The Fragment as a Manifestation of *Non-Finito* in Auguste Rodin’s Oeuvre

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By Sarah Bartram

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Thesis written by
Sarah Bartram
B.A., The University of Akron, 2014
M.A., Kent State University, 2016

Approved by

______________________________
Albert Reischuck, MA, Advisor

______________________________
Christine Havice, Ph.D., Director, School of Art

______________________________
John R. Crawford-Spinelli, Ed.D., Dean, College of Arts
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Auguste Rodin used *non-finito* (Italian for not finished, or unfinished) as an artistic device throughout the entirety of his career as a sculptor. His works such as *The Walking Man* (Figure 1) were often labeled incomplete or fragmented because of the exclusion of the arms and head by critics who would have preferred that the artist adhere to the guidelines set forth by the French Academy.\(^1\) As it applies to Rodin and other artists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, *non-finito* can be used to describe how artists did not bring their work to an academic finish. The phrase *non-finito* is often associated with Rodin’s sculpture as a means of describing the seemingly unfinished state of his sculptures, such as the apparent omission of body parts in *The Walking Man*. Furthermore, when *non-finito* is used as a definitive descriptive device by scholars such as Ruth Butler, Albert Elsen, and Antoinette Le Normand-Romain, it is often used to describe only one aspect of Rodin’s finished work at a time, depending on the source—meaning the term *non-finito* is often used interchangeably according to the scholar’s perspective and which works they are discussing. The aim of this thesis is to define *non-finito* as it relates to the isolated body part, amputated form, and assemblages that

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\(^1\) During the 19\(^{th}\) century the French Academy’s standards for their sculpture students were derived from classical art and put an emphasis on the idealized beauty found in classical antiquity and more traditional subject matter such as historical, biblical, and mythological subject matter along with portraiture. For further reading, consult Peter Fusco and H.W. Janson, ed. *The Romantics to Rodin: French Nineteenth-Century Sculpture from North American Collections* (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980).
reoccurs throughout Rodin’s oeuvre by providing a definition of non-finito, focusing specifically on the aspect of the fragment as it serves as a manifestation of non-finito. Through the sub-categories of the isolated body part, the amputated form, and assemblages my thesis will track the changes in non-finito in Rodin’s sculpture. My research will contribute to the scholarship on Rodin by providing a clearly defined stance on how non-finito is visible as style in relation to the artist’s sculpture.

For Rodin and other artists of the late 19th and early 20th century the term non-finito was most often used to describe how artists did not bring their work to an academic finish—meaning the appearance of unfinished. At this time there was friction in France between conservatives who strictly held on to the teachings of the École des Beaux-Arts, or the French Academy, and avant-garde artists who welcomed innovations in art. If a sculptor working in 19th century France wanted the favor of the government or the bourgeoisie, then they were expected to maintain the rules set forth by the school from which they were trained, the École des Beaux-Arts, and these standards remained pervasive throughout the critical arena. Rodin’s work did not adhere to the French Academy’s expectation of finished sculpture. When Rodin was submitting his work to the Salon, the French Academy would not consider a sculpture without a smooth finish as a completed work of art worthy of being exhibited. Likewise, a figurative sculpture exhibited without its limbs would not be desirable, unless of course it was from antiquity.

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2 The École des Beaux-Arts, or the French Academy, was the famed academy of fine art in Paris and the authority of academic art standards. Their teachings were based on the influence and implementation of aesthetics from Ancient Greece and Rome. It was expected for an artist to use these classical prototypes if they wanted to be successful in the eyes of the government and bourgeoisie.

3 The expectation for painters was different. Modern painters such as Manet, Whistler, and others made famous the Salon of 1863 for their scandalous exhibitions of avant-garde works.
Rodin was continually experimenting with the fragment in his sculpture, but the notion of *non-finito* took on a different meaning during different stages of his career. For example, *The Walking Man* is an example of the most obvious form of *non-finito* in that the work is literally a section of a whole, or an amputated form, a figure of a man with no head. *The Walking Man* exemplifies how Rodin utilized an amputated form to communicate a sense of movement as effectively as a more complete form would. However, if we look at another sculpture, such as *Danaiid* (Figure 2), the meaning of *non-finito* has completely changed from an amputated form to the emergence of form. *Non-finito* goes through different stages, or levels, throughout Rodin’s oeuvre. It is my belief that *non-finito* in Rodin’s oeuvre can be looked at through multiple lenses: the emergence of form, rough finish, and the fragment. The emergence of form can be viewed as emergence of form from the block such as in *Danaiid* or the emergence of form from within intertwined figures such as the *Fugit Amor* (Figure 3).\(^4\) Likewise, the fragment has multiple lenses to use when looking at *non-finito* in Rodin’s work: the amputated form, the isolated body part, and assemblages. This thesis will examine the stage of the fragment in *non-finito* throughout Rodin’s oeuvre by examining and defining the three subcategories of the fragment.

In 1882 Rodin showed the assemblage *I Am Beautiful* (Figure 4)—a combination of two previously made sculptures—at the Georges Petit gallery.\(^5\) It was also uncommon for artists to re-use works of art and exhibit them as something new, which is why Rodin chose a private setting versus a public event. In 1889 Rodin began showing parts of the

\(^4\) This stage of *non-finito*—emergence of form—will not be discussed in this thesis but my inclusion compliments the larger idea of how to view the complex stages of *non-finito* in Rodin’s oeuvre in addition to the fragment.

body, specifically hands, again at the Georges Petit gallery. It was unusual for an artist to exhibit an isolated body part at the Paris Salon. In 1900 Rodin exhibited the Walking Man, a sculpture of a male figure without an attached head, in the Exposition Universelle. It was quite unusual for a headless figure to be exhibited to such a large crowd if it were not from antiquity. These exhibits were often accompanied with a label of “incomplete” or “unfinished sculpture.” Rodin was quick to defend his choices:

Have the public, and critics who are servile to them, sufficiently criticized me for exhibiting simple parts of the human body? I have had to suffer even shameless drawings by the caricature makers. Did those people have no understanding of culture? Of study? Did they not imagine that an artist must apply himself to giving as much expression to a hand, to a torso as to a physiognomy? And that it was logical and much more for an artist to exhibit an arm rather than a ‘bust’ arbitrarily deprived by tradition of arms, legs and the abdomen? Expression and proportion, all is there. The means is modeling: It is by virtue of the modeling that the flesh lives, vibrates, fights, suffers.

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7 Albert E. Elsen, The Partial Figure in Modern Sculpture From Rodin to 1969. Exhibition Catalogue. (Baltimore: The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1969), 13-14. It is important to note that the partial figure has a history much older than the 19th century. Votive reliefs from ancient Rome show ears, genitals, feet and other body parts that would relate to a donor’s body part that had overcome disease or injury. In the European Middle Ages arms and heads were used for reliquaries. Furthermore, utilitarian objects have been found in Africa such as bowls or pipes decorated with hands or legs, and containers in the shape of the torso have been found in Pre-Columbian pottery. However, these objects were not made as figural sculpture to be exhibited in a gallery or the Salon such as Rodin’s work.
8 Butler, Rodin, 350. The Exposition Universelle opened in 1900 in Paris, France. Each nation had representations in the exhibition. Rodin was afforded a separate and very large pavilion for his work. The Walking Man was exhibited in a smaller format than the well known enlargement, and it was exhibited atop a column and was originally titled Saint John.
9 It was unusual to exhibit a fragment because it opposed the very ideal of the 19th century academic standard of sculpture, which was to imitate idealized beauty, not the broken remains of a figure. For further reading on Rodin’s sculpture in comparison to the accepted norm in 19th century sculpture consult the Introduction in Albert Elsen’s Rodin’s Art.
10 Michel Georges-Michel, Peintres et sculpteurs que j’ai connus: 1900-1942 (New
Rodin’s defense of exhibiting parts of the body, rather than the whole, provides evidence that it was never an accidental occurrence on his part to exhibit fragments; it was always intentional despite the public’s superficial understanding of sculpture, as demonstrated above where he clearly states the expressive emphasis that can be achieved by modeling a body part—such as a hand.

Before we can start to investigate the fragment in Rodin’s oeuvre there are certain factors that must be taken into consideration before further discussion. Most importantly, the definition of non-finito by other scholars must be acknowledged and taken into consideration when defining non-finito for the purpose of this thesis. Rodin’s process and workshop practices must also be addressed because Rodin did not necessarily complete all of his works, but rather delegated important parts of a project to his assistants. This aspect would be most problematic when discussing the rough finish of his work and the emergence of form in his work, but it is still relevant to the discussion of the fragment. Finally, it is important to set the parameters for which works will be included in this formal study of non-finito in Rodin’s sculpture because of the wide range in media and conditions for which his works exist and are exhibited.

CHAPTER II

NON-FINITO, MICHELANGELO, AND RODIN’S WORKSHOP

Scholars such as Albert Elsen, Truman Bartlett, and Ruth Butler who refer to non-finito in their discussion of Rodin do so by using the term synonymously with unfinished (as in, the work looks as though it was never completed and left with a rough finish) or lack of a finish in academic terms. This is problematic because it does not address the many variations of non-finito in Rodin’s sculpture. For example, the art historian Albert Elsen defines non-finito as “a mode of carving, which left areas of the stone rough with chisel marks exposed.”\(^{11}\) He goes on to state that this was a development inspired by Michelangelo.\(^{12}\) But this definition only refers to one area of non-finito—the rough finish. In another reference to non-finito Elsen pays most attention to non-finito as a fragment in his 1969 exhibition at the Baltimore Museum of Art titled, *The Partial Figure in Modern Sculpture: From Rodin to 1969*. In the introduction to his exhibition on fragments, Elsen wrote:

> Until Rodin, the partial figure and figural part were found as symbols and mementos, decorative objects and museum relics. It is doubtful that the partial figure, such as the torso, was either the central preoccupation of any sculptor or was the focus of the most important art. That the torsos and smaller parts of the body should play an important role in the evolution of a sculptor’s work, be widespread in serious art, and as a motif have a rich secular as well as spiritual implication is a phenomenon in art history reserved for the last ninety years of western sculpture.\(^{13}\)

