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**Allegory and
Realism: Rodin's Monuments to Victor Hugo and Honoré de Balzac**

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Abstract of the Thesis

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During his illustrious career, Auguste Rodin was commissioned to complete two monuments to honor two of France's most celebrated literary figures: Honoré de Balzac and Victor Hugo. The former is known for the brutal realism of his, *La Comédie Humaine*, and the latter is known for being the revolutionary leader of the Romantic Movement. Rodin's sculptures reflect the different literary approaches and political roles of Balzac and Hugo, in that both of the monuments are rendered in two distinct styles. This thesis explores the allegorical nature of the Hugo monument and discusses the reasons why this was an appropriate mode of expression for Hugo's political and poetic objectives. On the other hand, I discuss the realistic dimension to Rodin's standing portrait of Balzac and how this format better represents the literary style of Balzac as well as the literary agenda of Émile Zola.

*To Nick,
for always making me laugh.*

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Introduction

Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) once said, “A true artist always puts something of his time into his work and also of his soul.”¹ This is extremely apparent when considering the great nineteenth-century French sculptor’s participation in a nationwide effort to promote the legacy of prominent and influential French individuals. This effort manifested through the many public commissions for monuments celebrating France’s most well known literary figures and intellectuals. Two of his most famous monuments include his *Monument to Victor Hugo* and his *Monument to Honoré de Balzac*.² In creating these monuments, Rodin has “put something of his time” into his art because he contributed to the *zeitgeist* and perpetuated the developing fascination with France’s great minds.

In addition to illustrating how a work of art should represent the artist’s time, the monuments to Hugo and Balzac also demonstrate the latter part of Rodin’s statement concerning the soul. While serving similar functions, i.e. the promotion of the intellectual ideas and achievements, the final stylistic outcome for each monument was extremely different in that they both recall the unique literary styles of both Hugo and Balzac. The *Monument to Victor Hugo* is an allegorical representation reflecting the poetic dimension of Hugo’s *oeuvre*,

¹ Rodin pg 185. “Une véritable artiste met toujours son temps dans son oeuvre at aussi son âme.”

² To view an image of the Hugo monument, please go to the following link:

<http://www.cantorfoundation.org/pics/Rodin/rbiolh.jpg>

To view an image of the Balzac monument, please go to the following link:

http://www.casa-in-italia.com/artpx/moma/images/Rodin_MOMA_Monument_Balzac.JPG

whereas, the *Monument to Honoré de Balzac* is a standing portrait evoking his role as a major pioneer in literary realism.

The *Monument to Victor Hugo* (Fig. 1) is a deceptively youthful idealized nude figure that sits in a diagonal position as he reclines against three female muses. The diagonal is reinforced by Hugo's powerful arm outstretched as if he is suppressing the empty space below. His head rests heavily on his other hand, and his face is stern with a furrowed brow, revealing his contemplative state and true age. The delicate female figures appear to be crawling around Hugo's back in contorted positions, as if they are trying to penetrate his intellect. Between the idealized nudes and the mythological implications, the *Victor Hugo* echoes many classical tendencies.

On the other hand, the *Monument to Balzac* is somewhat more innovative, in that there are fewer traces of past stylistic traditions. Rodin sculpted this individual with a heightened sense of realism and a commanding presence. The Balzac figure stands just under ten feet tall, with his entire body swallowed up by a heavy coat that slightly reveals his physical imperfections. His face is also stern and pensive and he looks out into the distance, as if he is analyzing something that exists beyond the immediate temporal world.

Even though many factors contribute to the final outcome of a public art commission, it is clear that Rodin was able to incorporate his own soul when trying to capture the spirit of both Victor Hugo and Honoré de Balzac. Through the very distinct stylistic choices made by the artist, Rodin revealed his own

interpretation of Balzac and Hugo's legacy and what they came to represent. It is interesting then to consider that neither of these monuments were finally approved by those who commissioned them and whether or not Rodin's own vision compromised theirs. The goal of this thesis is to explain and justify the different stylistic and aesthetic choices made by Rodin. I will analyze the disparate literary aims of both writers to see how Hugo's employment of poetic devices and Balzac's realism could have affected Rodin's final monuments. While a comparison between Hugo and Balzac is not sufficient for a complete analysis, I will begin by examining such issues as the events surrounding the commission, the political roles and contemporary significance of both Balzac and Hugo, and the locations of the monuments. This information will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the two works.

The New Public Monument and the Cult of Great Men

In order to begin to analyze and compare Rodin's monuments to Hugo and Balzac, it is necessary to understand the new role that public monuments came to have in the nineteenth century. Up through the eighteenth century, secular art had been used as a source of propaganda for monarchs.³ This had been a long-standing tradition since antiquity and often took the ubiquitous form of the equestrian statue, which referenced the noble warrior.⁴ The most notable example of this form of public monument is the Roman statue of Marcus Aurelius located

³ June Hargrove, "The Public Monument" *The Romantics to Rodin: French Nineteenth-Century Sculpture from North American Collections*. Peter Fusco and H. W. Janson, eds. (Los Angeles County Museum, 1980) pg. 21.

⁴ June Hargrove, *The Statues of Paris, An Open-Air Pantheon. The History of Statues to Great Men* (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds 1989) 11.

on Capitoline Hill in Rome from 176 A.D.⁵ The mighty emperor sits in an authoritative position towering over the citizens with his powerful hand outstretched indicating the strength and stability of the Empire. The Marcus Aurelius statue served as a template for future rulers who wanted to advertise their power and dominance over their lands. In 1614 Henry IV was the first of many French Bourbon monarchs to embrace the equestrian monument, and used it as an “icon of dynastic hierarchy in absolute monarchy of divine right.”⁶ Other Bourbon monarchs also commissioned many public monuments to honor their legacy like Louis XIII and Louis XIV.⁷

However after the French Revolution and the abolition of the monarchy(1789-1799), public monuments began to promote the new republican ideals of Nature, Truth, Law and Equality rather than the absolute power of a single individual.⁸ These values were deeply embedded in the writings of the great philosophes from the Age of Enlightenment who pursued individual thought and freedom. As art historian June Hargrove noted in her essay entitled, “The Public Monument,” “How could the monument answer the needs of a society that wanted both to abolish individual control and to extol individual thought?”⁹

⁵ To view an image of the statue please visit: Mary Ann Sullivan, “Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius in the Capitoline Museum, Rome,” <http://www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/italy/rome/marcusaurelius/marcusaurelius.html> (accessed April 20, 2009).

⁶ Ibid 12.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hargrove, “The Public Monument,” 21.

In response to the new political orientation and cultural principles, both private and public organizations began to commission public monuments in honor of individuals who served as prototypes for the new Republican ideals. Public art became a vehicle for “secular moral guidance” rather than a means of promoting absolute authority.¹⁰ This tradition stems from the teachings of Diderot who claimed that art should “make us love virtue and hate vice.”¹¹ Hargrove explains this phenomenon in her book, *The Statues of Paris, An Open Air Panthéon*, when she states, “They could guide their audience to a better world through revealing the heights of greatness, which prompted social values and incited emulation.”¹²

In addition to moral edification, the public monument served another purpose in nineteenth century France. In commemorating the great lives of certain French individuals, this inevitably contributed to a rise in nationalism throughout the country. This relationship caused a cyclical proliferation of public monuments: as patriotic feelings increased more public monuments were generated. Hargrove also comments on the role of nationalism and the production of public when she states, “the rise of nationalism, of more constitutional political systems, and of the middle and then the working class were crucial to the development of monuments that would reflect the broader participation of individuals in the institutions governing their lives.”¹³ Because he had the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ As quoted in Ibid 22.

¹² Hargrove, *The Statues of Paris, An Open-Air Pantheon. The History of Statues to Great Men* 16.

responsibility of creating an iconic image for two of France's greatest intellectuals, Rodin participated in this phenomenon.

One of the great virtues that was held to the highest esteem was genius. People published anthologies of biographical texts, similar to what Plutarch accomplished in the Renaissance, as a means of disseminating among the public the prototypical lives of remarkable human beings. Some examples of these publications included, J.-P. Nicéron's *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des homes illustres* (1727-1745), and F.H. Turpin's book entitled *La France illustre ou le Plutarque français* (1775-1780). Public monuments were the visual counterpart to this tradition.

Literati like Honoré de Balzac and Victor Hugo were viewed as living personifications of genius and were to be remembered in that context. The novelist Maurice Barrès (1862-1923) referred to Hugo as "the genius of our race."¹⁴ Therefore it was the product of genius, i.e. the notion of the "idea" that came to the forefront in public art. It became the responsibility of the artist to physically represent the power and significance of the intangible idea when sculpting monuments honoring such intellectuals.

Sculptor Pierre-Jean David d'Angers (1788-1856) described the artist's responsibility and how it related to portraiture when he stated, "The statue must be the expression of the idea. The idea is the criterion of genius. Compare the traits of the nonentity and the traits of a superior man; if you know how to

¹³ Hargrove, "Public Monuments," 21.

