie von den anderen Dingen unterscheiden, den gewöhnlichen Dingen, denen jeder ins Gesicht greifen konnte. Es mußte irgendwie unantastbar werden, sakrosankt, getrennt vom Zufall und von der Zeit, in der es einsam und wunderbar wie das Gesicht eines Hellsehers aufstand” (SW V, 149).‡

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* “And suddenly we believe we recognize in the posture which this young maiden—because of inertia, dreaminess, or loneliness—has assumed, a primeval, sacred gesture in which the goddess of distant, gruesome cults was caught up. The head of this woman inclines forward a bit; with an expression of indulgence, haughtiness, and patience, she looks down as from the heights of a quiet night on the man who sinks his face into her bosom as into many blossoms. . . . Something of the atmosphere of purgatory exists in this work. Heaven is near, but not yet reached; hell is near, but not yet forgotten. Here too, all lustre radiates from the touch, from the contact of the two bodies, and from the woman’s touch of herself.”

† “Here were the depravities and the blasphemies, the perditions and the bliss, and one realized suddenly that a world would be deprived where all of this was hidden and buried and where it was pretended that it did not exist. It did.”

‡ “And yet it had somehow to distinguish itself from other things, the common things which everyone comprehends. It had somehow to become untouchable, sacrosanct, separated from coincidence and from the era in which it arose alone and wonderful like the face of a clairvoyant.”
After the initial section of the monograph, Rilke proceeds to a rather detailed discussion of most of Rodin's major works: "The Man with the Broken Nose," "The Age of Bronze," "Balzac," "The Citizens of Calais," "John the Baptist," "The Kiss," "Victor Hugo," and, of course, "The Gates of Hell." In all of these, he emphasizes typical Jugendstil qualities which reveal his own artistic bias. In particular, his investigation of the various structural elements in each work points to the poet's orientation and preference for the art of Jugendstil. This is true of his attention to Rodin's use of the Fläche (surface plane), for example. As most major critics of Jugendstil have recognized, the Fläche played an especially prominent role in the art of that period. It was the basic stylistic element of the art work and through it such typical characteristics as the pronounced silhouette and the vitality of movement were in part created. Other critics, Wolfdietrich Rasch for example, have seen in the use of the Fläche an artistic attempt at reducing the subject to its basic element in order then to recreate it into a new unity which more fully reflected the true reality of the universe.

Although Rilke described sculpture in his monograph and not painting and was not concerned with the destruction of dimension and volume as such, he nevertheless ascribed to the Fläche, as the basic structural element in Rodin's works, the same artistic function as that in the works described by Rasch and others. In depicting the sculptor's early development, Rilke writes:

In diesem Augenblick hatte Rodin das Grundelement seiner Kunst entdeckt, gleichsam die Zelle seiner Welt. Das war die Fläche, diese verschieden große, verschieden betonte, genau bestimmte Fläche, aus der alles gemacht werden mußte. . . . Mit dieser Entdeckung begann Rodins eigenste Arbeit. Nun erst waren alle herkömmlichen Begriffe der Plastik für ihn wertlos geworden. Es gab weder Pose, noch Gruppe, noch Komposition. Es gab nur unzählbar viele lebendige Flächen, es gab nur Leben, und das Ausdrucksmittel, das er sich gefunden hatte, ging gerade auf dieses Leben zu (SW V, 150).*

In Rilke's view, then, Rodin, like the Jugendstil artists before him, disregarded traditional concepts of art and constructed his universe from individual Flächen. This technique, as in a typical Jugendstil work, resulted in a unique and vital reality in which all elements are united into

