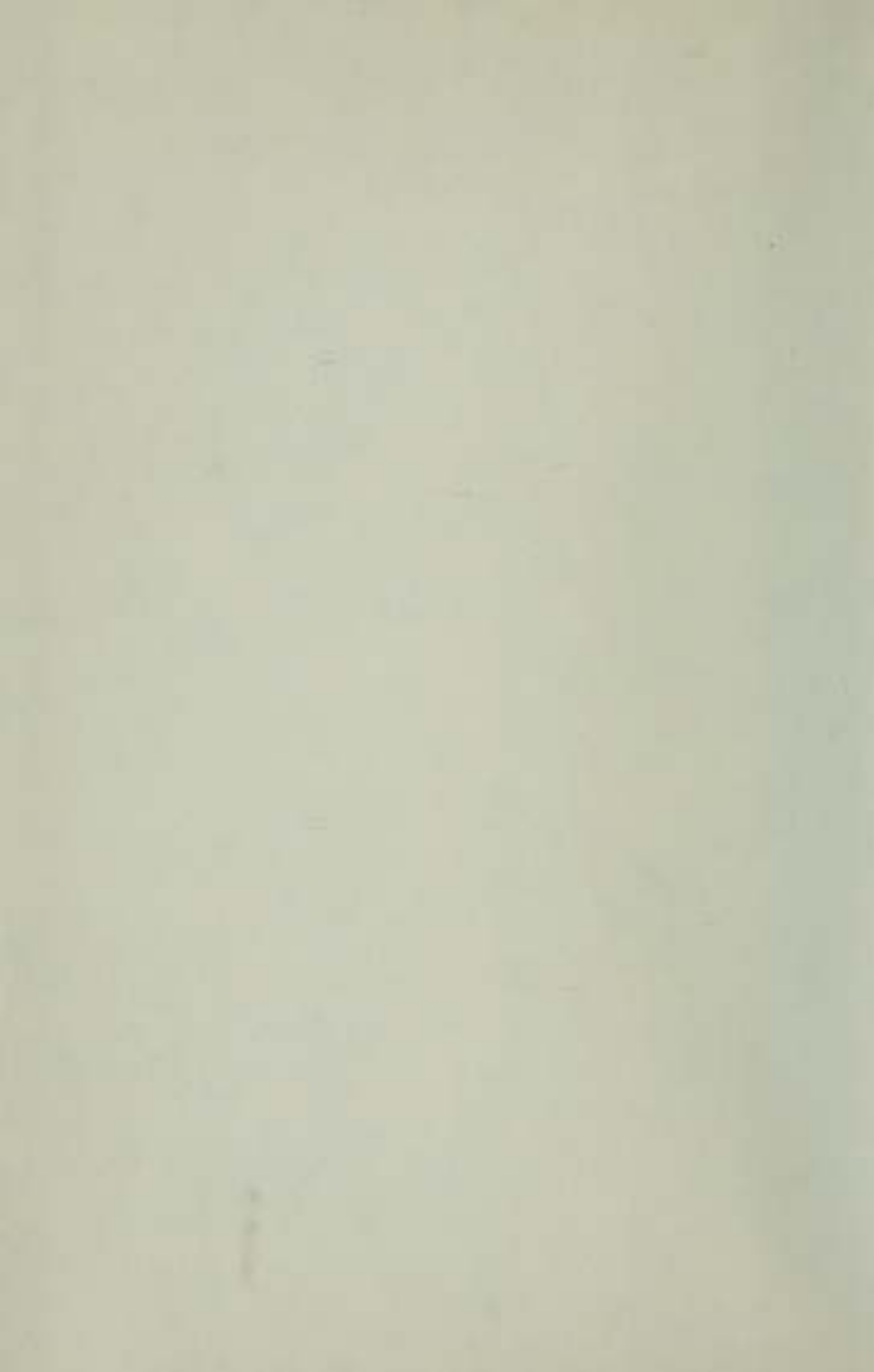


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A NOVEL
OF RODIN
BY DAVID
WEISS

William Morris and Company, (New York)



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CAME I**

**A NOVEL
OF RODIN
BY DAVID
WEISS**

William Morrow and Company, New York

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THE
CAMEL
A NOVEL
OF RODIN
BY DAVID
WEISS

William Morris and Company, New York

For my wife: *and I love the world*

Stynean Karlen

First Edition by Cambridge

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Naked came I into the world,
And naked must I go out.