¹⁴ As quoted in Jeanine Parisier Plottel, "Rodin's Victor Hugo," *Rodin's Monument to Victor Hugo* (London: Merrell Holberton Publishers, 1999) 26.

observe, you will be struck by their dissimilarity.”¹⁵ Through the subject’s physical features, the sculptor was responsible for conveying essence of the intangible genius that resided within the subject. David d’Angers was able to reconcile the interior essence of his subjects with their exterior appearance through the study of phrenology, a nineteenth-century study that hypothesized a correlation between one’s personality and one’s physical features, namely the head.¹⁶

David d’Angers describes even further how the artist is supposed achieve the expression of the idea by allowing “the eye [to] plunge [into] in the sublime depths where his hero resides. He [the artist] sees him with the eyes of his soul.”¹⁷ David D’Angers realized his vision most notably in his monument to Johannes Gutenberg (1398-1468) located in Strasburg, France, in which he depicts the inventor of movable type printing stoically standing next to a printing press holding sheets of paper that contain the ideas of great thinkers throughout history.¹⁸ The monument presents Gutenberg as an intellectual hero who liberates

¹⁵ As quoted in June E. Hargrove, “The Public Monument,” *The Romantics to Rodin* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980) p. 24.

¹⁶ Jacques de Caso, *David d’Angers: Sculptural Communication in the Age of Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 142.

¹⁷ As quoted in Mary Levkoff, *Rodin in His Time*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1994) 27.

¹⁸ To view an image of the David d’Angers’ Gutenberg monument please see: “Gutenberg-David d’Angers,” http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2249/2171862675_547e627f25.jpg%3Fv%3D0&imgrefurl=http://flickr.com/photos/12152206%40N03/2171862675&usq=_5gMlbgk2l1KMUxPbHqITuS17qYo=&h=500&w=333&sz=134&hl=en&start=1&sig2=HpnKtwf3X9daYj9Bnb4-3w&um=1&tbnid=nYYH27DMGmwx7M:&tbnh=130&tbnw=87&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dgutenberg%2BAND%2Bdavid%2Bd%2527angers%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DN%26um%3D1&ei=Mx_1SaiYCZLGM4jyubUP (April 20, 2009).

the ignorant and disseminates the written word as articulated by David d'Angers himself when he states, "his arms are outstretched, and he holds in his hands sheets of paper with printing, which he distributes to the peoples who surround the pedestal."¹⁹

Equally notable and like Rodin's monuments to Hugo and Balzac, David d'Angers also gives his hero a furrowed brow to stress the act of contemplation, emphasizing the importance of Gutenberg's intellectual activity; in other words, David d'Angers illustrates "the sublime depths where his hero resides." When considering Rodin's monuments to Balzac and Hugo, I would like to argue that he comes out of David d'Angers' quest to represent the soul of the individual. Even though the ultimate goal was the same for both monuments, Rodin could only represent the essence of Balzac and Hugo through two dissimilar monuments that reflect their individual literary styles and reputations. This thesis will explore the allegorical nature of the Hugo monument and discuss the reasons why this was an appropriate mode of expression for Hugo's political and poetic objectives. On the other hand, I will discuss the realistic dimension to Rodin's standing portrait of Balzac and how this aesthetic choice better represents the literary agenda of Balzac.

¹⁹ David D'Angers' entire description of the Gutenberg monument: "Gutenberg, on a pedestal, a press next to him; his arms are outstretched, and he holds in his hands sheets of paper with printing, which he distributes to the peoples who surround the pedestal. On the face of the pedestal Europeans break the irons of Negro slaves and offer them books. America leaning on its flag, is surrounded by happy children. Poland brandishes its sabre, as do Hungary and Italy. On each side, two crouching figures represent Asia and Oceania." As quoted in *Ibid* 30.

Chapter 1: Monument to Victor Hugo

Rodin's monument to Victor Hugo is a perfect example of the French organizations desire to seek moral guidance through secular examples of genius. In 1889 the Third Republic's *l'administration des Beaux-Arts* commissioned Rodin to commemorate the poet by sculpting a monument that was to be placed on his grave in France's Panthéon, an eighteenth-century church later dedicated to the great achievements of French individuals. After years of debates concerning the overall appearance of the monument, the artist and the government never agreed on a final product, so Rodin's sculpture was never installed in the Panthéon.

This chapter will introduce the history behind the intended location of the sculpture, the facts behind the commission, and describe the relationship between Rodin and Hugo in an attempt to provide the appropriate foundation for an in depth analysis of the monument. In doing so, I hope to prove why Rodin was able to infuse his own "soul" into the monument by rendering his uncompromising individual vision of Hugo's genius rather than passively mimic the desires of those who commissioned the monument. I would also like to address how Hugo's national reputation contributed to Rodin's decision to create an allegorical monument for the poet rather than a realistic portrait.

History of the Panthéon

Paris' Panthéon is the greatest manifestation of the cult of Great Men. The

building has had a tumultuous history, oscillating between a recognized sacred church and a secular resting place for some of France's greatest intellectuals and heroes. The controversial history of the Panthéon is useful to this thesis because it was the intended location of Rodin's monument to Victor Hugo. France was embarking on a new quest to achieve a secular Republic distinct from the omnipotent union between monarchy and church that had thrived for centuries before. The building's history documents the previous struggles and efforts made in order to achieve the ultimate goal of separation between church and state and the interior sculptural plan was meant to memorialize this national accomplishment. Therefore, the importance of Rodin's commission was on a monumental scale of national importance that would help illustrate the importance of intellectual, political, and religious freedom.

The interior decorations needed to echo this sense of nationalism and the Republican ideals of *Liberté, Égalité, et Fraternité* so that Paul Chenavard's vision of a temple to humanity could finally be realized. The Victor Hugo Monument was never meant to be a work that stood alone in and of itself but rather part of a collective whole that together represented a utopian vision of a secular free nation. The building's tumultuous past and the political significance of Hugo's death reveal the importance of Rodin's commission and both played a vital role in the monument's fruition. Furthermore, I would like to argue that given the history of the building and the fact that Hugo's death was the event that motivated the official and final secularization of the church that Rodin's *Monument to Victor Hugo* as an allegory for intellectual freedom.

The iconic building was constructed during the Bourbon monarchy in the eighteenth century under the authority of Louis XV, who dedicated the church to Sainte-Geneviève, the patron saint of Paris.²⁰ It is located in the fifth arrondissement on Montagne Sainte-Geneviève.²¹ The King assigned Jacques-Germain Soufflot to be the architect of its neoclassical structure. Marked by the death of the popular statesman the Comte de Mirabeau, Honoré Gabriel Riqueti (1749-1791), the Eglise Sainte-Geneviève was declared a secular Panthéon during the French Revolution (1789-1799) dedicated to great French individuals who like the count had lead exemplary lives promoting Enlightenment ideals.²²

On April 4, 1791 Mirabeau's body was placed to rest in the Panthéon, followed by the ashes of Voltaire on July 11 of the same year.²³ Mirabeau's death was the event that led to the first secularization of the building and Hugo's death was the event that inspired the last. Other individuals whose remains came to be interred in the building included Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Descartes and Marat and they were memorialized with the following dedication inscribed on the west pediment: "*Aux Grandes Hommes La Patrie Reconnaissante.*"²⁴

²⁰ Jane Mayo Roos, "Steichen's Choice," *Rodin's Monument to Victor Hugo* (London: Merrell Holberton Publishers, 1999) 62. Please go to the following link to view an image of the Panthéon: http://tightgrid.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/pantheon_paris.jpg

²¹ To view a map of the location of the Panthéon, please go to the following link: http://images.travelpod.com/cache/accom_maps/Villa_Pantheon-Paris.gif

²² Ruth Butler, "Rodin's Victor Hugo Monument," *Rodin's Monument to Victor Hugo* (London: Merrell Holberton Publishers, 1999) pg. 15.

²³ Jane Mayo Roos, "Rodin's Monument to Victor Hugo: Art and Politics in the Third Republic," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 68, no. 4 (December., 1986) 633.

²⁴ Roos SC, 62.

Despite the welcomed change, this was a short-lived period in the building's history because during the Bourbon Restoration between 1814 and 1830, the Panthéon returned to its original religious function.²⁵ In her essay entitled, "Steichen's Choice," art historian Jane Mayo Roos observed that the building represented an undying political battle in France between two philosophies- the unquestionable divine power of church and monarchy versus the separation of church and state. Roos states, "It [the Panthéon] was a sign with dual and mutually exclusive signifiers, and its status changed according to the political orientation of the governments that followed."²⁶ Supporters of the conservative *ancien regime* and the liberal revolutionaries would continue to regard the building as the physical embodiment of religious tension and political upheaval in France.

Following the Restoration, the Panthéon was once again transformed into a secular memorial and burial ground for the "Great men" of France. In a futile attempt to immortalize the building's reestablished purpose, the Minister of the current French government, M. Ledru-Rollin commissioned Paul Chenavard to paint a series of murals inside the Panthéon to counteract the religious ambiance by creating a "temple to humanity."²⁷ But in 1851, the *coup d'etat* led by Louis Napoléon prevented the murals from being installed, and the Panthéon became the

²⁵ Butler, 15.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ *Le Panthéon: Symbole des révolutions* (Montreal: Centre canadien d'architecture, 1989) 324.

church of Sainte-Geneviève, once again.²⁸ During the 1870's, the marquis de Chennevières commissioned a series of religious murals for the interior of the church as a declaration of the Catholic orientation of the building and of the country. Those who commissioned the murals hoped that they would evoke both religious devotion and patriotic fervor among those who entered the church.²⁹

The century-long feud between those who considered the building a to be a church and those who considered it to be a symbol of national secularization finally came to an end with the death of Victor Hugo on May 22, 1885. His funeral fueled the final decision to secularize the eighteenth-century church and to once again dedicate the building to France's accomplished intellectuals, writers, and politicians. Because Hugo's life was exemplary enough to solidify such a victory for supporters of la République, it is no wonder that Rodin depicted him as a symbolic figure of republican ideals. Rodin's *Hugo* became a prototype for political freedom because he portrayed Hugo on the shores of Guernsey in political exile when he refused to compromise his republican principles during a time of tyranny.³⁰ Rodin's idealized nude figure of Hugo elevates the

²⁸ Joseph C. Sloan, "Paul Chenevard," *Art Bulletin*, vol. 33 no. 4 (December 1951) 240.