* "In this moment, Rodin discovered the basic element of his art and at the same time the cell of his world. It was the surface plane, this varying large, varying emphasized, exactly determined surface plane from which everything had to be made. . . . With this discovery, Rodin's real work began. Now finally, all inherited concepts of sculpture became useless to him. There was neither pose, nor grouping, nor composition. There were only myriads of living surfaces, there was only life, and the means of expression which he had discovered for himself went right to the heart of this life."
one whole. The emotional impact of Rodin's "Man with the Broken Nose," according to Rilke, stems primarily from the unity of these individual, living surfaces: "Aber nicht aus der unvergleichlichen Durchbildung allein ergibt sich diese Schönheit. Sie entsteht aus der Empfindung des Gleichgewichts, des Ausgleichs aller dieser bewegten Flächen untereinander, aus der Erkenntnis dessen, daß alle diese Erregungsmomente in dem Dinge selbst ausschwingen und zu Ende gehen" (SW V, 157).* In Rodin's "Age of Bronze," the Flächen also serve to reveal the vital "life's force"; each surface forms an expressive unity by itself, and together they create a figure of awesome unity and power: "Das strengste Auge konnte an dieser Figur keinen Platz entdecken, der weniger lebendig, weniger bestimmt und klar gewesen wäre. Es war, als stiege in die Adern dieses Mannes Kraft aus den Tiefen der Erde" (SW V, 160).†

A second structural element to be found in all of Rodin's works is what Tschudi Madsen calls "the cult of line"—the "asymmetrically undulating line terminating in a whiplike, energy-laden movement."§ Because of this line, Jugendstil work is inherently energetic and rhythmical. Furthermore, the dynamic lines supplement the surface planes as the basic compositional element. They permeate the figures themselves and their surroundings and unify the various elements of the work while displaying the vital and powerful forces of life, the portrayal of which, as we have seen, formed one of the major goals of Jugendstil.

Rilke never diminished the importance of the Fläche as the basic structural element of Rodin's sculpture, for he believed these surfaces to be so charged with energy that they, in a sense, emanated electronic waves, like those actually portrayed in a Jugendstil work. They inspired each work, causing it to come to life and uniting it with its surroundings. In other words, the dynamic lines Rilke perceived were purely emotional ones, yet, in their effect, they possessed the same qualities as any other Jugendstil work.

In Rodin's "The Kiss," Rilke finds emotional waves pervading both of the figures and bestowing them with beauty and power:

Der Zauber der großen Gruppe des Mädchens und des Mannes, die Der Kuß genannt wird, liegt in dieser weisen und gerechten Verteilung des Lebens; man

* "But this beauty is not only a result of the incomparable composition. It arises from the impression of balance, from the equalization of all of these animated surface planes, from the knowledge that all of these moments of agitation reverberate and come to an end within the limits of the object itself."

† "The most critical eye could not discover in this figure a place which was less alive, less defined and clear. It was as if power rose up from the depths of the earth into the veins of this man."
Rilke and Jugendstil

In other works Rilke sees these waves reverberating from the statue into the surrounding space, filling it with the contours of the figures. In such a manner, not unlike Peter Behren's "Kiss," the figures and the entire surroundings are unified, and the space itself becomes part of the art work. Rilke says:

Wenn Rodin das Bestreben hatte, die Luft so nahe als möglich an die Oberfläche seiner Dinge heranzuziehen, so ist es, als hätte er hier den Stein geradezu in ihr aufgelöst: Der Marmor scheint nur der feste fruchtbare Kern zu sein und sein letzter leisester Kontur schwingende Luft. Das Licht, welches zu diesem Steine kommt, verliert seinen Willen; es geht nicht über ihn hin zu anderen Dingen; es schmiegt sich ihm an, es zögert, es verweilt, es wohnt in ihm (SW V, 198–99).

In the case of a group of figures such as the "Citizens of Calais," the wave-filled air serves as the unifying force not only of the statues and the space surrounding them but also of the individual figures themselves. The viewer therefore perceives only one figure and one work, not a constellation or grouping of statues. About the "Citizens of Calais," Rilke says:

Hätte man den Versuch gemacht, man hätte eine unvergleichliche Gelegenheit gehabt, die Geschlossenheit dieser Gruppe zu bewundern, die aus sechs Einzelfiguren bestand und doch so fest zusammenhielt, als wäre sie nur ein einziges Ding. Und dabei berührten die einzelnen Gestalten einander nicht, sie standen nebeneinander wie die letzten Bäume eines gefallenen Waldes, und was sie vereinte, war nur die Luft, die an ihnen teilnahm in einer besonderen Art. Ging man um diese Gruppe herum, so war man überrascht zu sehen, wie aus dem Wellenschlag der Konturen rein und groß die Gebärden stiegen, sich erhoben, standen und zurückfielen in die Masse, wie Fahnen, die man einzieht. Da war alles klar und bestimmt (SW V, 192–93).