\(^{11}\) Elsen, *Rodin’s Art*, 471.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) Elsen, *The Partial Figure in Modern Sculpture*, 15.
Elsen brings the fragment to the forefront in his exhibition. He legitimized the partial figure as a finished work of art. Albert Elsen pushes this accolade further by emphasizing the partial figure as Rodin’s greatest gift to modern sculpture. So here we have two examples of the unfinished nature of Rodin’s sculpture being applauded by a leading art historian on the subject. It is not to say that Elsen is wrong with how he describes the unfinished characteristics of Rodin’s work; the problem lies in the lack of acknowledgement that *non-finito* has a variety of meanings when applied to Rodin’s sculpture. Elsen shares the opinion of other scholars in this aspect, such as Éric Darragon, Truman Bartlett, and Ruth Butler; however I see a trend that differs from the mutual exclusivity of *non-finito* and the rough finish or the fragment alone in Rodin’s work because his art is particularly complex. Éric Darragon, Professor of Contemporary art history at the Université Paris-Sorbonne, defines Rodin’s *non-finito* as the most integral and deliberate aspect of his sculpture, which works to provoke the expressive quality of his work—an accepted standard for *non-finito* among scholars. However, Darragon pushes the idea of *non-finito* a bit further than Elsen does. Darragon notes the importance of Rodin’s clay models in the sense that they allow for models to be broken into pieces and re-assembled as a different creation, essentially invoking the Fragment and assemblages. *Non-finito* is present in many other ways in which this thesis will explore. Truman Bartlett, a writer and friend of Rodin, used the term “unfinished” to describe

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14 Elsen, *The Partial Figure in Modern Sculpture*, 11.
16 Antoinette Le Normand-Romain, *Rodin* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2014), 74. Rodin and Bartlett met in 1887 and became close friends. Bartlett spent much time with Rodin and consequently pulled from his interviews with the artist to construct a
parts of a figure that were not brought to full modeling. Jacques Lipchitz, the cubist sculptor, described Rodin’s sculpture with parts broken off as unfinished. Lipchitz wrote about Rodin’s *non-finito* when writing about the incredible influence of Rodin on his work stating,

> You know I found that he [Rodin] helped me a lot…to give you an example of how Rodin could influence me, you know that Rodin was breaking sculpture, breaking away an arm, a leg or a head and I was wondering why he did it, because it was very attractive and…it works, very effective; it gives to the work a kind of mystery, unfinished, so I understand that he did it intuitively…The real element that is needed in order to be effective in sculpture is mystery. Well, I adopted it.

Lipchitz recognized the possibility of *non-finito* to work as an effective means for communicating an idea with the viewer. A contemporary of Rodin, the sculptor Jules Dalou, referenced the études (studies) Rodin would exhibit as appearing unfinished in any other sculptor’s eye and that an étude is something that should be reserved for the studio, not the Salon. Ruth Butler uses *non-finito*, or unfinished, to describe a fragment and an assemblage simultaneously. She writes, “The most difficult thing for audiences to accept, however, was that nearly everything in the exhibition was unfinished, and that even the finished works looked unfinished…The fragments came from all periods of Rodin’s career, many of them newly assembled for the show, such as the headless, armless torso of *St. John the Baptist* (Figure 5) of 1877.” Butler is absolutely correct in

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19 Elsen, *Rodin’s Art*, 581.
20 Butler, *Rodin*, 356. The torso was modeled in 1877 and Rodin had attached new legs to it and placed it on a column with the title of *Saint John*. 

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her assessment, but she does not acknowledge the integral difference between fragment and assemblage. Art historian Thomas Schlesser defines *non-finito* as “voluntarily incomplete work, as well as fragmentation and a symbolic register.” Art historian Antoinette Le Normand-Romain writes about Rodin’s first partial figures, specifically his exhibition of the *Shade* (Figure 6) in the Monet-Rodin exhibition of 1889. She describes this étude as being in an ambiguous state, asking “Were they still just stages in his work or should they be regarded as fully finished creations?” Perhaps Le Normand-Romain’s assessment of Rodin’s *non-finito* is most pertinent to this thesis as it does not aim to define *non-finito* in one aspect. She does not define, but rather interprets Rodin’s reasoning for *non-finito*:

The mark of this slowness and dissatisfaction, which are proof of the artist’s sincerity and also of the rhythm that animates the universe, the *non finito* thus corresponds to what is most profound, most authentic in Rodin, his quest for a form taken to extremes in terms of expression and that is yet open to whatever influences the chance happenings of life may have on it. And since the form is captured at one moment in its development, it is quite naturally accompanied by the marks of the artist’s labor—guide points, pencil marks, holes left by the needle at the time of carving, and tool marks, all clearly visible...

This quote exemplifies how Rodin held onto the conviction that a work of art is never truly finished, but rather only a momentary stage in development, an evocation of an ongoing process. With the exception of Le Normand-Romain, all the previous mentioned opinions continue to reference only one aspect of *non-finito* in Rodin’s work, when the variations of *non-finito* should be acknowledged more thoroughly.

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22 Le Normand-Romain, *Rodin*, 156.
23 Ibid., 239.
However, when referencing non-finito, one consistency remains among scholars: the linking of Rodin to Michelangelo through non-finito. Michelangelo’s Bound Slaves (Figures 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16) are perhaps the most often referenced works in terms of what inspired Rodin. It is an accurate analysis to describe the Bound Slaves as an excellent example of non-finito when used to describe a work of art that is truly unfinished, but perhaps that is where the reach of Michelangelo’s influence stops. Michelangelo’s Bound Slaves are in my opinion unfinished; either Michelangelo was interrupted with other projects or he abandoned works out of frustration.24 Specifically one must compare the Slaves in the Academia Gallery collection in Florence with the Slaves in the Louvre collection. The Rebellious Slave (Figure 11) and The Dying Slave (Figure 12) are in the Louvre and qualify as being finished. Rodin was certainly inspired by the life that the two finished statues expressed which he wrote in a letter from Florence to his partner Rose Bueret, where he explained that he might have found what he was looking for in his study of the composition of the human figure. Rodin wrote,

24 Giorgio Vasari, Lives Of The Artists: Volume I (England: Penguin Books, 1987), 404. Vasari explains Michelangelo’s multiple unfinished works of art as a result of either the marble being too hard and thus the chisel would strike too large of parts or as a result of Michelangelo’s severe self-judgment. “That this was the case can be proved by the fact that there are few finished statues to be seen of all that he made in the prime of his manhood, and that those he did finish completely were executed when he was young, such as the Bacchus [Figure 7], the Pieta in St. Peter’s [Figure 8], the giant David [Figure 9] at Florence, and the Christ in the Minerva [Figure 10]…for Michelangelo used to say that if he had had to be satisfied with what he did, then he would have sent out very few statues, or rather none at all. This was because he had so developed his art and judgment that when on revealing one of his figures he saw the slightest error he would abandon it and run to start working on another block, trusting that it would not happen again. He would often say that this was why he had finished so few statues or pictures.”
...I have been studying Michelangelo, and I believe that the great magician is letting me in on some secrets...I have made sketches in the evening, in my room, not directly of his works but of their structure; the system I’m building in my imagination in order to understand him. Well enough; I think that I’ve succeeded, in my own fashion, in giving them that élan, that indefinable something, which he alone knew how to produce.”

Rodin was specifically trying to emulate the structural composition of Michelangelo’s works by imitating them from memory. In contrast, the *Awakening Slave* (Figure 13), the *Young Slave* (Figure 14), the *Atlas* (Figure 15), and the *Bearded Slave* (Figure 16) in the Accademia Gallery are truly unfinished. Because these four *Slaves* were never brought to their intended completion, it would be unsuitable to argue that Rodin’s *non-finito* is exclusively similar to Michelangelo’s *non-finito*. The connection between Rodin’s work and Michelangelo’s work is uncomplicated to read, but it is most important to remember that Michelangelo’s work was unfinished (never completed), while Rodin’s work was completed exactly how it was intended and thus only unfinished in comparison to the expectations of the French Academy.

Rodin noticed trends in the composition of the figure other than the *non-finito* quality of Michelangelo’s work from his trip to Florence. He was most interested in how Michelangelo composed his figures. Rodin’s compositions certainly adhere to the Michelangelo’s X-like characteristics as we can see in so many of his figures. For example, the *Thinker* (Figure 17) follows the X-like composition that Michelangelo follows in so many of his figures, such as his *Bound Slaves*. The *Thinker’s* right shoulder is pushed forward while the left

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should is pulled back. The Thinker’s right hip is pulled back, while the left hip is pushed forward. The implied line from the left shoulder to the right shoulder is perpendicular to the implied line from the left hip to the right hip, thus creating an X-like configuration. However, in relation to non-finito, it is Rodin’s modeling that should be examined more deeply than the figural composition.

The importance Rodin placed on modeling is supported in a letter Rodin wrote to Truman Bartlett in 1887, where he told Bartlett that the Medici tombs had resonated very deeply with him, but only

as a matter of impression…. for Michelangelo, Great as he is, is weak in modeling in comparison with the antique. I like his works because they’re living and I could find in them what I wanted. After looking at these figures long and well, I return to my room at the hotel and began making sketches, to test the depth of my own capacity of composition and of the impressions I had received; and I found that I can do nothing like my sailor, unless I copied Michelangelo. … I was, at the same time, struck with the idea that these principles were not original with him, but the result of discoveries made by those who had preceded him. I also have my doubts about his being conscious of these principles, or that he was the consummate artist and man that many think he is. He seems to me to have worked little from nature; that he had one figure, or type, that he reproduced everywhere and constantly, and that he took entire figures from Donatello…

Rodin admired the expressive nature of Michelangelo’s sculpture but was less impressed with the artist’s modeling—in comparing the Renaissance work to that of antiquity. Furthermore, Rodin questioned whether Michelangelo’s artistic achievements should be attributed solely to the artist or instead with his predecessors. Nevertheless, it is clear in Rodin’s letter to Rose previously quoted that his pilgrimage to Italy had a lasting effect on this practice, but only to an

\[26\] Grunfeld, Rodin, 96.
extent. I believe Rodin’s *non-finito* is dissimilar from Michelangelo’s in aesthetic and practice. What Rodin took from Michelangelo was the Renaissance artist’s capacity for composition of the human figure, which directly influenced the artist’s ability to breathe life into stone. 

Much of Rodin’s perceived connections to Michelangelo comes from the pervasive comparison of the two artists by Rodin’s contemporaries, which has also been continued to date. Octave Mirbeau, a celebrated French journalist, art critic, novelist, playwright, and Rodin’s contemporary told the readers of *la France* in February 1885 that “one has to go back to Michelangelo to find anything as noble, beautiful and magnificent in art” calling it, ‘the most important work of the century.”27 The poet William Ernest Henley had said, “he is our Michelangelo; and if he had not been that, he might as well have been our Donatello.”28 These are but a few of the instances of Rodin being referred to as existing on the same platform as Michelangelo. Significantly, Michelangelo was only one of many influences on the aesthetic of *non-finito* in Rodin’s sculpture. Since *non-finito* takes on various forms throughout Rodin’s sculptures the entirety can not and should not be linked to Michelangelo. Because this thesis will examine ideas relating to the fragment (assemblages, isolated body parts, amputated form) Michelangelo’s influence will not be as essential as it would be if we were only examining the specific forms of *non-finito* such as the figure emerging from the block or a rough finish.