²⁹ Roos SC 63. Roos also includes approval statements by the minister from February 28, 1874 which state that the murals would contain both "religious and patriotic art" and that "all subjects treated, all the figures represented [would] be marked by this double sign of being Christian and being French." The murals include a figure of the young Sainte Geneviève by Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898) and the *Martyrdom of Saint Denis* by Léon Bonnat (1833-1922).

³⁰ While Hugo gains success as a novelist, playwright, and poet, he also begins to develop his role as a political activist. In 1849, Hugo is elected into the National Assembly who at first supports Louis-Napoléon but for Hugo that opinion was to quickly change. On December 2, 1851, Louis-Napoléon declares himself emperor making him Napoleon III and solidifies his absolute control by putting an end to the National Assembly.³⁰ Disgusted by the new emperor's propagandistic ploys and tyrannical tendencies, Hugo leaves France to remain in exile in both

poet/politician to a heroic position that personifies intellectual perfection. Hugo was very vocal about his reasons for leaving France and proclaimed, "I shall share the exile of freedom to the end. When freedom returns, so shall I."³¹ By the time of his death, Victor Hugo's his literary works and political reputation had inspired so much so fervor throughout France that he was basically considered a national deity. Being familiar with Victor Hugo's accomplishments and symbolic reputation is imperative to understanding the allegorical nature of the Rodin's monument.

During the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, France was moving away from the conservative tendencies of Louis Napoléon's regime, which allowed for such activists as Édouard Lockroy (1840-1913) to initiate the re-secularization of the Panthéon.³² Victor Hugo's death was significant because it provided the perfect opportunity for such a process to take place.

Brussels and the Islands of Jersey and Guernsey, located near the coast of Normandy. In her essay "Rodin's Victor Hugo," Jeanine Parisier Plottell explains Hugo's decision to live in exile because he "grew to loathe Napoleon III, as Bonaparte fashioned himself, and his authoritarian Second Empire in which civil liberties were suppressed, opponents exiled, and plebiscites used in a demagogical way to ratify decisions that had been made in high places."

His years in exile were some of his most prolific years in terms of literary production. He published two of his most famous volumes of poetry during the period entitled, *Les Châtiments* (1855) and *Les Contemplations* (1856). In 1862, *Les Misérables* one of his greatest and most influential novels was published. Napoleon III is finally defeated in 1870, which entices Hugo to move back to France in time for the Franco-Prussian War. His years in exile proved to the public that he was a man of uncompromising integrity. Hugo not only created characters in his novels worthy of emulation but he himself was a national symbol of individual liberties. Around this time, the Cult of Victor Hugo grew in strength as Victor Hugo gained popularity.

³¹ Roos, *SC* 47.

³² *Ibid.* Lockroy married the widow of Hugo's son and dealt with the legal issues surrounding his death and made certain to fulfill all of the poet's dying wishes. He was also the *Ministre des Beaux-Arts* in 1888.

At the time of his death, Hugo was an extraordinarily popular figure in France for both his literary accomplishments and his republican pursuits. The state was aware of his status, and thus the Chamber of Deputies afforded Hugo a state funeral.³³ Moreover, Hugo was well known for his antipathetic views toward the Catholic Church. When Hugo's health was on a rapid decline in May of 1885 he ardently expressed his discontent with the Church as an institution. Archbishop Guibert of Paris wanted to come and sit with Hugo to pray with him as he entered into the last phase of his life. Hugo refused the archbishop's offer because as a "freethinker and anticlerical in the last years of his life, Hugo would not in his last hours bend his views or bow to the will of the Church."³⁴

Hugo officially expressed his views on the matter in his last will and testament, which stated, "I give 50,000 francs to the poor. I want to be carried to the cemetery in a pauper's hearse. I reject the orations of all churches. I ask every soul to pray for me. I believe in God."³⁵ As a public figure renouncing the power of the Church, Hugo became a national symbol for secularization.

Rodin translated Hugo's symbolic reputation in the form of an allegorical representation of intellectual freedom. Again, by recalling his exile and depicting him on an isolated island surrounded by the intellectual energies of the muses, Rodin creates a symbolic image of nonconformity and intellectual freedom. Because Hugo was such a monumental figure and had such a contentious

³³ Plottell 23.

³⁴ Roos SC 55.

³⁵ As quoted in Plottel, 23.

relationship with the Catholic Church, there was enough force and energy behind his death to revolutionize once and for all the political and religious orientation of the Panthéon. In the end, only such a secular building filled with the bodies and memorials to some of France's greatest minds would be an appropriate resting place for such a literary genius who "reject[ed] the orations of all churches."

A sculptural program for the Panthéon was announced in 1889 under the direction of Hugo's friend, Edouard Lockroy, who had been elected *Ministre des Beaux-Arts*.³⁶ Lockroy worked closely with Gustave Larroumet who served as the *Directeur des Beaux-Arts* and they announced their plans for the project in the *Journal Officiel de la République française*. The entire plan included one hundred sculptures all of which reflected a central theme of the French Revolution. The central monument at the east end of the building announced this theme as it directly honored the French Revolution and the ideals it pursued.³⁷ Around the central monument, Lockroy and Larroumet had planned to include individual monuments to the "great men" who through their writings established the foundations for Revolutionary thought: Descartes, Voltaire, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.³⁸ Located on the south transept, they had planned for a sculpture of Mirabeau. Victor Hugo's monument was expected to face that of Mirabeau's, symbolically documenting the tumultuous path toward a secularized Panthéon. Mirabeau's death was the event that led to the first secularization of the building and Hugo's death was the event that inspired the last.

³⁶ Roos, "Rodin's Monument" 640.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

A Funeral Fit for a King

Despite the poet's dying wish for a modest service, his funeral can hardly be described as a modest affair. On the eve of his funeral, Sunday May 31, 1885, Hugo's casket was followed by a parade of loved ones and statesmen and taken to its temporary resting place under the Arc de Triomphe. Thousands of mourners flooded the Champs-Élysées to pay their last respects to one of France's greatest minds. The incredible volume of mourners who congregated for the event signifies the profound impact of Hugo's death and proves that Hugo had become a national symbol for political, creative, and intellectual freedom. Because Hugo came to have symbolic significance for the country, an allegorical depiction was the most expressive mode of representation for Rodin. Furthermore, the magnitude of the funeral suggests the importance of the commission for Rodin and for his career.

In honor of the event, Charles Garnier (1825-1898) had been commissioned to lavishly decorate the area.³⁹ The Arc was covered in sheets of black cloth while the surrounding area was filled with black banners listing Hugo's novels and poetry.⁴⁰ As the day filled with respectful and solemn mourners faded away, the evening presented itself as a more celebratory backdrop for those who wanted to honor Hugo's life in a less reserved and more hedonistic way. French author, Maurice Barrès (1862-1923) relays the events that transpired in the following description:

³⁹ Plottell 24.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Like all cults of the dead, the funeral exalted one's sense of life. For this corpse, the crowd conceived a grand concept. We felt smaller, and a strange fire flowed through one's veins. It was a beautiful as the docks of great ports, as violent as the tide, the strong stench of which strengthens us by filling us with desire. The benches of the Champs-Élysées, the shadows of its woods, were sites of an immense debauchery that lasted until dawn. The Paris night went outdoors. Except for its beacon, this uneasy world would have been in chaos. – A carnival? No, a coffin surrounded by humanity!...Night of May 31, 1885, a dissolute and pathetic night of vertigo, in which Paris was obscured with the vapors of her love for a relic. The great city may have been trying to compensate its loss. Did these men, these women have a hint of the burning chance whence genius stem? How many women gave themselves to lovers, to strangers, with the true fury of one seeking to become the mother of an immortal child? The children of Paris who were born in February 1886, nine months after this delirium, should be closely watched.⁴¹

As proven by this reaction, Victor Hugo's death inspired parades of ecstasy throughout Paris honoring the man who appeared to be the personification of genius. The mayhem is the result of the way in which Hugo was apotheosized by the nation and recalls celebrations of religious "cults." Rodin's *Hugo* sits alone with his muses and echoes the god-like perception of writer in that Rodin creates a super-human image of the writer who consults with the gods on his isolated island of higher thought. Therefore, the allegorical nature of Rodin's statue is able to capture the divine nature of Hugo's reputation.

After the night of sexual chaos, order was reestablished and Hugo's coffin was escorted to the Panthéon where it would be permanently housed. A multitude of people crowded around the Panthéon to witness the event (Fig. 5). Barrès

⁴¹ As quoted in *Ibid.*

described the significance of Hugo's body being transferred into the Panthéon for France:

From L'Étoile to the Panthéon, Victor Hugo comes forward, and everybody accompanies him. He was the pride of France, and now he enters its heart. The genius of our race now withdraws unto itself. After flourishing throughout the world, it now returns to its center. It will join the body of our tradition. From the Arc where the poet was the host of Caesar, we accompany him to the unsinkable Ark, transforming his excellence into the ideas that will henceforth stimulate French energy.⁴²

It was this energy that weighed on Rodin as he accepted the offer to create the monument that would mark the grave of such a colossal hero. Between the final secularization of the Panthéon and the death of Victor Hugo, France was coming together into a transformed entity. In order to understand the magnitude of such a commission for Rodin, it is necessary to understand to what degree Hugo was elevated among his contemporaries. How do you represent the "pride of France" or "the genius of our race?" It was no small task but Rodin knew he had to combine Hugo's intellectual ideals along with the aesthetic beauty of his works into one single monument that would immortalize and capture the spirit of such an intense individual. It was Rodin's responsibility to "plunge [into the] sublime depths where his hero resides" and to see Hugo "with the eyes of his soul."