* "The fascination of the wonderful statue of the maiden and the man, which is called 'The Kiss,' lies in the wise and equitable distribution of life; one has the feeling here that from all contact points waves pulsate into the bodies, shudders of beauty, anticipation, and power. For that reason, one believes he sees the bliss of that kiss everywhere on these bodies; it is like the sun which rises, and its light shines everywhere."

† "If Rodin had the goal in mind of drawing the air as near as possible to the surface of his objects, it is here as if he had almost dissolved the stone in it. The marble appears to be only the solid, fruitful center whose last and softest contour is the vibrating air. The light which shines on this stone surrenders its will and does not go beyond it to other objects. It nestles against the stone, it hesitates, it tarries, it resides in it."

‡ "If one had made the attempt, one would have had a splendid opportunity to admire the
Two other structural elements of Rodin’s works, though not as basic to Jugendstil as the Fläche and the line, also occupy Rilke’s attention throughout his discussion of the various works. If in a Jugendstil work the view of the world seems incomplete or distorted, if the frame of a picture dissects the arm of the main figure, or if the branches of the tree grow beyond the painting into the frame or even onto the wall, it is, once again, because the artist has attempted to find and depict a reality that transcends the limits of his work. A detailed, well-proportioned, “realistic” portrayal or a “well-made” work of art is unimportant to him. Rasch says that the typical Jugendstil work represents: “... ein Ausschnitt aus dem unendlichen Fließen der Dinge und Gestalten, das jenseits der Bildränder weitergeht. ... Das Bild zeigt einen Teil des unendlichen Gewebes, in dem jedes mit jedem verflochten ist und das einzelne wenig, der Zusammenhang alles bedeutet. An welcher Stelle der Bildausschnitt den Zusammenhang unterbricht, ist gleichgültig, da nur der Zusammenhang, nicht das einzelne Gebilde zählt.”

Rilke recognized this same Jugendstil “arbitrariness” in Rodin’s works. He felt compelled in his book to defend the sculptor against his many critics who thought that Rodin’s statues were poorly composed, often left incomplete (i.e., the Balzac statue), and lacked much in the way of artistic polish. Rilke believed, as did the Jugendstil artists, that such works often revealed more of the true reality of the world than more traditional art. In a passage concerning the statue “Interior Voice,” he indicates surprise that in relation to sculpture some of Rodin’s critics, who had by now learned to accept such features in painting, still held fast to antiquated concepts of art from the past:

Es ist nicht lange her, da lehnte man sich in derselben Weise gegen die vom Bildrande abgeschnittenen Bäume der Impressionisten auf; man hat sich sehr rasch an diesen Eindruck gewöhnt, man hat, für den Maler wenigstens, einsehen und glauben gelernt, daß ein künstlerisches Ganzes nicht notwendig mit dem gewöhnlichen Ding-Ganzen zusammenfallen muß, daß, unabhängig da-

* “... a portion of the infinite flowing of things and figures which goes beyond the picture itself. ... The picture shows only a section of the infinite tapestry in which everything is united with everything else, the individual thing meaning little, the cohesive unity everything. It is immaterial at what point the picture interrupts this overall unity since only this continuity and not the individual picture counts.”
Rilke and Jugendstil

In describing Rodin's many studies of the human hand, Rilke views them as complete and totally realistic works which are capable of expressing any human emotion:

Dem Künstler steht es zu, aus vielen Dingen eines zu machen und aus dem kleinsten Teil eines Dinges eine Welt. Es giebt im Werke Rodins Hände, selbstständige, kleine Hände, die, ohne zu irgend einem Körper zu gehören, lebendig sind. Hände, die sich aufrichten, gereizt und böse, Hände, deren fünf gesträubte Finger zu bellen scheinen wie die fünf Hälse eines Höllenhundes. Hände, die gehen, schlafende Hände, und Hände, welche erwachen; verbrecherische, erblich belastete Hände . . . (SW V, 163-64).