It is important to note that Rodin did not actually carve any of his marbles; instead he would hire specialists to do the carving. Usually, two types of carvers worked on a

27 Grunfeld, *Rodin*, 181. This quote is in reference to Rodin’s *Gates of Hell.*
28 Ibid., 302.
marble: first, the rough hewer, who would perform the more crude shaping of the block in its initial stages; second would be the fine hewer who would execute the intricate modeling and finish the surface. One of Rodin’s most famous students, Antoine Bourdelle, began as Rodin’s assistant as a fine hewer. Now this is not to say Rodin had no further input once the models went to the carvers; in fact it was quite the opposite.

Writer and friend of Rodin, Paul Gsell, affirms:

He would lavish advice on them. He would mark in black pencil on the marble the spots needing further carving. Occasionally, to whip any shy assistants into decisive action, he would grab the hammer and chisel himself and furiously chip off frosted fragments. The assistants would be distressed, for in a blink of the eye, he had rendered useless a great deal of their patient toil. By the time he had finished, everything had to be returned to the part that he had altered. His rather vexed pupils got back down to work and before long they were forced to admit that he had been dead right.

Despite the carvers completing the majority of the work, Rodin remained heavily involved. Rodin remained aware that the touch of the carver would always be present in his marble copies; he was fully aware that his models would be interpreted differently depending on which carver was working on it, but he nonetheless respected his carvers and their work, conceding that they were indeed superior in their craft. In fact, Rodin planned for his work to be subject to the carver’s interpretation. He is quoted as advising to an assistant carver, “My works can be interpreted in various different ways! You will do as you feel like, to suit your own temperament, and others will do it some other way.” Of course, the final work followed the direction of Rodin’s vision. This is important to consider when examining non-finito in any of Rodin’s marbles. Léon

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29 Le Normand-Romain, Rodin, 219.
31 Le Normand-Romain, Rodin, 219.
Fourquet carved *The Man with the Broken Nose* (Figure 18) in 1874; Jean Escoula carved the *Danaiid* and more; and many others like Bourdelle worked under Rodin. Despite these carvers completing the physical task of carving, the works remain Rodin’s creation through their entirety. While Rodin considered marble to be the highest quality of media, it was plaster that was his favorite to work with, perhaps because it provided more opportunities for exploration with its easier handling of additive and subtractive methods of sculpture.

Rodin worked in various media including bronze, plaster, marble, terracotta and clay; he often exhibited studies and he also made multiple versions of works. Sometimes Rodin would exhibit both studies and final castings, or he would exhibit the same composition but in different media. Because of this wide range in medium or degree of finish multiple versions of the same sculpture exist with slight variations. For the consistency of this thesis, only works that were formally exhibited by Rodin will be included. Therefore, along with any cast bronze or carved marble, any étude, plaster cast, clay or terracotta maquette (scale model) that was formally exhibited will be included for consideration.

When Rodin exhibited the human figure in fragments he was explicitly showing that the fragment puts a demand on the viewer to relate to the tactile form just as much as the face or body as a whole. By doing so—showing only a particular part of the body—Rodin argued that this fragment of the body is fully capable of eliciting an emotion just as much as the face or body as a whole is capable of. For *The Walking Man*, Rodin argued,

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33 Ibid., 196.
34 Ibid., pg 33.
if it had a head, the viewer would be fixated on the face,\textsuperscript{35} so by eliminating the whole, the inner feeling of that body part is more emphasized and with much greater force because the culminating essence of Rodin’s work lies in the relationship with the viewer, where the sculpture encourages the viewer to contemplate their innermost self. Even more striking about The Walking Man is that without the addition of the head to this sculpture, Rodin was experimenting with abstraction of the figure. Although Rodin did not utilize arms here, it does not appear as if the piece is lacking anything; it appears whole and complete. The only reason for these armless statues to be labeled unfinished or incomplete is because of this ingrained idea that where there is a body there must be arms, and that a body without arms can in no way be complete.

Perhaps the initial experimentation with the fragment began with the first sculptural piece Rodin exhibited as an independent artist, the Mask of The Man with the Broken Nose from 1865. Rodin’s first studio had no heat and thus the cold had a detrimental affect on his work. The Man with the Broken Nose was initially conceived as a bust, but the cold cracked the bust and so the back of the bust broke off, leaving the face of the man and thus the addition of the word “mask” in the title.\textsuperscript{36} This accident of nature left Rodin with a work that he felt extreme proud of, telling Truman Bartlett, “That mask determined all my future work. It is the first good piece of modeling I ever did.”\textsuperscript{37} The Paris Salon accepted the mask in 1875.

The idea and the aesthetic of the fragment stem in part from the Romantics’ obsession with ruins.\textsuperscript{38} Rodin was a Romantic in the sense that he appreciated the

\textsuperscript{36} Butler, Rodin, 46.
\textsuperscript{37} Le Normand-Romain, Rodin, 28.
\textsuperscript{38} Another way of interpreting ruins would be through the lens of Foucault and his theory
emotional effects that time and weather can have on art and architecture. In fact, he valued a decaying building more so than buildings that had been built new or reconstructed; he detested the way that man tried to imitate facades of the past in order to “fix” architecture. This same incompleteness of the architecture is what attracted the Romantics so much to their ruins.\(^{39}\) The incompleteness of the ruins—like that of the artist’s sketch—invites the viewer to not only be a participant by finishing the piece in their imagination, but it also invites the viewer to imagine what would or could have been. These remains that are part of the past juxtaposed with that of the present created an intriguing contrast that allowed for contemplation in the most private sense, just as the examination of the abstracted, expressive sketch of the model is much more interesting to consider.

It is my opinion that ruins are very similar to the fragment as they too suggest an absent whole. In their present state of decay ruins of the past signify loss and absence, as if the viewer is witness to their disappearance. Although ruins appear broken down, there is a sense of perseverance; these buildings had defied time and history. This sense of perseverance aligns with the romantic notions of hope and remembering and make the ruins a place for contemplation and meditation upon the greatness of the past.

\(^{39}\) The quest for acquiring antiquities became very competitive in the 18\(^{th}\) century. Therefore, abandoned cities with ancient ruins became fashionable and the epitome of romanticism. This also sparked a desire for faux temples and ruins to be installed in English gardens. The magic of these ruins attracted the Romantics for many reasons: the juxtaposition of past and present, beauty and decay; shattered remains, human experience, incompleteness, self-reflection, fall of great empires, the public monument, class distinction, power, history, change, discovery, imperfection, and contemplation. For further reading, consult Peter Fusco and H.W. Janson, eds., *The Romantics to Rodin: French Nineteenth—Century Sculpture from North American Collections.* LA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980.
It is important to note the difference between fragments and ruins. In terms of a fragment, the idea is more abstract. The term “fragment” naturally connotes that it is a part of a whole. On the other hand, a ruin was once a whole, is now in pieces, and remains a state not to be returned to. But, to say that a fragment is incomplete is not always true, because that would imply that the fragments have failed in their purpose. So, it is possible to define a ruin as a kind of fragment, but it is not so clear-cut. To differentiate the terms fragment, ruin, and incomplete is important because many of Rodin’s works are considered fragments and incomplete but these words should not be used too freely. Rodin takes from Romanticism the physical ruin and fragment of the decaying architecture and transforms it within figurative sculpture. The human form becomes broken into pieces, and at times Rodin literally broke his sculptures and pieced them back together, often to create an entirely new sculpture. Rodin also takes the inner contemplation that one might be subject to when confronted with a ruin and incorporates this into his work, such as how the viewer would mentally complete *The Walking Man*. By doing so, he forces the viewers to be an active participant and complete the work themselves.

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40 Elsen, Rodin’s Art, 26.
CHAPTER III
AMPUTATED FORM

Scholars including Antoinette Le Normand-Romain and Albert Elsen use the term “partial figure” when describing non-finito in Rodin’s work regarding the fragment. For example, Le Normand-Romain defines the partial figure as “a deliberately scaled down or damaged figure.” My thesis compliments the definition of deliberately scaled down, but not with damaged. To say a work is damaged is to imply that something is wrong with it, when in fact Rodin executed his sculptures such as The Walking Man and Meditation (Figure 19) to a point that he deemed satisfactory and thus complete. She goes on to describe the partial figure as the simplification of forms—a reduction that results from eliminating everything unnecessary—to which I agree is present in Rodin’s fragments. Albert Elsen argues that Rodin utilized the partial figure in accordance with his desire to create sculpture in its purest form, going on to describe this as the “preservation of parts of figures after their destruction, their negotiability in other works, and isolation as formally finished forms” and offering the opinion that the partial figure was Rodin’s “most important contribution to modern sculpture.” Both Elsen and Le Normand-Romain provide excellent definitions of the partial figure, however it is my belief that the idea of the “partial figure” should be examined in more detail and should be classified as two different embodiments of the fragment: the amputated form and the

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41 Le Normand-Romain, Rodin, 244.
42 Ibid., 348.
43 Elsen, The Partial Figure in Modern Sculpture, 17.
44 Ibid., 11.
isolated body part. Therefore, when discussing the partial figure as a manifestation of *non-finito* in Rodin’s oeuvre it needs to be examined with a more particular lens. Both the amputated form and the isolated body part should certainly be considered “partial figures” but the difference between the two should be acknowledged and so shall be regarded as dissimilar for consideration in this thesis.

The amputated form is a figurative work where select body parts have been omitted as the result of a conscious decision made by Rodin. The amputated form would have materialized in either of two ways: by removing a body part from a whole figure, or by choosing not to continue with the addition of all body parts in a figure. Both of these processes may seem inconsequential, but they are important to consider because both steps (the subtraction of an element and the chosen moment at which to stop moving forward with a figure) were a deliberate action made by Rodin during his process of creation with the desire to communicate an action or expression through the simplification of forms.