Rodin and Hugo

It was the latter years of Hugo's life, when his popularity had reached

⁴² As quoted in Ibid 26.

an all time high that Rodin had his first encounter with the writer. In 1883, Rodin met Hugo and describes to his friend Henri Charles-Etienne Dujardin-Beaumetz his first impressions of the event: “He made a profound impression upon me. His eyes were magnificent. He seemed terrifying to me. He was probably affected by angry or hostile thoughts because his natural expression seemed that of a good man. I thought I had seen a French Jupiter. When I got to know him better, he seemed to be more like a Hercules”⁴³

Like many of his contemporaries, Rodin was mystified by the domineering presence of the great poet. Rodin’s initial reaction to Hugo’s personality is manifested in the super-human tone that permeates the monument. The physical strength of Hercules is distinctly sculpted in the nude figure of Hugo with his defined anatomy and powerful outstretched hand. The overall mythological comparisons were translated into the sculpture with three muses surround Hugo. Rodin also managed to evoke the “terrifying” presence he experienced by rendering a tense face contorted by a furrowed brow that clearly implied that the poet was “affected by angry hostile thoughts.”

Hugo was adamantly opposed to the idea of sitting for Rodin. Pierre-Jean David d’Angers had already done two busts of Hugo in 1837 and 1842 with which he was satisfied.⁴⁴ Eventually Hugo gave in to Rodin’s recurring requests and sat for Rodin but only on the condition that they would not have “formal

⁴³ Butler, 27.

⁴⁴ Plottell 35.

sittings” and that Rodin had to “keep his distance” while working.⁴⁵ Despite the fact that the artist was only permitted to do many quick sketches of the poet, this would still prove to have critical significance because it allowed him to have real life interactions with the poet, which would be very valuable a few years later when he was commissioned to do the posthumous monument. Rodin records the challenging experience:

I worked entire hours in the veranda of the hotel filled with flowers and green plants. I saw Victor Hugo sometimes, across the salon, cold and hard expression; he would also go and sit at the end of the room absorbed in thought...I placed myself beside him, following him with my eye, making quick sketches of him drawing as many profiles as I could on little squares of paper; he didn't look at me, but had the goodness not to dismiss me; he tolerated me. I made many drawings of the skull, I then compared those contours with those of the bust; thus I managed to execute it but with such difficulties, I extricated myself from them as best I could.⁴⁶

Later, Rodin continues to comment on the experience of sketching Hugo when he recalls, “I would go and look at him, and then, with my hand filled with the expression of an image which combined properties of Pan, Hercules, and Jupiter, I would go back again to memorize a feature a wrinkle or a fold of skin.”⁴⁷ This quote is extremely important because Rodin admits to his emphasis on his empirical findings by memorizing “a wrinkle or a fold of skin.” This is typical of Rodin because he always argued that to achieve truth one must go through nature as he states, “nature is the only medal that must be followed, since

⁴⁵ Roos, SC, 55.

⁴⁶ As quoted in Ibid.

⁴⁷ As quoted in Ibid.

she inspires us and gives us the truth of the impression, shows us the truth of forms, and when we copy it with sincerity, she shows us the means of uniting and expressing them.”⁴⁸ Moreover, the latter quote also demonstrates how Rodin’s own interpretations of Hugo’s character are beginning to form in his imagination by associating Hugo with Pan, Hercules, and Jupiter.

From these sketches and sessions, Rodin was able to produce a bust of Hugo, which the poet dismissed. It was not until September 18, 1889 four years after Hugo’s death that Rodin received the commission from the French government for the monument to Hugo that was to be installed in the Panthéon for which he would receive 75,000 francs.⁴⁹

Rodin did not send a preliminary sketch to the committee until March 22, 1890. Jane Mayo Roos in her article entitled, “Rodin’s Monument to Victor Hugo: Art and Politics in the Third Republic” claims that she was able to discern the preliminary design of the monument based on archival research.⁵⁰ In the sketch, the poet was seated on the rocky shore of Guernesey surrounded by the three muses: the muse of *Justice vengeresse*, the muse of *Les Châtiments*, and the

⁴⁸ Rodin, 15.

⁴⁹ Roos, “Rodin’s Monument to Victor Hugo,” 643.

⁵⁰ The letter from which this information was taken was written on March 24, 1890 by Rodin and was reproduced and translated in Roos’ article, “Steichen’s Choice” pg. 72. “As you have done me the honor of asking me for it, I am sending you a note on the sketch for the monument that you have commissioned for me, and that the committee of Fine arts has accepted.”

“Victor Hugo is seated on the rocks of Guernsey, lashed by waves, three muses inspire him, the one in the middle, most vehement in arms and visage is Avenging Justice, the muse of *Les Châtiments*[:] the one on the left the muse of *Les Orientales* [:] the one on the right is the most ideal. The whole rests on a base that I assume fairly low.”

muse of *Les Orientales*.⁵¹ The committee did not accept Rodin's sketch because they did not feel as though it complimented the Mirabeau monument or fit in the space of the Panthéon.⁵²

Rodin started on plans for another version, one that may fit the criteria of the committee but as art historian Ruth Butler observed in her article, "Rodin's Victor Hugo Monument," "The politics of the whole enterprise were not right, and somewhere along the way the government lost interest in both Rodin monuments."⁵³ Hugo prepared a marble version of his model for the committee and exhibited the monument in the Salon of 1901.⁵⁴ It was not until June 18, 1964 that Rodin's monument was permanently installed in a public location. During World War II, the Germans destroyed a monument of Victor Hugo by Ernest Barrias (1841-1905) leaving Paris without a monument to its highly esteemed poet.⁵⁵ An art historian by the name of Raymond Escholier proposed that the city use Rodin's monument. It was eventually agreed upon that Rodin's monument was to be installed on the corner of *Avenue Victor Hugo* and *Avenue Henri Martin* in close proximity to the *Place Victor Hugo*.⁵⁶

The overall public reaction to the monument was not necessarily a consistent one. A contemporary German art historian to Rodin by the name of

⁵¹ Ibid, 644.

⁵² Butler, 16.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid 19.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Julius Meier-Graefe in his book, *Modern Art* argued that the monument was a great success. He wrote, “It is the glorification of the mind, universal as the art of Phidias, the glorification of the body.”⁵⁷ For Meier-Graefe, the monument accomplished everything it set out to do, i.e. the visual representation of the immaterial idea or genius. Rodin was able to achieve what David d’Angers described: he was able to plunge into the “sublime depths where his hero resides.” Because of such an accomplishment Meier-Graefe argues, “The man who could conceive such a thing may scorn all honors; he can withdraw from the world and from mankind; all humanity is within him.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ As quoted in Ruth Butler, *Rodin in Perspective*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1980) 135.
⁵⁸ Ibid.

Chapter 2: Monument to Balzac

Like the *Monument to Victor Hugo*, Rodin's *Monument to Honoré de Balzac* came out of the preoccupation with genius that permeated nineteenth-century France. Naomi Schor observes in her article, "Pensive Texts and Thinking Statues: Balzac with Rodin," that "The pensiveness that pervades the Balzacian universe is arresting because it constitutes a distinctive trait in nineteenth-century French fiction whose protagonists are in the main little given to the state of thoughtfulness;" therefore it is only appropriate that the author who emphasizes the importance of contemplation and intellectual thought through his characters should be honored in conjunction with the greater cultural celebration of genius.⁵⁹

While Rodin was dealing with the political and bureaucratic frustrations associated with the *Monument to Hugo*, he was simultaneously dealing with a similar situation with his *Monument to Balzac*. Rodin received the commission from the *Société des gens de lettres* in 1891 but only after a somewhat questionable decision made by the society's president at the time, Émile Zola (1840-1902). The purpose of this chapter is to explain the events of the commission as well as the political controversies surrounding it. I will also comment on the ideological relationship between Zola and Rodin and compare their statements on art and the role of the artist. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate how their intellectual bond resulted in the decision to create a

⁵⁹ Naomi Schor, "Pensive Texts and Thinking Statues: Balzac with Rodin," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 27, no. 2 (Winter, 2001) 240-241.

realistic portrait of Balzac rather than an allegorical representation, as in the case of Victor Hugo.