Rilke also discovered in Rodin's works the Jugendstil predilection for the meaningful gesture or stance through which the artist casts a particular aura around his figures or creates a particular mood. These emotional qualities often signify the underlying meaning of the work and as such play a vital role in its structure. In describing Rodin's "Age of Bronze" (illus. 4), he says:


* "It has not been long since people rejected in the same fashion the trees of the Impressionists which were cut off by the frame of the picture. But they very quickly got used to this effect and acquired, at least with regard to painters, an understanding and a belief that an artistic whole need not correspond to the ordinary whole of objects, that, completely independently, new unities arise within the picture, new affinities, relationships, and equilibria."

† "It is incumbent upon the artist to create a unity out of many objects and from the smallest particle of an object a world. There are in Rodin's works hands, independent, small hands, that, without being attached to any body, are alive. Hands which aise, irritated and angry, hands whose five bristling fingers appear to bark like the five necks of a dog of hell. Hands that walk, sleeping hands, and hands that awaken; villainous, congenitally afflicted hands."

‡ "This figure is meaningful in still another way. It illustrates in Rodin's works the birth of the gesture. That gesture, which grew and developed gradually to such majesty and
4. Auguste Rodin: "The Age of Bronze" (Musée Rodin, Paris)
In Rilke's description, the gesture and the stance of the figure become more significant than the figure itself. In the gesture alone, man's past (and for that matter, the past of all of mankind) and his future come to life. The mood of the work, its true reality, transcends the actual work itself.

In another section of his analysis of "Interior Voice" (a passage which because of its unmistakably Jugendstil ambience we shall quote in its entirety), Rilke continues his evaluation of Rodin's use of the gesture in endowing his figures with a greater reality and context. In this instance it is the torso of the statue which expresses that "distant pulsation of life":

> Never has a human body been so united in its inner being, so controlled by its own soul and again restrained by the elastic power of its blood. And the neck, as it rises a little on the body, which is bent sharply sideways, and stretches and supports the head which listens to the distant pulsations of life, has been so impressively and effectively conceived that one could not imagine a more moving or intensified gesture. It occurs to one that the
Rilke’s reference to the great Eleonore Duse as she acted in a D’Annunzio play, indicates once more the poet’s own identification of Rodin’s works with the spirit of the Jugendstil movement.

Two years after the completion of the Rodin book, Rilke undertook a speaking tour in Germany where he gave several highly successful lectures on Rodin. The material for these lectures was compiled, revised in some instances, and published in 1907 as an appendix to the original book. It is significant that, now far removed from the influence of Jugendstil, Rilke nevertheless maintained in the revisions the essential spirit of the earlier period. In fact, it is difficult to distinguish the two versions from one another in tone and meaning. For Rilke, in 1902 as well as in 1907, Auguste Rodin demonstrated the fundamental elements of Jugendstil in his life and his works. That Rilke was able to recognize this influence and that he never reversed his opinion of it is indeed evidence of the profundity of the poet’s attachment to a movement that fascinated him in his early years as a critic.

arms are lacking. Rodin perceived them in this case to be too simple a solution to the problem, as something that did not belong to the body which wanted to be wrapped in itself without foreign assistance. One could think of Duse as she (in a play by D’Annunzio), painfully abandoned, tries to embrace without arms and to hold without hands. This scene, in which her body learned a caress which went far beyond it, forms one of the unforgettable memories of her performance. It conveyed the impression that the arms were superfluous, an ornament, a matter of the rich and immoderate, that one could fling them from oneself in order to be totally poor. It was not as if she gave up anything important; rather she gave the impression at this moment of one who gives away his cup in order to drink from the stream, like a person who is naked and yet a bit helpless in his nakedness. It is the same with the armless sculptures of Rodin; nothing essential is lacking. One stands before them as before something whole and perfected that admits to no further additions."