It is my belief that the effect of the amputated form rests heavily on the role of the viewer and their ability to complete the work in question in their imagination. When presented with the human form as sculpture it becomes instinctive to think of the work in relation to one’s own body. Therefore, I argue that when a viewer is presented with a figure without a head or without legs—such as with Rodin’s *The Walking Man*—one would instinctively fill in the blanks—or rather complete the figure with all of its intended parts in the likeness of one’s image. Therefore, the amputated form relies on the viewer to complete the work of art.
Viewer participation is an essential element in Rodin’s oeuvre, and not only in the fragment. For instance, the *Burghers of Calais* (Figure 20) in its intended composition invites the spectator to become one of the burghers. Rodin composed this grouping with the intention that the work would be situated very low so the viewers would be forced deeper into the sorrow and sacrifice of the characters. He argued against having the monument on a pedestal and for it instead to be installed on ground level so that the audience would physically be on the same plane as the figures. This activation of the viewer is what makes Rodin’s monument so powerful and what also gives his amputated forms their expressive nature. I suggest that the viewers become aware of themselves as individuals in relation to the figures in the narrative, therefore making them part of the work.

To refer to the *The Walking Man* as an example again, a viewer might wish to seek the answer to what happened to this man’s arms or head, and in doing so will mentally grow the figure’s arms in their mind, subsequently deciding on their own what the arms should look like and which gesture the arms shall make. This forces the viewers to participate in the act of creation and to write the figure’s story for themselves. Here enters the dualism of the past and future: it is up to the viewer to decide whether this story is the past or the future of the figure; have the missing body parts been removed, or are they yet to be added? In regards to *The Walking Man*, Rodin stated, “The interest lies not in the figure itself, but rather in the thought of the stage he has passed through and the

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45 Ruth Butler, *Rodin*, 295. When the Burghers of Calais was first installed it was placed atop a pedestal in the square of Calais against the advice of Rodin, who always envisioned the group on the ground level. However, the grouping is installed at ground level at the Musée Rodin in Paris as well as other museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.
one through which he is about to move.” Furthermore, the inclusion of the viewer in the creative process allows for a connection between the viewer and the work of art, which is important in order to engage the mind and emotion of the audience.

*The Walking Man* is composed of different studies for Rodin’s *Saint John the Baptist*: the torso and legs were made independently from one another and do not correspond appropriately to nature (this is most noticeable where the torso is joined to the legs), however when paired together they suggest a strong forward movement. It must be stressed that although this work may appear to be a study of movement, it is anything but a mimetic interpretation of the human figure walking in real life and time. The human figure in a walking stride would not naturally appear in such an expressive manner. What gives this composition its expressive nature is the figural composition and chosen models that together extend the expressive nature of this work. Le Normand-Romain describes *The Walking Man* as an innovation in its representation of movement. She explains:

Made powerfully expressive by its colossal size, this movement seems extraordinarily precise, and yet, as we know, it is not the literal reproduction of a phase of walking but a reinterpretation thereof by the artist. Rodin in effect suggests the progressive unfolding of the action thanks to the differences in the axes with which the different parts of the body are aligned, while the ensemble is recomposed visually in such a way as to condense a succession of moments in a single image.

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47 Le Normand-Romain, *Rodin*, 350. The model was enlarged in 1905-06 by Henri Lebossé and was subsequently exhibited in 1907, first in Strasbourg and then Paris. The enlarged *Walking Man* is what is most well known and which is most often exhibited.
48 Butler, *Rodin*, 356. At the exposition Universelle, Rodin showed the headless, armless torso of *Saint John the Baptist* (from 1878) with new legs attached to torso. Rodin exhibited this work with the title of *Saint John* and placed the figure high on a column. This figure was to be later recognized as the famous *Walking Man*.
Le Normand-Romain is describing the X-like structure that Rodin so commonly employs in many of his works such as *The Thinker*. The left shoulder of *The Walking Man* leans forward, which pulls the right shoulder back. The right hip is thrust forward, which in turn brings the left hip back. This X-like composition adds to the expressive quality of the piece and thus gives the suggestion of a full body in motion. The work is so expressive that the need for arms and head are unnecessary. It seems as though the torso expresses a movement that the legs follow, therefore two movements in time are being expressed simultaneously. Rodin explains this concept in regards to his sculpture, *The Prodigal Son* (Figure 21):

> What enables the artist to give the viewer the illusion of muscle movement is that he does not represent all the parts of the figure at the same moment in time... Thus, in this statue [The Prodigal Son], which you are looking at, the legs, the hips, the torso, the head, the arms, are represented not at the same minute but in a succession of moments. This is not a theory that I am applying but an instinct that pushes me to express movement in this way. In this manner, when the viewer looks from one extremity of my statues to the other, he sees their movements unfolding.\(^5\)

Rodin states the means of expression lies in how the parts of the whole are dissimilar in representing the same movement but they work together to create a more realistic sense of movement as a whole. So with *The Walking Man* Rodin has created a figure that does not rely on the age-old conventions of identification—such as the hands and the head—in order to tell a story. He was able to utilize the amputated form in order to communicate the story of movement and so he successfully used an amputated form to communicate a feeling as effectively as the complete human form would have. Furthermore, the identity of

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the figure is unimportant, as the sculptor Bourdelle reiterated in a toast to Rodin in regards to *The Walking Man*:

> Is it the torso of Saint John? Is it the torso of Bacchus? Is it the torso of the prudent Ulysses? Is it the torso of Theseus? Perhaps. What difference does the name make? It is indestructible flesh made through your spirit; it is an indefatigable torso born of your knowing, it is the human torso, it is sublime life, it is art.⁵¹

Bourdelle is reinforcing the aim of Rodin in the sense that *The Walking Man* is a reduction of forms—the identity of the figure is a non-essential element to this work as it performs as an expression of motion through time and space via the amputated form.

Another example of Rodin’s amputated form is *Meditation* (Figure 19), which was exhibited at the Pavillon de l’Alma as part of the 1900 World’s Fair in Paris. This solo show included 168 of Rodin’s sculptures in addition to several dozen of his drawings and photographs. The exhibition was a means for Rodin to show a large portion of his work to interested young artists and was constructed in a way to mimic the artist’s studio—in such that the works appeared to be in progress.⁵² Rodin showed the many assemblages that he had worked on before as well as that of the amputated form and isolated body part.

Like so many of Rodin’s fragments, the origin of *Meditation* lies in the *Gates of Hell* (Figure 22). While Rodin was creating figures for his *Gates* he modeled a small Damned Woman (Figure 23) who was made to project outward from the right tympanum of the structure. It was this Damned Woman—a figure of a woman who hides her face in her arms while the body displays an exaggerated contrapposto—that would eventually

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⁵² Ibid., 359.
become Meditation. It is clear that Rodin favored this figure of a woman because he reused the model for Christ and Mary Magdalene (Figure 24), Constellation (Figure 25), and Monument to Victor Hugo (Figure 26).

The next moment in Rodin’s studio where the Damned Woman moved closer towards becoming Meditation lies in the creation of the Monument to Victor Hugo, an assemblage which united the representation of Victor Hugo with three other muses. In order for the Damned Woman to fit with the Monument to Victor Hugo, Rodin had to remove some of the volume of the straight right leg, the knee of the bent left leg, and both arms. Rodin made these adjustments to the plaster model of the Damned Woman but was having difficulty linking all the figures in a way that satisfied him. As he took his mind away from the Monument to Victor Hugo he decided to have the Damned Woman—now an amputated form—enlarged and cast in plaster. The work was consequently exhibited in 1897 in Paris, Dresden, and Stockholm with the title Meditation. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke—also Rodin’s secretary and close friend—wrote of the work:

The arms are surprisingly absent. Rodin felt them in this instance to be something extraneous to the body, which sought to envelop itself without any external aid. One may recall (Eleonora) Duse, who, in a play by D’Annunzio, when bitterly abandoned, tries to give an embrace without arms and to hold without hands. This scene…conveyed the impression that the arms were a superfluous adornment, something for the rich and overindulgent, something which those in pursuit of poverty could easily cast aside. In that moment she did not look as if she had sacrificed something important…The same is true of Rodin’s armless statues; nothing vital is missing. One stands before them as if before a completed whole that brooks no complement.

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53 Le Normand-Romain, Rodin, 250.
54 Ibid., 250-52. Rilke is referencing La Gioconda, a play written by Gabriele D’Annunzio in 1899. Lucio Settala had modeled a statue after his mistress, La Gioconda. While Settala’s wife was in his studio, the statue fell on her and in turn crushed the wife’s hands and broke the hands off the statue. Later in the play, the wife is unable to comfort her daughter because she has no hands. The child does not understand and asks her mother, “Why don’t you pick me up? Why don’t you put your
It is Rilke who made the connection between Rodin’s *Meditation* and the character Eleonora Duse. It is unclear whether or not Rodin had her in mind when he amputated the arms from his Meditation like Le Normand-Romain suggests but although Rodin and D’Annunzio did not know one another, they were both close friends of Rilke at the same time, therefore the connection remains relevant to acknowledge. Of *Meditation*, Rodin wrote to Prince Eugen of Sweden on January 2, 1897 “In it the study of nature is complete, and I have made every effort to render art as complete as possible. I regard this plaster as one of my best finished, most accomplished works.”\(^{55}\) So with *Meditation*, we have an example of Rodin exhibiting an amputated form as a manifestation of the fragment and as a finished work of art.

*Iris* (Figure 27) was shown alongside *Meditation* at the Pavillon de l’Alma in 1900. At a first glance, *Iris* may seem like an impossible posture of a female flying through the air with her legs spread apart. And if it seems that the pose would be difficult for one of Rodin’s models, that is because it was. Rodin formed the work differently than how his model was posed. The work was initially titled *Woman With her Legs Apart*, and by examining the body it becomes clear that this work was modeled from the viewpoint of Rodin looking at a woman lying on her back. The weight of a body could not be supported on the toes such as the left foot of *Iris* suggests; rather it would seem more plausible that she was lying on her back with her foot arched when Rodin was modeling his figure.

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arms around me? Take me in your arms! Take me in your arms, mamma!” The mother hides her arms in shame. The husband never restored the statue of his mistress.\(^{55}\) Le Normand-Romain, *Rodin*, 252.
Rodin’s choice to alter the verticality of the figure essentially changed the sensuality of the figure from passive to aggressive because the blatant exposure of the genitals is impossible to ignore. This change heightens the fact that the figure is without a head. If the figure were exhibited horizontally—as it most likely was modeled—the exclusion of a head could be explained through foreshortening as Rodin modeled the form while observing the female from the feet closest to him. If the viewer were to look at the model in the same manner in which Rodin had, it would be logical that the head of the figure would remain unseen due to foreshortening. However, because Rodin exhibited the work upright, the exclusion of the head is much more noticeable and thus problematic in order to determine the narrative or identification of the figure. The exclusion of the head (thus the narrative or identity of the figure) specifically enhances the genitals and the pose.