The Commission:

In 1880, Émile Zola learned that plans for a monument honoring French writer, Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870) were well underway by the sculptor, painter, and printmaker, Gustave Doré. Zola reacted strongly to this information because it had only been ten years since Dumas' death, whereas it had already been thirty years since the death of Balzac and no such plans for honoring the author of the *Comédie Humaine* had even been discussed.⁶⁰ Therefore without hesitation, Zola proposed such a monument but still no immediate action took place. In November of 1883 a day after the Dumas monument was unveiled, France's prestigious literary society, the Société des Gens de Lettres finally announced that they intended to commission a monument to immortalize the great Balzac and apologized for the thirty-year delay.⁶¹

Rodin was not the society's first choice, as seen by the fact that in 1888 they initially commissioned Henri Chapu (1833-1891) who was both a member of the Academy and taught at the École des Beaux-arts.⁶² However, Chapu was

⁶⁰ Jacques de Caso, "Rodin and the Cult of Balzac," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 106, No. 735 (June 1964) 280.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² The Société des Gens des Letters was formed while the liberal Louis-Philippe ruled France. It was a group of writers who came together in order to protect their works from being stolen and from illegitimate reproduction. The first members included George Sand, Théophile Gautier, Victor Hugo, Honoré de Balzac, and Alexandre Dumas. Balzac was actually their second president so that it is significant that they would be the ones to inaugurate such a project. Henri Chapu received much acclaim for his bust of Alexandre Dumas the elder.

unable to complete the project due to his unexpected death.⁶³ This event prolonged the project and evoked even more frustration among those who were in favor of the monument. In 1889, Tours, the city of Balzac's birth, unveiled the first monument in all of France that honored the author. To some less conservative members of the society this was an outrage considering that the county's capital had not yet erected a monument to such an influential French writer. Therefore, the Tours monument "provided the necessary stimulus for a decision on the Parisian monument."⁶⁴

By 1891 Emile Zola was the current president of the society, and he took it upon himself to take control of the project. This particular commission had a large amount of personal significance for Zola because he viewed the monument to Balzac as an opportunity to promote his own revolutionary literary credo, naturalism. According to Ruth Butler in her book, *Rodin the Shape of Genius*, that Zola admired Balzac because he "was responsible for extricating modern French literature from the quagmire of artificiality and turning it to observation and reality."⁶⁵ Zola had found his literary prototype and considered it his own personal responsibility to provide Paris with a monument commemorating the preeminent novelist.

⁶³ Hargrove, *The Statues of Paris*, pg. 158. Balzac was the *Société des Gens de Lettres'* second president. In his article "Rodin and the Cult of Balzac," Jacques de Caso writes in a footnote that only two drawings remain illustrating Chapu's idea for the project. Both drawings reflects a similar idea to Rodin's Hugo monument in that Chapu envisions Balzac to be surrounded by allegorical figures. In the first drawing, Balzac is surrounded by two allegorical figures and in the second, one figure sits next to him as he gazes into a mirror. Caso 281.

⁶⁴ Caso, 280.

⁶⁵ Ruth Butler, *Rodin: The Shape of Genius*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 252.

Rodin was aware of the coveted commission and realized the impact it could have on his career were he to receive it. In addition to Rodin's exceptional reputation and ability to "register a beautiful summary" of his subjects, Rodin's chances at getting the commission were much in his favor because he had already established a strong intellectual alliance with Émile Zola, the most powerful figure involved in the project. Furthermore, Rodin had the support of such friends as Gustave Geffroy, a writer and associated with the Société des Gens de Lettres who also expressed his interest in giving the commission to Rodin when he pleaded with the artist to be patient in a letter from June 29, 1889 in which he states, "Of course I want you to be the sculptor of the Balzac. I am sure you are the one who would know best how to conjure up the great name of the century and to register a beautiful summary of *La Comédie Humaine* on a pedestal. We should just wait and be helpful to the project."⁶⁶

Even though the first known meeting between Zola and Rodin was not until February 1889 when the former visited the latter's studio, both Zola and Rodin shared a similar social circle so it is very probably that they had come into contact with each other before that day.⁶⁷ In any case, Zola was familiar with Rodin's work and his approach to art and decided that he would be the best choice for the monument even though other such artists as Marquet de Vasselot were also contending for the job. As a member of the Société des Gens de Lettres, Vasselot was a fierce competitor and had acquired much support among the other

⁶⁶ As quoted in Butler, *The Shape of Genius*, 253.

⁶⁷ Butler, *Rodin: The Shape of Genius* 253.

members of the group.⁶⁸ Zola claims that he wanted the decision to remain democratic but in the end it was not an entirely unanimous one. By the summer of 1891, Rodin had been named the sculptor of the Balzac monument.⁶⁹ Zola's influence over the committee's choice was evident to many as critic Frantz Jourdain wrote in a letter addressed to Zola, "It is certain that if you were not president of the Société des Gens de Lettres, Rodin would never have had this commission."⁷⁰ Even Rodin recognized the role in which Zola played in the prolonged bureaucratic debacle when he humbly expresses his gratitude, "It's thanks to you, here I am the sculptor of Balzac and patronized by Zola! I feel surrounded in the most formidable fashion."⁷¹

Rodin and Zola:

Some argue that Zola's unyielding decision to commission Rodin for the Balzac monument was motivated by his literary agenda, i.e. to champion naturalism and to announce it as the dominant literary style. Rodin was a good choice for such a plan because the artist's ideological approach to art and sculpture mirrors that of naturalism. Naturalism calls for an honest and unembellished representation of reality based on scientific discoveries and

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Albert Elsen, "Rodin's Naked Balzac," *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 109, no. 776 (Nov. 1967) 606.

⁷⁰ As quoted in Ibid.

⁷¹ As quoted in Butler, *Rodin: The Shape of Genius*, 254. From a statement written by Rodin on July 9, 1891.

empirical experience. Zola and the naturalists advocated the inferiority of any literature that employed idealized and symbolic modes of representing reality. Unlike the *Monument to Victor Hugo*, an allegorical and symbolically charged representation of Balzac would not have fulfilled Zola's agenda for the monument seeing as how he rejected such modes of representation and considered Balzac to have done the same. Therefore, a realistic portrait of Balzac was a more efficient and exacting choice for a monument that would serve as the manifestation of naturalist principles.

In Rodin's writings on art, he admits that he too "reproduces only what reality spontaneously offers [him]."⁷² Rodin also goes on to profess his belief in that Nature is the only source of truth and the only way to ascertain that truth is through "observation" just as his literary contemporaries claimed. Rodin admits, "I obey Nature in everything, and I never pretend to command her. My only ambition is to be servilely faithful to her."⁷³ Zola and Rodin's intellectual bond was so strong that Rodin even came to be known as the "so-called 'Zola of sculpture,' and therefore he was a flawless candidate for partaking in Zola's plan to create an iconic image for the man who laid the foundations for naturalism."⁷⁴

Furthermore, Rodin's and Zola's statements strongly align themselves to Balzac's own convictions concerning the responsibility of the artist and the limitations of merely copying nature. In Balzac's novella, *The Unknown*

⁷² Auguste Rodin, *Rodin on Art*, (New York: Horizon Press, 1971) 30.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Naomi Schor, "Pensive Texts and Thinking Statues with Rodin," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 27, no. 2 (Winter, 2001) 243.

Masterpiece, he immediately announces his artistic views in the beginning during a discussion between the old man and Porbus. The old man describes the difference between an artist and a copier:

You all think you've done what needs to be done when you've drawn a face correctly and put everything in the proper place according to the laws of anatomy...you think you've succeeded in copying nature, you imagine yourselves to be painters and you fancy you have stolen God's secret from him!...Ha! To be a great poet it is not enough to know your syntax to perfection and to avoid grammatical errors...Here is life, movement-there only stillness; in every piece life and death struggle with each other: here is a woman, there is a statue, there again a corpse. Your creation is unfinished. You were able to breathe only a portion of your soul into your cherished work.⁷⁵

Balzac's old man advocates the artist's responsibility to give life to his work and to put his soul into the work. Both Rodin and Zola express similar ideas, which helped to establish a united foundation for producing an honest portrait of Balzac and the themes that he conveys in his novels. Furthermore, while Balzac argues that an artist should permeate his work with a life force- a soul, and not solely rely on copying nature, he does also emphasize nature as being the point of departure for artists and calls for them to translate a tangible reality as opposed to non-existing idealizations. For this reason, a standing portrait is an appropriate compositional choice to represent the novelist because it portrays a realistic image of Balzac, one that derives from nature and coincides with his personal credo.

⁷⁵ Honoré de Balzac, *The Unknown Masterpiece* (London: The Menard Press, 1988) 11-12.

In Zola's art criticism, namely in his essay, "Edouard Manet: Art at the Moment," he mirrors Balzac's sentiments. Zola argues that artistic creativity must be a combination of both nature and the artist's own personality. He praises Manet for his individuality and argues that Manet achieves artistic originality because he is able to convey his personal "translation" of reality rather than merely passively mimicking nature. Demonstrating the influence of science on his theories, Zola succinctly outlines his views concerning the function of art as he defines it by stating, "a work of art is always the combination of man, the variable element, and, and nature, the fixed element."⁷⁶

Like Zola, Rodin expresses a similar system of beliefs in that the artist's responsibility is twofold; he states, "the artist does not see Nature as she appears to the vulgar, because his emotion reveals to him the hidden truth is beneath appearances."⁷⁷ Both Zola and Rodin preach that the artist distinguishes himself by delving deep within his subject and bypassing any superficial perceptions. Rodin clarifies this point by describing "a mediocre man" who copies nature "will never produce a work of art: because he really looks without *seeing*, and though he may have noted each detail minutely, the result will be flat and without character."⁷⁸

In this instance, Rodin's notion of "seeing" is synonymous to his assertion that "A true artist" always incorporates his "soul" into his work, which echoes

⁷⁶ Emile Zola, "Edouard Manet: Art in the Moment," 428.