Don Quixote, by Cervantes



The endpapers are drawings of Rodin sculptures by Lydia Fruhauf

TOP ROW: *St. John the Baptist/The Man with the Broken Nose/
Victor Hugo/Burgher of Calais*

MIDDLE ROW: *The Kiss/Adam/Eve/Eternal Spring*

BOTTOM ROW: *The Age of Bronze/Mignon (Rose)/
Thought (Camille)/Balzac*

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of

the proposed changes on the system. The study will be conducted

using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

The study will be conducted in three phases. The first phase

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- 5. THE HISTORY OF THE EMPIRE
- 6. THE HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE

PART
ONE
**THE
FAMILY**

PART
ONE
THE
FAMILY

CHAPTER 1

The father of the infant was a French peasant from Normandy.

Jean Baptiste Rodin had not expected to be the father of a son at the age of thirty-eight; he had two daughters, Clotilde and Marie, but they did not really count, and he was overjoyed. He had come to Paris because he had wanted to own land and had known that as a peasant he would never own land. But a son was the next best thing. A son would provide for his old age, carry on his name. Rodin meant red in Normandy, and all his family had red hair.

Papa paused, however, in the *Mairie* of the *arrondissement*. It was necessary to make a declaration to register his son, but neither he nor his wife, Marie, a thirty-four-year-old peasant from Lorraine, could write, and he turned to his wife's sister, Aunt Thérèse, and asked her to fill out the form. Aunt Thérèse could write; housekeeper, model, and occasional mistress of the painter Dolling, she had learned from Dolling.

Papa said, "We will call him François Auguste."

Aunt Thérèse wrote, "François Auguste Rodin, born November 12, 1842, at 3 rue de FArbolète, the twelfth *arrondissement* of Paris."

Papa said, "I will put away a *louis* to celebrate and to say *Masse*."

"He looks like a healthy one," said Aunt Thérèse.

"All Rodins are healthy," Papa said vigorously. Aunt Thérèse, for all her wit and charm, floated around in a never-never land, but he was practical. His thick, heavy features, like a block of rugged stone, took on the air of a troubled man. He pushed his stubby, square-

fixed hand through his luxuriant dark red hair, his pride and joy, and still disturbed, scratched his Louis Philippe chin whiskers. He was a supporter of the monarchy, of the Bourbons, but how could he guarantee that all would turn out well for his son? This was the Paris of the *petite bourgeoisie*, he thought: they were becoming more important each day, and he was a peasant, his wife was a peasant, their ancestors had been peasants, although he had risen to be a not quite minor police official, a police messenger.

And the quarter in which they lived! *Mon dieu*, it was hardly better than a slum, and it was infested with prostitutes—they lived next door, all around them. But he could not afford anything better than this medieval labyrinth of twisting, narrow alleys and streets. The rue de l'Arbalète was stony and steep, and the cobblestones were as rough and jagged as mountain rocks. It was one of the ugliest, poorest quarters of Paris, yet he consoled himself with the thought that they were within walking distance of the Sorbonne and Notre Dame, that the district was dominated by the gray cupolas of the Panthéon and by many fine old churches, like St. Séverin, Ste. Geneviève, and Val de Grâce. Family piety would make up for the neighborhood, he hoped. Then as Papa thought of the house in which they lived his heart sank. There was no sidewalk in front of the house, which was yellow and gray, and a mixture of cracked stone, crumbling plaster, imitation Gothic turrets, and a yellow stucco roof. They rented one floor, the fifth, the top, the cheapest. They had to climb one hundred and one steep, winding, cracked steps to reach it. It had been a wonder his wife had survived her pregnancy; this one must be a strong one.

Aunt Thérèse said, "I like the name Auguste. I'm glad I named my first-born that."

How pitiful, thought Papa. He liked Aunt Thérèse, everyone did, she was pretty, cheerful, spirited, but what would become of her three illegitimate boys? Worse, when he scolded her, she was not ashamed. It was just that she had avoided the formality of getting married; she had a large heart—and a different father for each of her three sons.

At least he would give his son a name.

Aunt Thérèse gave Papa Rodin a kiss of congratulations, and he prayed that François Auguste would grow up to be pious, strong,

and a minor police official—only the *bourgeois* were major police officials, and they could read and write. Then Papa was struck with an astounding idea. If Thérèse could learn to write, why couldn't his son? Mama would say he was out of his mind, but the failure to know how to write was why he was still a police messenger at only eight hundred francs a year. He would put the boy in school before he sent him out to work. François Auguste would get a good education and avoid the influence of the prostitutes next door.

Papa said with bravado, "I am not a republican, but it is good for a son to read and write."

II

When Auguste was five—the François had never been used—and preparing to enter the Jesuit school nearby, Aunt Thérèse gave him drawing crayons as a present which she had borrowed from Dolling without asking.

The Rodins lived near the rue St. Jacques now, on a cleaner street, and the child hoped that someday they would live on a wide one. The house was better, too, and they had the first floor. This afternoon he was alone with Aunt Thérèse, who had promised to watch him. Red-haired, stocky, shy, nearsighted, he was fascinated by the black crayons. When he pushed down on them, they made such distinct lines—he could really see them! Then he paused, he was making the kitchen table dirty.