Because Rodin exhibited Iris as an amputated form, the sensuality of the pose is dramatically enhanced as opposed to the identity of the figure. Rodin communicated the sensuality more effectively as an amputated form than if the figure would have been exhibited with the head, because the facial expression would have competed with the expression of the pose. Therefore, it is the fact that Iris is a fragment, amputated form, that allows for the expressive nature of this specific piece to come forward so forcefully.

The Walking Man, Iris, and Meditation are all rather obvious examples of the fragment because of their blatant omission of body parts. However, I would like to include a work of art that has less obvious features of the fragment—Rodin’s Monument to Balzac (Figure 28). My inclusion of Monument to Balzac has a more subtle indication of it being a fragment as opposed to the more obvious examples of the amputated form.
but upon closer examination, the *Monument to Balzac’s* placement under the category of fragment becomes clear because Rodin has truly presented the viewer with a head floating atop a dressing gown with only the suggestion of a body within.

Rodin has presented the viewer with the suggestion of a full body covered with a robe, with all of the body parts included, or so it seems. If we look at this work through the lens of the amputated form it becomes clear that all the parts of the body, with the exception of the neck and head, are merely suggestions of parts of the body such as the stomach, arms, and legs. The corresponding bulges in the robe suggest parts of the body; the elbow is where the elbow bulge is, the leg is where the leg bulge is and so on. But if one follows the curvature of the arm there is an opening in the robe for the placement of the hand—yet Rodin did not model an actual hand. This observation brings about the question of whether the hand is covered with the gown, or if it does not exist at all.

The dressing gown remains the most important element of this work that elicits the amputated form. As Rodin had done with *The Walking Man, Iris, and Meditation*, he eliminated the parts of the *Monument to Balzac* that were non-essential for his intended expression. Rodin only needed to model the head, neck, and robe in order to capture the energy of the beloved novelist. But for Rodin, the plan was never to depict the physique of Balzac but rather his soul. Rodin is quoted as saying, “But it is the feeling, the intimate inner life of the man that I want to get—and that’s a tough customer to find: the soul of Balzac.” Rodin researched all he could of the novelist, traveling to Balzac’s hometown of Tours as well as seeking out the written descriptions of the writer along with any other

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documents on Balzac that he was able to procure. Rodin very much loved Lamartine’s visual description of Balzac, “He has the face of an element…he possessed so much soul that his body seemed not to exist.” And just as Rodin was able to capture the forward motion of *The Walking Man* by eliminating the essentials (head and arms), he did the same with his *Monument to Balzac* by eliminating all the body parts that fall below the neck. Journalist Gaston Leroux critiqued the work in *Le Matin,*

This Balzac has neither legs, nor arms, nor neck, nor anything; nothing but two eyebrows, two holes, two eyes, and then a lip…Because of these eyes and this lip, Rodin perhaps deserves to be forgiven for the missing arms and all the rest that does not exist. I can picture Rodin making his Balzac as complete, as well finished, as marvelously executed as the heroes of his *Kiss* [Figure 29], then erasing everything, spending months taking away muscles, arms, legs, everything that has no use and does not express solely what this man saw with his eyes and felt with that lip.”

Leroux understands the extent to which Rodin went as he eliminated parts of the body and thus provides a map of how to read Rodin’s monument in *Le Matin.* If the amputated form is relegated to the suggestion of a whole, then the *Monument to Balzac* should be categorized under the umbrella of the Fragment and the amputated form. Rodin remained proud of his Balzac and described it as “the very pivot of my aesthetics.”

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60 Le Normand-Romain, *Rodin*, 188.
CHAPTER IV
ISOLATED BODY PARTS

The isolated body part and the amputated form both fall under the category of the fragment, and while they may seem similar in the sense that they both consist of a figure based sculpture that is deemed incomplete due to the seemingly missing elements, they differ greatly in the sense that one could essentially complete the other. The amputated form represents the suggestion of a whole. The whole can represent either motion, a moment, or story. The isolated body part is a smaller part of a whole but does not necessarily represent or suggest a larger component.

Thematically, the isolated body part in Rodin’s oeuvre is most certainly influenced by his affinity for antiquities. Rodin first began collecting broken antiques in the early 1890s while he was living at Muedon. His collection centered on objects from Egypt, the Far East, Greece, and Rome, and many of his pieces showed the effect of weather and time. Rodin surrounded his workspace with his collection of antiquities dispersed among his own works. Between 1893 and 1917 he amassed over 6,000 works of art from antiquity.

The Roman fragment Colossal Left Hand Holding Drapery (Figure 30) from the 1st century CE was a gift to Rodin from the archaeologist and art dealer John Marshall.
who had purchased the fragment in Rome.\(^{63}\) This larger than life-size (21.2x23.5x29 cm) stone hand which clutches a piece of fabric was once a part of a full figure. Another of Rodin’s favorites from his collection is the *Crouching Venus Anadyomene* (Figure 31) from the late Hellenistic or Early Imperial Period. The *Crouching Venus* is a figure of a nude in a crouching position whose limbs have been broken off at the feet, arms, and neck. Rodin liked this work so much that he exhibited it at the Hotel Biron\(^{64}\) between 1912-1913.\(^{65}\) Rodin had written in his notes: “Egyptian marble—it's a world in itself, an Egyptian Mona Lisa, a crouching Venus, as well as the living flower, a form whose powerful vigour and grace fill me with joy…This little fragment is a masterpiece.”\(^{66}\)

Rodin’s admiration for torsos like the *Crouching Venus* and hands like *The Colossal Left Hand* is mimicked in his repetitive modeling and exhibition of his own torsos and hands. Broken antiquities like the above mentioned hand and torso would have flooded Rodin’s studio and museum while being placed side by side with his own études of hands, feet, legs, and torsos.\(^{67}\) However, the difference between these antiquities and Rodin’s works are that the antiquities acquired their fragmented state because of time and weather, whereas Rodin’s fragments were deliberate and often exhibited as independent works of art. One of the many ways Rodin came to the isolated body part is recorded in Ambroise Vollard’s account of visiting Rodin’s studio:

\(^{63}\) Garnier, “Antiques,” 220.

\(^{64}\) The Hotel Biron is an 18\(^{th}\) century mansion in which Rodin rented studio space on the ground floor in 1908. Other notable tenants who shared the space with Rodin were the writer Jean Cocteau, painter Henri Matisse, dancer Isadora Duncan and others. By 1911 Rodin had settled in the entire building and in 1916 the property was allocated by the French government as the Musée Rodin which officially opened in 1919 and has thus retained its title to this day.


\(^{66}\) The Musée Rodin archives as quoted in Garnier, “Antiques,” 203.

\(^{67}\) Garnier, “Antiques,” 203.
He had a large saber in his hand. On the studio floor one saw the debris of statues, hands, decapitated heads...Rodin spied one of the statues, the only one that remained intact...He wielded his sword. The head fell...Rodin then held the head in his hands. ‘How beautiful it is without the body! I will tell you one of my secrets. All these fragments that you see come from enlargements. Now, in an enlargement if certain parts keep their proportions, others are not in scale. But one must know where to cut!'

Vollard’s dramatic encounter with Rodin in the studio precisely pinpoints the degree to which Rodin was willing to go with amputating his forms in order to achieve what he perceived to be beautiful.

Rodin found beauty in the fragments from antiquity. Judith Cladel recorded the following quote from Rodin which tells us how he approached the fragment in antiquity and thus how he translated the aesthetic into his own work:

Observe any fragments of Greek sculpture: a piece of an arm, a hand. What you call the idea, the subject, no longer exists here, but is not all this debris nonetheless admirably beautiful? In what does this beauty consist? Solely in modeling. Observe it closely, touch it; do you feel the precision of this modeling, firm yet elastic, in flux like life itself? It is full, it is like a fruit. All the eloquence of this sculpture comes from that.

This quote provides a basis on how to approach the isolated body part in Rodin’s sculpture. Thus the fragmented forms lends itself to make the antique work stand out as beautiful in Rodin’s mind because of the modeling. The isolated body part Torso of a Young Woman with Arched Back (Figure 32) lacks a narrative yet Rodin exhibited the works as an example of beauty as a result of modeling.

Rodin held onto his pieces of modeled body parts and in doing so, would many times have them cast and displayed either on a wood pedestal or column. He admired his “pieces” so much that he was known to give hands, legs, or torsos to his admirers as well.

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68 Elsen, Rodin’s Art, 26
69 Ibid., 565
as institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1901, he installed the same pavilion in which he exhibited his own works in the place d’Alma at his home in Meudon. He displayed his collection of antiques along with his own works and expressed what types of antiques he preferred to collect:

Not the triumphant antiquity of the Parthenon marbles, but the humble antiquity, collected as found, broken and fragmented…Not the absolute masterpieces of Greco-Roman plasticity, but the mutilated marble that accompanies you every morning, or the Gallo-Roman dish that you love to hold in your hands and caress, then fill, following your inspiration, with a plaster figure.

This quote exemplifies Rodin’s preference for fragments from antiquity rather than the intact works of art. Rodin transferred his collection of antiques to the Hotel Biron in 1912 with the direction that they be exhibited in the same manner as they were in Meudon, dispersed among his own creations.

There are those who accused Rodin of simply speeding up the effects of time, such as Charles Morice who was a friend of the artist yet critical of him nonetheless. When he said: “To deliberately do the work of time oneself, and produce novelties marked by the years at their very birth: surely, there is some mistake here?” Despite skeptics like Morice, Rodin’s approach to fragments such as the isolated body part and amputated form was methodical. His decisions were deliberate and thoroughly thought through; there was never simply the amputation of a leg on a whim. Rodin commented, “There are certain admirers…who attribute to artists completely unforeseen

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70 Le Normand-Romain, Rodin, 357. “Rodin himself gave small hand, leg, and foot sculptures to admirers such as Lady Sackville, Malvina Hoffman, Loie Fuller, Mrs. Simpson, et al.”
71 Le Normand-Romain, Rodin. 347.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., 369.
intentions…Be assured that the masters are always fully conscious of what they do.”