⁷⁷ Rodin 33

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Balzac's conversation between the old man and Porbus. And like Zola argues when he says, "I accept all works of art on the same basis, as manifestations of the human spirit," it is the spiritual dimension that constitutes creativity and beauty.⁷⁹ Rodin was able to actually implement his, Zola's, and Balzac's shared view concerning the importance of imbuing art with a sense of the human spirit in his Balzac monument. Rodin was careful to recreate an honest physical description of the artist but he also managed to permeate the monument with a sense of Balzac's personality, especially in the way in which Rodin rendered his face. The deep hollows of Balzac's eyes recall his contemplative nature. His tall stance and intense gaze out into the world evoke a sense of stoicism and insight. In other words, Rodin created an uncanny physical likeness of Balzac while also capturing the existence of a personality and boldly announcing, "Here is life."

In addition to political self-interest, it is evident why Zola chose Rodin to be the sculptor of such an important monument. Not only would Rodin be dealing with a subject that promoted naturalism but he also would literally implement Zola's own theories on art through the creation of the sculpture. Zola was confident that Rodin's final result would be permeated with Rodin's creative soul and it would be the physical proof that "Beauty lives within us, not outside ourselves."⁸⁰ After the final monument was presented to the Society, Rodin claimed, "I tried in Balzac, as in Victor Hugo, to render in sculpture what was not photographic," proving that he attempted at delving past the superficial and

⁷⁹ Zola 423.

⁸⁰ Ibid 422.

reproducing the “sublime depths where his hero resides.”⁸¹

The Monument:

The society had anticipated a model for the project by February of 1893 but like the Hugo project, the perfectionist Rodin did not meet this deadline either much to the disappointment of the society.⁸² The press jumped on this opportunity to comment on the situation: “We had survived for 24 years without a statue of Balzac, but it seemed impossible to wait for two more days: Our patience was exhausted; Balzac was urgent.”⁸³

Rodin’s approach to designing the Balzac’s monument was significant because he did so in a way that conformed to both Zola’s naturalism theories and Balzac’s literary style Rodin wanted to take his time before sending the society a model because unlike the case with Victor Hugo, Rodin had never met Balzac in person and therefore had no first-hand understanding of his character. At this point in Rodin’s career, he had of course been exposed to the writer’s *oeuvre* or as Rainer Maria Rilke describes, “he read his works again and again.”⁸⁴ In order to make up for his deficiency, Rodin did a lot of personal research in order to recreate a likeness that realistically resembled the author both in terms of his exterior and interior. Rodin traveled to Balzac’s native city of Tours to study the physical traits of the locals, he went to Balzac’s tailor to gather information

⁸¹ As quoted in Butler, *Perspectives*, 92.

⁸² Elsen 606.

⁸³ Ibid 159.

⁸⁴ Rainer Maria Rilke, “Auguste Rodin,” *Auguste Rodin: Readings on his Life and Work*, (Englewood cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965) 141.

concerning his body type and size, and he collected any photographs he could have found of his subject.⁸⁵ Rodin was also familiar with descriptions written by some of Balzac's contemporaries like Homophile Gautier. Perhaps one of the most useful and memorable was the essay written by Lamartine:

It was the face of an element: big head, hair disheveled over his collar and cheeks, like a wave which the scissors never clipped...he was big, thick, square at the base and shoulders....There was so much soul that he carried himself lightly, gaily. So that his body was like a flexible covering and not a burden. This weight seemed to add and not detract from his strength. His short arms gestured with ease and he chatted the way an orator speaks...his large fat hands responded expressively to his thought. Such was the man in his robust frame...his black eyes were as piercing as darts...his rosy cheeks were full...the nose was well modeled although a little long; the ample lips were gracefully shaped and turned up at the corners....the head often rested to one side on the neck and then with an heroic pride straightened itself as he became animated in the discussion. That expressive face, from which one could not detach one's gaze, was entirely charming and fascinating. But its predominant characteristic, even more than its intelligence, was the goodness it communicated...No passion of hatred or envy could have been expressed on that face; it was impossible for it to be anything but kind...it was a loving kindness, aware of itself and of others.⁸⁶

By going to Tours and gathering as much information about Balzac as he could and reviewing photographs and sketches, Rodin took an empirical approach so that he could recreate the most realistic posthumous portrait of the novelist as possible. His overall approach reflects the emphasis on realism that pervades the

⁸⁵ Levkoff, 104.

⁸⁶ As quoted in Elsen, 606.

monument and distinguishes it from the more figurative and poetic tone of the *Monument to Victor Hugo*.

Because Rodin opted for such a fitting yet onerous means of collecting data for the sculpture, he was not able to work fast enough by the committee's standards and kept them waiting for a final result. On December 18, 1892 Zola grew impatient and announced to Rodin that he was coming over to his studio to review a sketch of monument. An article in *Le Temps* from January 11, 1892 posted a description of the sketch viewed by Zola and eventually by the rest of the committee which said that Balzac was standing "with his arms crossed, head high, and dressed in his legendary monk's robe tied by a cord at the waist."⁸⁷ The committee was pleased with the sketch and bid Rodin their approval.

The projected unveiling for the monument was supposed to be May 1, 1893; however, Rodin was unable to make this deadline. He could sense some pressure from the Society and in a letter to Zola he wrote, "I assure you I work on nothing but *Balzac*."⁸⁸ By 1894, Rodin was no longer protected by the presidency of Zola, and he created quite a stir among members the Society as he asked for repeated extensions on the project so much so that the society threatened "legal action."⁸⁹ The criticism Rodin received at this point in the commission was

⁸⁷ As quoted in Butler, *Rodin: The Shape of Genius*, 255. Butler also includes another quote from a Parisian paper, *Éclair*, on January 20, 1892 which proves the general surprise over how much freedom the Society has given Rodin for the project compared other public art committees in the past. In an article entitled, "Deux monuments: Balzac et Victor Hugo, par Auguste Rodin the author wrote, "1.) the maquette is eloquent and in the grand style of sculpture, 2.) the sculptor will be allowed the freedom to finish the sculpture as he feels best, with no further formal examination or criticism deemed necessary."

⁸⁸ Ibid 285.

probably exacerbated by the fact that Zola's own enemies within the Society were being less discreet about their animosity toward the champion of naturalism.⁹⁰

Despite the public appearance of failure, Rodin was actually making slow but steady progress in his studio. Based on his research on the author, Rodin proceeded to make multiple studies of different versions of the Balzac: the *Naked Balzac*, *Balzac in a Dominican Robe*, and *Balzac in a Frockcoat*. The final version of is of the robust Balzac dressed in the coat that the novelist would wear when he wrote. Even though these were all different versions, there was still an underlying factor that remained constant as with the *Monument to Victor Hugo*, i.e. they were all "hymns to genius."⁹¹

In "Pensive Texts and Thinking Statues: Balzac with Rodin," Schor gives a rather less traditional interpretation of how Rodin expresses genius in his *Balzac*. In her Freudian analysis of the statue, she argues that in the final version, Balzac's "phallic" posture refers to a masculine genius that in the other versions had been more explicit. In such earlier versions as the *Naked Balzac*, she claims that Balzac "laid bare holds in his hand a powerful organ, rooted in the earth, exposing the source of his genius and creativity."⁹² I would like to argue that such interpretations reduce the nineteenth-century notion of genius to a basic theoretical model that overlooks the true intentions of Rodin. As in the tradition David d'Angers who claimed that the artist must descend into the "sublime depths

⁸⁹ De Caso, 280.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Schor, 243.

⁹² Ibid.

where his hero resides,” Rodin was searching for a universal genius that transcended the novelist’s gender. Rather than deriving from the physical, Rodin’s notion of genius sprouted from the soul of Balzac and was able to elucidate truths about all of humanity.

Even contemporary responses were able to extract the interiority of Balzac’s genius as represented by Rodin. Poet, Rainer Maria Rilke noticed a similar “Rodin has seized upon the essence of Balzac’s being, has not confined himself to the limitations of his personality but has gone beyond into his most extreme and distant possibilities.”⁹³ Rilke’s reaction to the monument further supports the David d’Angers claim and proves that Balzac’s genius cannot be reduced to a creativity based on gender. Frank Harris who reviewed the monument on July 2, 1898 further emphasizes the point. Harris describes a dynamic experience with the monument and states, “I became aware of Rodin’s meaning. Looked at from the front, this statue shows the soul of Balzac, the boundless self-assertion of the great workman, the flaming spirit of one given to labour and triumph.”⁹⁴

The Unveiling

Seven years after Rodin had received the commission, he finally was able finish the *Monument to Balzac* in time for the 100th anniversary of Balzac’s birth

⁹³ Rilke, 142.

⁹⁴ As quoted in Butler, *Perspectives*, 99. Frank Harris, “A Masterpiece of Modern Art,” *The Saturday Review*, July 2, 1898.

in 1899. Not much documentation exists concerning the progression and preparation of the monument between 1895 and its unveiling in 1898.⁹⁵ The public was aware of much of the artistic tension surrounding the *Monument to Balzac* and therefore prompted much excitement when Rodin announced that he would exhibit it in the Salon of 1898. In *Le Vernissage* (May 1st 1898) Jean Villemer described the anticipation surrounding the unveiling at the Salon: “People are suffocated and pushed about and don’t know where to go...And no one could talk of anything but Rodin’s *Balzac*.”⁹⁶ After the monument was revealed, there were mixed reactions among the general public which were also recorded by Villemer: “There are more than 2,000 people in front of the Balzac of Rodin and each gives his own opinion. I am obligated to reproduce faithfully these impressions:

-Admirable!

-That is to say that I have found Rodin too inward until this moment’ and now I understand him.

-But it’s appalling.”⁹⁷

Unfortunately for Rodin, the unveiling was a disastrous event his career because after being placed on public view the Société des Gens de Lettres officially rejected the monument, “The committee of the Société des Gens de

⁹⁵ De Caso 283.