Therefore, the isolated body part should be seen as an exercise in simplification, that is, simplifying a work to its most essential parts and not a chance occurrence. He stated, “In art, one must know how to sacrifice…Details lessen the purity of the lines and harm the emotional intensity; we reject them…The photograph is there to render the multitude of details a hundred times better and more quickly. Plastic form will present emotion as directly as possible and by the simplest means.” Rodin makes it clear that he will not be bound by traditional conventions of representing the human figure—including of all body parts—in order to express a desired emotion.

But what would allow Rodin to exhibit simple body parts as complete works of art? Surely one would agree he would only exhibit these works with the understanding that they are to be viewed as studies and not completed works of art. But that is not entirely true. Rainer Maria Rilke said about Rodin,

A piece of arm and leg and body is for him a whole, a unity, because he no longer thinks of arm, leg and body (that would seem to him too thematic, you see, too literary, as it were), but only of the modelé which is self-contained and which in a certain sense is ready and rounded.

Rilke provides an insight into Rodin’s approach to the isolated body part and provides a basis for his reader’s understanding of how Rodin thought of an arm or leg as a self-sufficient work of art.

Depictions of the torso permeate Rodin’s career, highlighted by the Torso of a Young Woman with Arched Back and The Prayer (Figure 33). These motifs were exhibited many times and have taken on different forms and meanings. For instance,

74 Elsen, Rodin’s Art, 562.
75 Le Normand-Romain, Rodin, 352.
Rodin exhibited the *Torso of a Young Woman with Arched Back* and *The Prayer* next to one another at the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts (The Paris Salon) between April and June of 1910. Both of these works were exhibited in plaster and later cast in bronze. The torso was a part of the body that Rodin certainly took advantage of for its capacity for expression. In *Torso of a Young Woman with Arched Back* Rodin hyperextended the arch of the back in order to create a heightened sense of expression, whether it be pain, sensuality, or a force of energy pumping through the form. In other works, Rodin would stiffen the torso in order to create a sense of solidity and permanence, as is evident in the *Torso of a Seated Woman* (Figure 34).

Why is the torso considered an isolated body part instead of the amputated form? It is my belief that Rodin’s torsos do not invite the viewer to complete the form, perhaps because there are already too many elements that have been excluded from this form. Or perhaps the torsos are dissimilar from the amputated forms such as *The Walking Man*, *Iris*, or *Meditation* because they do not seem to be part of a larger narrative but instead emit a sense of being stagnant, or they are too permanent in comparison to the amputated forms which are more fleeting in nature. But most importantly, the isolated body part does not beg completion.

Let us return to the example of the *Torso of a Young Woman with Arched Back* and *The Prayer* from the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. The *Torso* is an isolated body part, but *The Prayer* is an amputated form. The differences between the two works are subtle but fundamental to the argument that a difference lies between the isolated body part and the amputated form. The *Torso* includes the top of the thigh just below the buttocks to the neck and includes the shoulders. The *Prayer* is more complete
with the figure being cut off below the knee and the front of the neck being modeled further. It is my belief that this slight difference in addition to Rodin’s titles of the two works gives each torso a different narrative. The *Torso of a Young Woman with Arched Back* is just that—an isolated body part. The *Prayer* is a figure in action with a narrative that the viewer could complete in their mind, making it an amputated form.

The bronze *Torso of a Seated Woman* is another instance of the isolated body part. Rodin had started with a complete figure and subtracted the legs, arms, and head to leave only the torso and shoulders. Had he kept any more of the body it would be an amputated form, but because this work of art functions without the need for completion it should be considered an isolated body part. The torso is a figure in its simplest of forms while still retaining the means for an intense expression. To further reiterate this torso as a complete work of art, Rodin placed the torso on a block of clay, making it essentially its pedestal. When Henri Lebossé enlarged the figure in 1907 Rodin removed the thighs, which left him with the problem of supporting the torso so that it would remain upright. This is where the pedestal came in, and when viewed from the back makes the figure appear to be sitting, but when viewed from the front it becomes a rather crude looking element that abruptly interrupts the pelvis area. Rodin did not model the hands and subsequently the wrists seem to merge with the breasts, as the wrists and hands lose any sort of volume. The cube like form of this trunk combined with the tight composition of the arms pushed against the breasts enhances the block like nature of this stone.

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77 Elsen, *Rodin’s Art*, 570. *Torso of a Seated Woman* was exhibited in London and Edinburgh between 1914-1915. Rodin gave the work to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1914.


79 Elsen, *Rodin’s Art*, 570. Elsen argues that this added pedestal was unattractive enough to warrant the viewer’s distaste and so is the reason for the work being ignored in literature.
The expressive hand dominates Rodin’s collection of isolated body parts. He considered his hands to be independent works of art and so he sold and exhibited them as such. The amount of hands that Rodin produced in his lifetime are difficult to count. As Elsen explains, numerous problems arise when attempting to count the hands. Georges Grappe—curator of the Musée Rodin in the first part of the 20th century—counted 450 hands but it remained impossible to tell whether or not these hands had been used on larger figures. To keep consistent with this thesis, only hands that were cast in bronze, carved in marble, or formally exhibited will be considered.

Rodin modeled his hands from life and with intense observation of hands of people from all ages and in all stages of health. Many of Rodin’s hands are distorted or deformed to such an extent that their modeling carries as much expression as a full figure. In his *The Clenched Left Hand* (Figure 35) the wrist and the palm of the hand are so contorted that it gives the impression that the hand has been tortured and broken because the pose is so far from removed from a physical possibility. Furthermore, the enlargement of the hand enhances the expressive nature, as each vein and fingertip is presented to the viewer as larger than life.

Isolated body parts do not require completion on the part of the viewer, which is the definitive difference between the isolated body part and the amputated form. To further reiterate this observation of Rodin’s hands, Rilke had said, “It [isolated hands] must not demand or expect aught from outside; it should refer to nothing that lay beyond

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80 Elsen, *Rodin’s Art*, 583. Elsen continues addressing numerous problems that arise when cataloguing Rodin’s hands. For example, when creating a comprehensive catalogue of hands held in the Meudon Reserve two sets of numbers were created: “one for those hands used with arms and bodies and a second for hands that had not been attached to figures.”
Rodin first exhibited his hands in 1889 in a private gallery before showing them at larger public venues. It was not until the late 1890s that Rodin began exhibited his hands on a more public scale. *The Clenched Hand* (Figure 36) was by far the most exhibited isolated hand and so was exhibited at least seven times between 1896 and 1917 in Paris, Rome, Prague, and Munich in both its small and enlarged versions.\(^\text{82}\)

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\(^{81}\) Elsen, Rodin’s Art, 589.
\(^{82}\) Ibid., 592.
CHAPTER V
ASSEMBLAGES

In Rodin’s sculpture a work of art is considered an assemblage when two or more modeled forms (figure, part of a figure, vessel) were joined together to create an entirely new work of art. Most importantly, the forms that Rodin used in each assemblage were not conceived for the assemblage; rather, they were conceived prior with another project in mind. For example, the assemblage *I Am Beautiful* (Figure 4), modeled in 1885, is the culmination of positioning the *Crouching Woman*, 1880-1882, (Figure 37) in the arms of *The Falling Man*, 1882, (Figure 38), both of which were created for The *Gates of Hell* prior to ever being considered as the independent sculpture *I Am Beautiful*.

According to Le Normand-Romain, Rodin considered an assemblage finished only if it was carved in marble or if it was formally exhibited in any other medium. The works would have been given titles in both of these stages and in turn, the assemblages would have been given their meanings.\(^{83}\) Certain plaster models were exhibited along with bronze casts, but the thought process behind which assemblages Rodin chose to exhibit remains unknown, so for consistency only the assemblages carved in marble or assemblages that have been formally exhibited will be included in the discussion of assemblages as part of the fragment as *non-finito* in this thesis.

The opportunity for assembling was plentiful; Rodin kept an arsenal of forms from which he would pull when creating an assemblage.\(^{84}\) His studio was filled with

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\(^{83}\) Le Normand-Romain, *Rodin*, 219.

\(^{84}\) Ibid., 146. This is most notably the case with the figures he conceived for the *Gates of Hell*. Hundreds of figures were kept in his studio from which he could pick and choose at will in order to avoid having to recreate models.
models of hands, feet, torsos, arms, legs, and more. While Rodin was working in his studio, and especially while working on important commissions, he would often have multiple casts of a specific figure or parts of a figure (such as hands or torsos) available in his studio. Elsen reported that “He created a vast repertory troupe, one that visitors commented on as filling the floor, walls, shelves, and furniture of his studio, this battlefield covered with twisted bodies in the strangest poses.” 85 This seems to have been a normative state for his studio and so it is important to acknowledge as it relates to his re-using works of art that on their own would be considered fragments, but when combined with another fragment, would be a part of a whole. Elsen asserts, Rodin could “sit or stand among his plaster progeny and audition them by pairing separately made figures to see if by chance an electric spark of form and drama would result.” 86 Some of these models were clay maquettes and some were cast in plaster. It seems Rodin never disposed of an unused model but rather kept them in his studio to be reworked or reused at another time. One of the reasons Rodin stowed away so many models was to expedite future projects. If Rodin were to create a new figure, it would be useful for him to re-use an already modeled hand or leg, rather than build up a new one, which would provide the same outcome but would require more time. 87

It is important to note that an assemblage is not merely two previously sculpted figures that Rodin spliced together as a shortcut. Rather, the assemblages are the result of Rodin re-imagining his pieces with a completely new and entirely unrelated narrative. Therefore, while a modeled hand may have initially been used to convey an expression through a gesture as part of a larger figurative work of art, in a re-worked assemblage, the

85 Elsen, Gates of Hell by Auguste Rodin, 82.
86 Ibid.
87 Le Normand-Romain, Rodin, 146.
modeled hand could be used to stabilize two smaller figures, such as what we see in The
*Hand of God* (Figure 39).

One might assume that Rodin’s works followed the same scale if they were to be fitted with one another at the will of the artist, but this is not true. As with many of Rodin’s assemblages, they are not always formed in a manner that would be physically possible for a person to maintain in real life and they are not always formed in a matter that would be consistent in scale. For example, in *Fugit Amor* (Figure 3), which is an assemblage of the *Despairing Adolescent* (Figure 40) and one of Ugolino’s children in the sculptural work of the same name, the positioning of the figures back to back would be impossible to orchestrate in real life. Clearly Rodin would not have used live models for this composition; it is more likely that he appropriated two previously worked models and joined them together. Additionally, Rodin altered the two figures in order to enhance the expressive nature by spreading the woman’s legs and bringing a greater distance between the two figures so that the man on top would appear to slide further down the woman’s back, but this alteration enhances the unbelievable nature of this pose. One then might assume he gave way to expression over nature in the instance of *Fugit Amor* and that Rodin usually re-worked his pieces in order to fit more believably or realistically together, but again this is not true. A harmonious unity was not mutually exclusive to a physically impossible union of forms. With assemblages, Rodin’s method was not to unite forms that would fit together perfectly—such as to mimic real life—but instead to unite forms that would suggest a new narrative.