⁹⁶ As quoted in Butler, *Perspectives*, 92.

⁹⁷ As quoted in *Ibid*.

Lettres...refuses to recognize the statue of *Balzac*.⁹⁸ For Rodin, this was the second large commission that was not completed in the span of 10 years. Rodin was deeply crushed by this event and made a public defense of his Monument on May 12, 1898:

There is no doubt that the decision of the Société is a financial disaster for me, but my work as an artist will continue to be my supreme satisfaction...I tried in Balzac, as in Victor Hugo, to render in sculpture what was not photographic. People may find errors in my Balzac; the artist does not always realize his dream; but I believe in the truth of my principles and Balzac rejected or not, is nevertheless in the line of demarcation between commercial sculpture and the art of sculpture as we no longer have it in Europe. My principle is to imitate not only form but life. I search in nature for this and I amplify it by exaggerating the holes and limps in order to gain more light, after which I search for a synthesis of the whole.⁹⁹

This defense is yet another example of Rodin's unwavering ability to stand up for his art without compromising his vision for the sake of his salary and public reputation. That is to say, this statement proves that it was Rodin's personality and interpretation of Balzac that pervaded the ending result rather than that of the Société des Gens de Lettres. Furthermore, it also reiterates the ideological emphasis on "synthesizing" the natural with the personal interpretation of the artist. In both the instance of the Victor Hugo and of the Balzac monuments, the interpretation is a key element because that was the means by which Rodin was able to capture the essence of Balzac and his works. Had Rodin compromised his

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

vision for the monument, he would have run the risk of recreating an inferior version, one that would not achieve the superiority that Rilke notes, “This was Balzac in the fullness of his productivity, the founder of generations, the waster of fates. This was the man whose eyes were those of a seer, whose visions would have filled the world had it been empty. This was the Balzac that Creation itself had formed to manifest itself.”¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Rilke, 141

Chapter 3: Hugo and Balzac: Literary Interpretations

While the preoccupation with genius was a cultural phenomenon, the notion of the “idea” also intrigued both Hugo and Balzac as Naomi Schor remarks, “The pensiveness that pervades the Balzacian universe is arresting a distinctive trait in nineteenth-century French fiction whose protagonists are in the main little given to a state of thoughtfulness....Only Hugo, the great contemplator and self-styled thinker, escapes this rule.”¹⁰¹ After having established that both the *Monument to Victor Hugo* and the *Monument to Balzac* came out of the same desire to promote French genius throughout the country, I would now like to begin to analyze the ways in which they depart stylistically and aesthetically.

In the last chapter of this thesis, I would like to attack the literary interpretations of the works of Balzac and Hugo and apply them to the final monuments to see how their works could have influenced Rodin’s artistic interpretations and aesthetic choices. Gustave Geffroy expressed in the aforementioned letter to Rodin that he was sure that the sculptor would “register a beautiful summary of *La Comédie Humaine* on a pedestal,” indicating that the monument would participate in a dialogue with the works of Balzac. For the remainder of this chapter, I will consider aspects of the poetry of Victor Hugo and specific works from Balzac’s *La Comédie Humaine* and apply them to the iconic images Rodin has provided.

While both the Balzac and the Hugo monuments are unquestionably the product of Rodin’s ingenious and innovative style, the artist does rely on two traditional templates for the monuments. The reclining contemplative Victor Hugo

¹⁰¹ Schor 241.

surrounded by three muses evokes the allegorical tradition, which was ubiquitous during the first half of the century. On a very basic level, the fact that Rodin turns to such a representation of the poet appears to be an appropriate choice considering that the allegory was a celebrated figurative device among the romantics for which Hugo championed. However, I would like to delve deeper into this issue and analyze the use of the allegory in Hugo's own work in order to make a stronger argument for Rodin's choice.

In his *Monument to Balzac*, Rodin abandons the allegory for the standing portrait, which during the mid to latter-half of the century was the "most popular format...firmly rooted in the tradition defined by David D'Angers for both historical and contemporary personalities."¹⁰² While the allegory celebrates the idea, the standing portrait demonstrates the power of the individual and the embodiment of genius. The examination of the works of both Balzac and Hugo could elucidate the reasons behind Rodin's conscientious decision in using the two different modes of representation.

Les Contemplations

According to correspondences written by Rodin and the preliminary sketches of the *Monument to Victory Hugo*, the sculpture depicts Hugo resting on the rocky shore of Guernsey during his exile between 1855 and 1870. His period outside of France proved to be a very prolific and fruitful episode in his literary career; it is no wonder that Rodin considers this to be the quintessential setting in which to immortalize Hugo's staggering genius. Hugo published volumes of poetry, plays and novels during his political refuge including *Les Châtiments* (1853), *Les*

¹⁰² Hargrove, "The Public Monument," 31.

Contemplations (1856), *La Légende des siècles*, *Les Misérables* (1862), and *L'Homme qui rit* (1869) to name only a few. Because the monument recalls Guernsey, I would like to argue that the allegorical content of the *Monument to Victor Hugo* relies heavily on both political and literary interpretations

Hugo fled France when Louis-Napoléon assumed absolute power, completely shattering any possibility of a French Republic. In addition to leaving the country, Hugo's fury and disdain over the newly established regime was ardently expressed in his book of poetry, *Les Châtiments*. Because Rodin's vision of Hugo places the poet on the unruly shores of Guernsey with the tumultuous waves crashing against the rock, I would like to argue that Rodin's sculpture becomes an allegory for intellectual freedom. Rodin's ability to render the disobedience of nature reflects Hugo's refusal to comply with the despotic manner with which Louis-Napoléon seized power. Sitting on the rock, Hugo is literally elevated by the terrain of Guernsey to heroic heights based on his unwillingness to compromise his political principles.

In terms of a literary analysis, choosing to memorialize Hugo's legacy in an allegorical format is a significant choice for Rodin especially when considering his first publication at Guernsey, *Les Contemplations*, in which Hugo himself employs the fundamental concept of allegory as his point of departure. In the preface to *Les Contemplations*, Hugo announces that the compilation of poems should be read from beginning to end just as one would read a novel.¹⁰³ To further emphasize the point in a letter to Émile Deschanel, Hugo asserts that "the

¹⁰³ Victor Hugo, *Les Contemplations*, (Paris: Gallimard, 194) 27. In the opening paragraph Hugo writes, "Ce livre doit être lu comme on lirait le livre d'un mort."

first verse is meaningless until one has read the last” and considers a poem to be both the structure of the work, “La pyramide,” and the passageway, “la voûte,” leading to the meaning.¹⁰⁴ Hugo insists upon this reading because the narrative nature of the volumes serves as a “soul’s memoir” that grapples with the “events” and “sufferings” of the author’s past twenty-five years centered around the death of his daughter, Léopoldine, in 1843.¹⁰⁵

Hugo “poetizes his personal history” in order to create a universal biography of a man’s soul.¹⁰⁶ In doing so, he turns his own life into a romantic allegory and creates “metaphysical significance” for the events in his life.¹⁰⁷ Suzanne Nash discusses this process in her book, *Les Contemplations of Victor Hugo: An Allegory of the Creative Process*: “Hugo places himself intentionally within a didactic allegorical tradition. In his preface, he informs the reader that he is telling the story of human destiny and describes the traditional allegorical theme of man’s voyage from life to death and redemption.”¹⁰⁸ Therefore if in his own body of work, Hugo situates himself within the literary tradition of allegorical representation, it is appropriate for Rodin to participate in the same

¹⁰⁴ The translations are my own and excerpts from the letter were reprinted in Suzanne Nash, *Les Contemplations of Victor Hugo: An Allegory of the Creative Process* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) 16. The excerpt from which this was taken: “*Les Contemplations* sont un livre qu’il faut lire tout entire pour le comprendre...Le premier vers n’a de sens complet qu’après qu’on a lu le dernier. Le poème est une pyramide au dehors, une voûte au dedans. Pyramide du temple, voûte de sépulcre. Or dans des edifices de ce genre, voûte et pyramide, toutes les pierres se tiennent.”

¹⁰⁵ Hugo “Preface” 27.

¹⁰⁶ Nash, 15

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid 18.

trend.

Nash also discusses an essay Hugo wrote soon after he published *Les Contemplations* entitled, *Philosophie, commencement d'un livre*, in which Hugo discusses the act of contemplation and describes the stages of the creative process. Hugo outlines the three stages as follows: the first stage is a highly stimulating period of observation during which the contemplator actively observes the “magnificence of creation;” although this period quickly transitions into what Hugo refers to as the thinking stage.¹⁰⁹ This stage quickly transforms the innocent enthusiasm of observation into an overwhelming feeling of alienation and separation from the external world.¹¹⁰ The final stage is classified as the act of praying and during this stage the contemplator is able to reunite with the external world with a sense of “rediscov[ery] of natural order.”¹¹¹

For the purpose of Rodin’s monument, I would like to focus on the period of alienation for the contemplator. Again the location of Guernsey plays a vital role in interpreting Rodin’s monument. Rodin depicts Hugo in exile, i.e. displaced from society. Hugo’s physical alienation therefore can be interpreted figuratively as the second stage of the creative process. Rodin heightens the sense of contemplation by the intense expression on Hugo’s face. Hugo gazes downward completely avoiding any interaction with the viewer, which signifies a clear detachment from the physical world. His gaze looks out into the sea which is

¹⁰⁹ Ibid 22.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

yet another setting devoid of any human presence. His gaze into an empty abyss further emphasizes his contemplation of philosophical matters that are greater than human existence. Therefore, through this sense of alienation the *Monument to Victor Hugo* becomes an allegory for the creative process and the act of contemplation as defined by Hugo, himself.