While Rodin often re-used figures in order to use them again as part of a larger composition (an assemblage) he would also implement the reverse; he would cast
portions of a larger composition and present them as independent works of art. With *I Am Beautiful*, Rodin re-used two figures from the *Gates of Hell* – The *Crouching Woman* and the *Falling Man*. At first glance the figures would not appear to make a likely couple as both figures hold a seemingly opposite pose; one is a figure whose limbs are pulled toward the torso and the other a figure whose limbs all project away from the torso. Rodin altered the arms of the *Falling Man* slightly in order for the figure to better envelop the form of the *Crouching Woman*.  

*Falling Man* and the *Crouching Woman* are not unified in terms of their scale, anatomical accuracy, or how gravity affects the weight of the body. Yet the assemblage remains one of Rodin’s most touching and intimate examples of figural combinations. Despite Rodin altering the arms of the *Falling Man*, his pose would still be physically impossible to sustain while supporting the weight of the *Crouching Woman*. The same is true for the *Crouching Woman* in this assemblage; the pose would be physically impossible to maintain in the arms of the *Falling Man*. The composition begs the question, How does Rodin successfully unify two figures that are disproportionate in so many ways?

Rodin successfully altered the structure of a figure in order to maintain a harmonious balance of planes, emotion, drama, and genders exclusive of whether or not a pose would be physically possible to maintain while keeping intact the integrity of the structure.

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88 Albert E. Elsen, *The Gates of Hell by Auguste Rodin*, 83. Albert Elsen proposes the idea that Rodin would press fresh clay into a used plaster cast in order to handle a more malleable material. So it would make sense that Rodin could have pressed fresh clay into the used cast of the *Falling Man* in order to manipulate the arms of the figure while in its formable state. Another option could have been that Rodin would break off the extremities of a figure— in this case the arms—and re-attach them in whatever manner seems appropriate.
original model. Albert Elsen explains the reason Rodin was able to couple so many of his figures was because so many of them seemed to follow the same compositional structure, something that Rodin learned in part from studying Michelangelo’s figures such as the *Bound Slaves*. Additionally, because his sculptures were sculpted in the full round they fit more easily together. Elsen explains:

> It was also grounded in Rodin’s compositional discoveries that if two figures were well modeled from every profile, and if their points of contact seemed to catch fire, such things as difference in modeling mode, scale, or sex were unimportant. The fact that their bodies had been shaped according to a given orientation to gravity that differed from the new orientation he had given the figures was dismissed by Rodin as insufficient to force him to either give up or rework what he had found and that delighted him.⁸⁹

Although the figures would be a physically impossible unity, they remain in a visual harmony because their points of contact operate as a successful bond, as Elsen explains in the quote above.

The *Falling Man* and the *Crouching Woman* each hold their distinct position on the *Gates of Hell* and they both are representative of the most intense disparity of the human condition, yet when shown as *I Am Beautiful* they lose the desperation for salvation and instead become a sensitive portrayal of human touch and closeness. It is not that Rodin simply changed the context, i.e., removing the *Falling Man* and the *Crouching Woman* from the Gates and showing them independently. No, Rodin’s method of assemblage has quite a different approach which is best understood by examining the components of *I Am Beautiful* in all their intended forms.

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⁸⁹ Elsen, *Gates of Hell by Auguste Rodin*, 82.
When the *Crouching Woman* is exhibited as an independent sculpture, it no longer is a part of the specified context of the *Gates of Hell*. Additionally, when exhibited independently, The *Crouching Woman* is also no longer a part of the implied expression of freedom it gains from being a part of *I Am Beautiful*. Instead, she exhibits a strong and aggressive state of being which is suggested through the unapologetic pose. Although her state of being seems to be a state of pain and despair as seen through the tense musculature in her neck and shoulder area as well as her furrowed brow, she emits a sense of formidable defiance and endurance through her grounded pose that suggests permanence through the cube like composition.

As is often seen in Rodin’s figures, the *Crouching Woman*’s pose is seemingly impossible with the twisted pose of the torso combined with the crouched position, yet the composition emits no sense of disharmony. She turns her head in a pained expression and extends her neck to place her head so far over her right shoulder that it would be physically impossible for a normal person to maintain such a pose. The implied limitations of the body only enhance the sense of carnal pain that she seems to be enduring. The essence of a painful state of being that is expressed through her pose implies not only physical suffering, but a psychological suffering as well. The viewer ventures to know the reasoning behind her pain, but without the context of Hell or the unified couple, one is left wondering. Because the *Crouching Woman* lacks the depressive context of the *Gates of Hell*, she remains defiant rather than damned. Because the *Crouching Woman* lacks the uplifting power of *I Am Beautiful*, she remains in control of her situation rather than in need of her couple’s support.
On the *Gates of Hell*, the *Crouching Woman* is positioned to the *Thinker*’s left on the tympanum. Her form is rather difficult to discern from the crowd of figures because of the chaotic and crowded nature of the piece. Additionally, she is not sculpted so fully in the round in comparison to other figures such as the *Falling Man* or the *Thinker*, both of which project away from the surface of the Gates. As a part of the *Gates of Hell*, the *Crouching Woman* retains the compact nature of her presentation as an independent sculpture and the damning context surrounding the sculpture returns. It is clear as to where the woman’s pain is emanating from; her soul is damned in Hell. Because so many of the figures in the *Gates of Hell* are depicted in despair as they attempt to escape the grips of the inferno, it is my suggestion that the *Crouching Woman*’s despair becomes much less difficult to read in this chaotic context.

The *Fallen Man*, much like the *Crouching Woman*, is not indicative of any particular person or an interpretation of any particular story, but rather the damnation of one’s soul. As with all of his figures for the *Gates of Hell*, Rodin was pulling from the Italian poet Dante and his Christian based epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*. In his work Dante writes of his journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise escorted by Virgil and Beatrice. The 14th century poem is based on a Eurocentric worldview of the afterlife and the Gates are based on a 19th century artist’s interpretation of that work. This is important to consider when interpreting the figures of Rodin’s *Gates*.

Unlike the *Crouching Woman* whose pose is nearly impossible, the pose of the *Falling Man* is rather believable when placed in the context of the *Gates of Hell*. The *Falling Man* can be found on various places of the *Gates of Hell* but he is most prominent in the tympanum, to the *Thinker*’s right. The architectural elements enhance the story of
this man physically falling into Hell because his vertical positioning is accurate in relation to the door. Within the context of Hell, the pose of the body expresses desperation and defeat. The muscles are so exaggerated that it gives the sense that this man had been holding on to the edge of the tympanum with all his might, giving everything of himself in order to resist falling. The arms outstretched from the body suggest a lasting hope that perhaps he can reach something or someone to save him. The arched back intensifies the projection of the figure into the space of the viewer. The *Falling Man* was sculpted almost completely in the round thus its attachment to the *Gates* is ever so faint, much like his attachment to the physical world is ending as he falls to Hell.

*I Am Beautiful* successfully highlights the expressive nature of the pose of the *Crouching Woman* and *The Falling Man*. Furthermore, when the *Crouching Woman* is unified with the *Falling Man* they both lose their identity as individuals in pain and despair. When united with the *Falling Man* she emits a feeling of lightness and freedom rather than the heavy block of the *Crouching Woman*. In the reverse, when united with the *Crouching Woman*, he emits a feeling of strength and stability as his body is reversed into an upright position and his arms have been altered in a way to cradle the body of the *Crouching Woman*, rather than the loss of control he experiences as part of the *Gates of Hell* as his body is positioned with his feet upward and his arms projecting down toward the bottom of the *Gates* as he falls into Hell.

Another assemblage whose roots lie in the *Gates of Hell* is *The Three Shades* (Figure 41)\(^9^0\), (Characters from Dante’s *Divine Comedy*) which were first created as an

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\(^{90}\) Dante encounters the Three Shades along his journey through the inferno (Hell). They
assemblage to adorn the very top of the *Gates of Hell*. The group was later cast in bronze, larger than life size, and exhibited independent from the *Gates of Hell*. The *Three Shades* is another example of Rodin’s re-use of a figure (and in this case three figures) in order to create a larger composition. However, unlike *I Am Beautiful*, Rodin did not combine different models for the *Three Shades*; instead he combined three identical models of *Adam* (Figure 42), an earlier interpretation of Adam from the biblical creation myth. The *Three Shades* is essentially a composite view of the figure *Adam* where the audience is presented with the left side of *Adam*, the right side of *Adam*, and the front of *Adam* simultaneously without necessitating the viewer to walk around the figure. Although in theory the *Three Shades* could be seen as three separate figures lightly attached to one another, it should be viewed as a single entity when exhibited as an assemblage.

*Adam* was first conceived in 1876 and intended to be paired with *Eve* (Figure 43), a sculpture that would represent the female character from the same biblical creation myth. The two works were initially intended to only flank the *Gates of Hell* such as what can be seen at the Musée Rodin, but they have also been exhibited independently. As an independent sculpture, *Adam* is a study of human anatomy. Rodin exaggerated the musculature of the body yet the figure still retains anatomical accuracy. The twist in the torso and the extended contortion of the neck are a physical impossibility, yet it gives a sense of feeling natural as the pose gives way to its principle purpose of expression.

are three Florentine men who have been relegated to the third level of Hell for sodomy. They are described as emaciated and unable to ever stop moving for fear of being burned. As Dante encounters the Three Shades they form a circle around him and walk continuously as they explain to Dante their circumstance and as Dante tells the Shades of what is going on in Florence. For further reading on the visual representation of Three Shades in sculpture consult Aida Audeh, “I Tre Fiorentini: Rodin's Three Shades and Their Origin in Medieval Illustrations of Dante's *Inferno* 15 and 16,” *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 117 (1999), 133-169.  

Adam’s presented state of being is that of a person who is not yet full of life. Rodin presents the transient moment when life is beginning to surge through his body, one muscle at a time. Although Rodin used the model for Adam for the Three Shades, the meaning that resides in Adam does not carry over to the meaning of the Three Shades, as the Three Shades is not a representation of three Adams coming to life. Furthermore, the Three Shades lose their purpose as the guides who point towards the entrance of Gates of Hell and becomes more of an intimate guide with their interaction with the viewer as the figures extend their arms in a directive manner when it is exhibited as an independent sculpture.

Rodin altered the structure of Adam slightly in his formation of the Three Shades, but just as he had done with The Falling Man and the Crouching Woman, he maintained the integrity of the figure’s original conception as Adam. The alteration of the neck and arm—however slight—dramatically changes the meaning of the figure. When modeled for Adam, the limp arm that extends from the body might seem more like the famous touch of God in the Creation of Adam (Figure 44), Michelangelo’s fresco on the Sistine Ceiling. Michelangelo’s Adam is depicted with a limp arm because of the lack of life, or energy, while he awaits God’s touch. However, when exhibited as the independent assemblage, the Three Shades, the figures attain the duty of guidance in relation to the viewer. While a limp hand may not express much command, three limp hands pointed in the same direction express a need to heed such guidance.

The pose has been altered most noticeably with the left arm reaching further away from the body and the neck pointed downward in another seemingly impossible position. Most significant to this thesis is the right hand of the figure. As a part of the Three
Shades, the repeated figure is actually an amputated form with the right arm coming to a stop just above the wrist. The exact reason for the amputated hand is unknown at this time, but other scholars have offered possible reasons. Most recently Le Normand-Romain states her opinion of the reasoning behind the amputation of the right hand:

… the Shades group may highlight the representation of torments inflicted on the damned, but the elimination of the right hand, the hand of action, tells us that they belong to a world where this action no longer has any sense. They are anonymous shadows, without physical bodies and thus with no possibility of action, moving around in the space of The Gates.  

Le Normand-Romain’s statement most fully corroborates the ideas found here in this thesis. Furthermore, her account of the amputation fits most accurately with the Three Shades as it was first intended for the Gates of Hell. Because Rodin continued with this amputated form for the enlarged Three Shades, it shows that the work was sufficiently evocative of the expression he was seeking to exhibit independently.

The Three Shades is unique because of its multiplicity. As the group is exhibited independently and enlarged, the meaning of the figures again change. The figures are no longer placed atop a complex unfolding of events such as the Gates of Hell, but rather in their isolation the gesture loses its authoritative directive, that of guidance. Instead, the focus turns in part to a study of multiplicity. The repetition becomes clearer in their isolated state. The fact that the figures are exact copies of one another becomes more of a focal point. The figure of the re-interpreted Adam is repeated three times, each time with the same pose and the same scale, with each figure only turned slightly. As previously stated, the left profile of Adam, the front view of Adam, and the right profile of Adam are presented to the viewer. Unlike the assemblage I Am Beautiful, the Three Shades is unified in terms of scale and proportion.

92 Le Normand-Romain, Rodin, 156.
The role of the *Three Shades* changes dramatically when removed from the *Gates of Hell* and viewed as an independent sculpture for many reasons such as context and scale, but most importantly because of the audience’s proximity to the work. As a part of the *Gates of Hell*, the *Three Shades* is placed on the uppermost region of the structure, distinctly separate from the events unfolding below. The majority of the figures that occupy the *Gates of Hell* are representations of humanity’s despair and damnation, yet the *Three Shades* is distinctly different in its role as a part of the *Gates of Hell*. Additionally, as a part of the *Gates of Hell*, the *Three Shades* group is only a supporting scene among many damned souls. Therefore, the trio is much less of a focal point when it is a part of the *Gates of Hell*. Most importantly, the group is physically very far from the viewer’s position in front of the Gates, which significantly changes the relationship with the work as opposed to being viewed as an independent work of art, thus the role of the work has changed dramatically as well.

Many of Rodin’s assemblages have origins from the *Gates of Hell*, which is a logical consequence since he was creating hundreds of figures for the Gates and in doing so was also creating multiple versions of each figure. He worked on the *Gates of Hell* for almost twenty years\(^93\) and so he had developed quite a large assortment of models from which to choose from for his assemblages. But not all of his assemblages were rooted in the *Gates of Hell*, most notably his works that feature hands such as the *Hand of God* and *Large Clenched Left Hand with Figure* (Figure 45).

Hands are a major theme in Rodin’s work; he placed much importance on hands as one of the ultimate vehicles for expression, equivalent to the face. His hands expressed various moods, most of which were theatrical in their exaggerated anatomy. Some hands

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were entirely clenched in a fist while others were clenched only in the fingers leaving the palm open; some were made in a gesture of blessing and others were a demonic clawing gesture; some were modeled life-size, others were modeled larger than or smaller than life-size; some were modeled with smooth skin while others were modeled as bumpy or with crusty sickly skin; some hands were attached to arms, others were attached only to a wrist. Most importantly, these hands were perfect for an assemblage. Furthermore, when included as a part of an assemblage they often functioned outside of their usual role as gesture maker and instead functioned as an energy force or a stage on which a scene could be enacted.

The *Hand of God* (Figure 39) consists of the right hand of Pierre de Wissant (Figure 46) from the monumental group the *Burghers of Calais*. Within the hand, Rodin affixed a figure of *Adam* and a figure of *Eve* in a much smaller scale than the hand. These figures are intertwined as they represent the main characters from the biblical creation myth. The figures emerge from the block as if they are in the fluid moment of being molded from the marble that evokes plasticity when in the *Hand of God*. The parallel to Rodin as creator is undeniable in this work of art. Therefore, in the *Hand of God*, the hand functions as the progenitor of life but it also serves as a visual aid as it functions as a stage for the creation of human life. The hand also exhibits a hindrance when exhibited, which adds to the transitory feeling of life being created before the viewer’s eyes. It is difficult to see the figures of Adam and Eve in their entirety. Not only are the figures emerging from a block, but they are also posed in a way that makes it difficult for the viewer to see the figures from different angles. In addition to these challenges, the viewer is also faced with the large hand that stands between the viewer and the figures. The hand
is perhaps the biggest obstacle that lies between the viewer and their understanding of the subject matter. I suggest this was the artist’s intention, to force frustration out of the viewer in their attempt to witness the event that is unfolding within the hand.

Rodin has taken a model of a hand originally intended for the figure of Pierre de Wissant who was to be one of the six figures for the monumental group the Burghers of Calais. As we have learned, Rodin had an arsenal of models at his disposal in his studio, so the question arises of why would the artist choose this particular hand over the others? There is no evidence as to why he chose this hand, but the choice of a Burgher’s hand must have had some sort of significance. When looking at the Burghers of Calais as a whole, it is the hands, feet, and heads that are the most expressive aspects of the group especially as the Burgher’s bodies are covered with robes. Furthermore, it is the figure of Pierre de Wissant whose gesture is arguably the most dramatic with the right hand held up in the air. The scale of the hands and feet in the Burghers of Calais—all of which are notably larger than in real life—was not a mistake on the part of the artist but was surely intended in order for the expression not to escape the audience. It would have been most appropriate for Rodin to choose one of the most expressive vehicles for gesture from the Burghers of Calais group to use in Hand of God—a work where he essentially compares his craft to that of God creating human life. Ultimately, four marbles of the Hand of God were made by his assistants.\footnote{Le Normand-Romain, Rodin, 215. Rodin again used the right hand of Pierre de Wissant in another assemblage, Assemblage of the Mask of Camille Claudel and the Left Hand of Pierre de Wissant. This piece however was never exhibited in Rodin’s lifetime, and unlike the Hand of God was made into marble carvings, it was never cast in bronze or carved in marble.}

The Hand of God is similar to I Am Beautiful in the sense that the scale of the assembled forms is not proportionate, but in the Hand of God the change in scale is most
dramatic. The same can be said for another assemblage, which uses a sensational

dramatization of a clenched hand, *Large Clenched Left Hand with Figure* (Figure 45). In

this assemblage the hand is in a much larger scale than the figure of a woman whose
torso is joined to the wrist of the hand.

In *Large Clenched Left Hand with Figure*, the hand is dramatically contorted into

a position where the entire palm is open but the five fingers remain clenched and the

physical strain can be sensed throughout the entire modeled hand. Juxtaposed with the

hand is a form of the female figure whose body has been cut off from the torso down.
The figure’s arms are outstretched above her head and reach the palm of the hand. The

female’s joined hands rest perfectly in the void of the palm. Furthermore, the strain in the

large left hand is mirrored by the female figure’s straining reach.

The female figure’s origins lie in *The Centauress* (Figure 47) where she occupied

the upper portion of the work of art. The female figure is itself an assemblage as the head

is from a model for Paolo intended for *Fugit Amor*, the body is that of Orpheus or the

*Prodigal Son*, and the left arm may be from the stock of models Rodin kept in his

studio. What remains so interesting about this small assemblage is how the role of the

hand will change depending on which angle one views the work of art. From certain

angles it seems as though the hand is recoiling away from the figure of the woman, while

from other angles the hand seems ready to engulf the figure as though the opposing forms

are caught in the transitory moment of building momentum to grasp the entirety of the

figure.

As with so many of Rodin’s works, the attention to expressiveness in every part

of the form—right down to the fingernail—is filled with energy, and these two forms

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95 Elsen, *Rodin’s Art*, 513.
seem to reciprocate each others dynamic spirit in full. Although these two works were never intended to be linked to one another, they are such a success as an assemblage. Their success as an assemblage lies in Rodin’s ability to re-imagine these two previously made forms as a completely new work of art. In doing so he heightened the expressive nature of both forms to a state that would only be possible as a pair.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have addressed non-finito as it relates to the fragment in Rodin’s oeuvre by providing a definition of non-finito focusing specifically on the aspect of the fragment as it serves as a manifestation of non-finito. Through the sub-categories of the isolated body part, the amputated form, and assemblages my thesis tracked the changes and variety of non-finito in Rodin’s sculpture.

In works such as The Walking Man I have identified the notion of the amputated form as a figurative work where select body parts have been omitted as the result of a conscious decision in order to communicate an action or expression through the simplification of forms. I have shown that the effect of the amputated form rests heavily on the role of the viewer and their ability to complete the work in their imagination. I have shown that the isolated body part is a partial figure like the amputated form, but it does not rely on the role of the viewer for completion. Works such as Torso of Seated Woman exist as independent works of art. In works such as I Am Beautiful, I have shown how Rodin re-imagined his pieces as new works of art with an unrelated narrative after combining previously modeled forms.

Drawing from leading scholars, Albert Elsen, Antoinette Le Normand-Romain, and Ruth Butler, this thesis extends their research and contributes by providing a clearly defined stance on how non-finito should be used in relation to Rodin’s sculpture.
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