Finally, the last element of the monument that has yet to be discussed in great detail is the three muses that surround Hugo. In 1890, the documents surrounding the commission identify two out of the three muses as being the muse of *Les Châtiments* (center) and the muse of *Les Orientales* (left); however the third is left unidentified only described as being the “most ideal.”¹¹² I would like to argue that the third, unidentified muse represents *Les Contemplations*. However I acknowledge that it is difficult to interpret and to identify these figures with much certainty because throughout the design process, the three figures went through a series of metamorphoses. Such scholars as Roos argue that we can only conclude that the muses “existed as generalized ciphers- signs of Hugo’s inner life” because of their inconsistent presence and form.¹¹³

Although one is unable to know for certainty, we can speculate based on the letter from 1890 in which Rodin identifies the other two as being personifications of two of Hugo’s volumes of poetry. Jeanine Plottel also argues that the third muse comes out of the poems written in *Les Contemplations* and for this reason she calls it the “Tragic Muse.” She argues that while at Guemsey, Hugo concluded, “light- illumination in the mystic sense- could be attained only

¹¹² Roos, SC 72.

¹¹³ Ibid 72.

through darkness, by the transfiguration of death and mourning.”¹¹⁴ Therefore in the monument, if Rodin depicts Hugo at Guernsey, would it not make sense that the sculptor would include a muse that reflected the revelations Hugo experienced while on the island? Such a representation would heighten the overall significance of his exile.

Balzac and the Standing Portrait:

While an allegorical representation provided a multi-faceted interpretation of Hugo’s genius and romantic ideals, the same format would not have been as fruitful for Honoré de Balzac, the literary marvel who prefigured Naturalism and explored the possibilities of realistic renderings of society. In his seminal novel, *Le Père Goriot* (1835), Balzac begins by providing his readers with a meticulous description of both Madame Vauquer’s boarding house, the stage on which his drama unfolds and of the protagonists who will participate in his drama. His introduction to Mme. Vauquer is as follows:

Madame Vauquer is about fifty years old, and she resembles *all women who have had a peck of troubles*. She has the glassy eye and innocent air of a procuress ready with a show of virtuous indignation to squeeze a client for some extra payment, and she is, in fact, ready to lend herself to any shift that may make her path in life smoother...all the same she is a good woman at heart.¹¹⁵

Balzac’s intensely descriptive language and precise diction provides a visual image that is practically as vivid as a painted portrait. From the beginning in

¹¹⁴ Plottell 39.

¹¹⁵ Honoré de Balzac, *Old Goriot* (London: Penguin Books, 1951) 32.

Le Père Goriot, Balzac similarly describes the other characters in the novel and demonstrates the importance of physical appearance. For the remainder of this section, I would like to argue that there is a striking parallel between the verbal portraits Balzac presents of his protagonists and the way in which Rodin chooses to portray the author in his final monument in that both Rodin and Balzac insist upon relationship between exterior appearance and interior presence.

Through the description of Madame Vauquer's "glassy eye and innocent air," Balzac's reliance on physiognomy becomes clear. He demonstrates the significance of physical appearance and how the tangible world serves as a gateway leading to more profound understandings of human nature. In the case of Madame Vauquer, Balzac establishes a connection between her "glassy eye and innocent air" and her capacity for deception just like a "procuress ready with a show of virtuous indignation to squeeze a client for some extra payment."

Balzac's creative approach is different from that of Hugo in that the former immediately confronts reality and social encounters as his form of a contemplative experience, whereas Hugo retreats from society in his state of contemplative alienation. For this reason, an allegorical representation of Balzac would neither compliment nor reveal the novelist's creative agenda because allegories are idealizations that foreground immaterial ideas rather than the tangible reality. Therefore similar to the descriptions in his novels, a standing portrait for Balzac emphasizes the exterior appearance of the

novelist but also guides the viewer to a greater understanding of the interior workings of Balzac's genius.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Rodin was unable to complete any preliminary live studies of Balzac due to the novelist's death 20 years before the Rodin received the commission for the monument; however, Rodin actively worked to render the most realistic representation of Balzac based on the resources he had available to him in an attempt to mimic the novelist's literary style. Just as Balzac employed realistic physical descriptions of his protagonists to reveal their character and personality, Rodin's compelling representation of Balzac allows for similar interpretations.

When Frank Harris encountered the Rodin's monument for the first time in 1898, he immediately recognized how Rodin was able to express "the passion of labour and achievement, of self-assertion and triumph" that existed within Balzac's personality,¹¹⁶ His robust frame that Rodin painstakingly attempted to accurately recreate reflects Balzac's "heroic pride" that Lamartine describes.¹¹⁷ Balzac's deeply inlaid eyes framed by his thick eyebrows capture his internal depth and the intensity of his genius. Like the *Monument to Victor Hugo*, Balzac's tense facial expression and furrowed brow reveal the contemplative aspect of his nature. However unlike the Hugo Monument, which depicts Hugo looking out into a sea of nothingness, Balzac peers with his head turned outward into society from his pedestal,

¹¹⁶ As quoted in Butler, *Rodin in Perspective*, 98.

¹¹⁷ As quoted in Elson, 606.

allowing him to critique social relations and comprehend human behavior as demonstrated in reality.

In his book *Realist Vision*, Peter Brooks comments on the importance of appearance in Balzac's novels but expands his argument beyond physical features to include a person's surrounding objects, i.e. clothing, furniture, etc. In so doing, Brooks establishes a correlation between one's physical reality and interior existence; he argues, "the importance of things [accessories] in this understanding lies in their representative value, what they tell you about the person who has acquired them and uses them as part of his self-presentation."¹¹⁸

Brooks' argument proves its validity in *Le Père Goriot* in the case of Madame Michonneau who "over her tired eyes...the elderly gentlewoman, wore a dirty, green taffeta shade bound with iron wire, which would have frightened the angel of pity away. Her shawl with its scanty drooping fringe seemed to cover a skeleton, so angular was her body. What acid had consumed the feminine curves of this creature? She must once have been pretty and well-formed. Was it vice, grief, greed?"¹¹⁹ Based on Balzac's description one can notice the "representative value" of such details and easily deduces that this woman has suffered during her lifetime and that her weathered dress and inadequate scarf reflect the misfortunes she has endured. Balzac proves that her tangible exterior appearance reveals insight into her personal history and character.

¹¹⁸ Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) 26.

¹¹⁹ Balzac, *Old Goriot*, 36.

When applying Brooks' analysis of Balzac's use of objects to Rodin's monument, it is critical to consider the writing coat in which Rodin chooses to cloth his final version of *Balzac*. Rodin completed multiple versions of the monument including his unclothed version, *Naked Balzac* as well as others that trace Rodin's experimentation with different coats including, *Balzac in a Dominican Robe*, and *Balzac in a Frockcoat*. Therefore, the decision to drape the figure in the monstrous black coat was a conscious decision made by Rodin who modeled the coat after the actual one Balzac would wear when he was absorbed in creativity writing his groundbreaking novels. Furthermore, the detail of the coat also distinguishes the *Monument of Balzac* from the *Monument to Victor Hugo* because in the latter, Rodin depicts his protagonist in the nude, emphasizing the more classical tradition of allegorical poet; whereas with the former, Rodin is emphasizing the creative realism of Balzac.

The coat swallows his sturdy frame as if not even his physical strength could resist the creative powers that ensued when he wore the coat. The fact that this is the only visible article of clothing augments its importance and pulls its presence to the foreground of the monuments composition. Because the coat is so sleek and long it gives the sculpture a sense of verticality that forces the viewer to look upward at the pensive expression on Balzac's face, which is the culminating feature of the sculpture. The verticality of the coat also reflects the soaring height of his literary reputation and the profound dominance of his genius. Ultimately,

Rodin was able to create a visual description of the novelist that conveyed the inner workings of his intellect and character in a way that mirrored the verbal portraits Balzac included in his own novels to reveal the unique personalities of his characters.

Conclusion:

After analyzing the events of the commissions, the reputations of both Balzac and Hugo, and the stylistic outcomes of the final monuments, it has become clear why Rodin chose to depict Hugo in a figurative setting surrounded by muses rather than the realistic portrayal he chose for Balzac. During his lifetime and as exemplified by the magnitude of his funeral, Hugo was apotheosized by the nation and represented a personification of genius who was tormented by metaphysical issues that transcended temporal existence. Therefore, a form of representation that makes reference to this transcendence and evokes Hugo's preoccupation with immaterial ideals best captures the nature of his intellect.

On the other hand, Balzac is better represented as an individual functioning within the physical world and observing the nature of social interactions. Rodin's realistic portrayal of the author is highly reflective of Balzac's literary style as proven in his enormously detailed descriptions of his protagonists in their social environments in *La Comédie Humaine*. Zola's active role in the commission reaffirmed the need for an emphasis on realism in order to truly exemplify the individual who anticipated Naturalism in

French literature.

Throughout the course of their creation, it is evident that Rodin adhered to his personal vision of both monuments. Perhaps his unwillingness to compromise his own vision and interpretation of how to represent the two literary giants, lead to the monuments' ultimate rejection by both committees. In any case by standing by his personal interpretation of both writers, Rodin exemplified his ability to stay true to his own principles while also capturing the different types of genius represented in both the works of Balzac and Hugo.

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