Aunt Thérèse smiled encouragingly, said, "Use the floor."

Auguste nodded. He wanted to draw her—Aunt Thérèse had delicate features where Mama's were hardy—but he knew Papa should come first; Papa came first in everything. He squatted on the uneven stone floor of the kitchen, which was also dining room and living room, and sketched an outline of Papa. He liked the feel of the stone though it was too hard for the black crayon, which crumbled as he drew. But the outline had been distinct even at a distance. He noticed the brown wrapping paper which Mama had gotten when she bought potatoes for their dinner. Maus had put the wrapping paper aside to light the fire in the oven, but it did not crumble the crayon.

He pitched cross-legged at the kitchen table, forgetting the dinner

to be served, frowning, preoccupied; the crayon made a thick line, like Papa's lips. A scowl, that was right, but should he? Auguste altered the width of the line to make it clearer but so as to not alter it beyond recognition. He gave the body Papa's dumpy trousers, rumpled coat, thick belt. Then he was ashamed, Papa would be angry.

Aunt Thérèse said, "That's nice. I'll try to get you colors next time."

Auguste said nothing. Papa would be very angry.

The next week, when Mama bought cabbage and potatoes, he took the paper which they had been wrapped in and drew on it. The fish was wrapped more heavily, in newspapers, and he copied pictures from the newspapers. The greatest delight was when Mama bought butter, cheese, and eggs. Not only were they a delicacy for Sunday and their picnics, they were wrapped in white paper and the white was wonderful to draw on—everything was so clear that even with his weak eyes he could see all the details.

He drew people he knew: Papa, excited and flushed; Mama, patient and subdued; Aunt Thérèse, gay and smiling; his sister Marie, sweet and pleasing; his half sister Clotilde, pretty and perfect-featured. He could not halt. He hoped school would be as adventurous. He drew only when he was alone. He was still afraid Papa would not like it.

He heard Mama grumbling, "Auguste, what has happened to the wrapping paper? You didn't throw it out? We've nothing to light the fire."

He shook his head no, afraid his lips would stick together if he lied.

The next few days Auguste took only an occasional piece of wrapping paper and drew on both sides, but drawing excited him so he could not think of anything else. Then Mama hid the wrapping paper. Wood and charcoal cost sous but the wrapping paper came with the groceries. Auguste was afraid to use the floor, they would discover his secret.

Today the kitchen was lonely and barren until he sat in Mama's rocker and rocked with great zest, as she did. Then as the magic of his beloved twilight filled the room, he sat like stone on the edge of the chair. The changing and darkening light in the sky was a miracle, but he also loved the contrast of the darkness in the kitchen, and that, too, was changing and darkening. Everything was changing

and darkening, and he was fascinated by the motion this suggested. Suddenly he started rocking again, only to halt, remembering Mama's words: "Papa, why does he sit in the dark?"

Mama puzzled him. Didn't she know? Couldn't she feel the great thing going on around her at twilight?

Mama's shopping basket hit the door as hard and loud as a rock, and Auguste's skin felt it was crinkling up like crepe paper.

Mama asked, "*Mon cher*, why do you sit in the dark?"

He grinned, unable to explain.

She quickly lit the oil lamp, Auguste wanted to cover his eyes, but she was scraping off the white cheese from the pure white wrapping paper. Busy with the other groceries, cabbage, potatoes, turnips, peppers, she did not see the paper fall off the table. It lay spread out on the floor and it was more than Auguste could resist. As Mama turned her back to prepare the supper, he grabbed a dark saucer, a flowered cup, and flung himself on the floor, over the white wrapping paper.

With the stubby crayon in one hand and the plate held fast over the paper with the other, Auguste drew the outline of the plate on the paper. He held the cup down and drew it the same way. He pressed his left hand down on the paper, opening wide his fingers, and outlined his hand. For a moment he didn't know whether to draw the lines up to his elbow or to stop below it. Some kind of judgment had to be formed and it was—he ended the line just below the wrist. He stared at the lines in his hand and began to fill in the hand on the paper in the same way. Another noise like a rock hit the door and there stood Papa.

"Auguste, get up from the floor!" Papa picked up the wrapping paper, crumpled it, and threw it toward the fire in the kitchen stove.

"Yes, Papa." He couldn't take his eyes off the paper, which had missed the fire, falling by the stove.

"What are you doing, playing with a cup and saucer? You're not a girl."

Auguste wanted to explain, but how could he? He looked at the crayon in his hand and smiled. Papa took off his dark blue jacket and pulled off his heavy shoes and gave a tired sigh.

Auguste grabbed one of the boots, uncrumpled the wrapping paper,

placed the boot on the paper, and bending down, started to draw the outline of the boot. Papa, tired, hungry, eating at once, didn't notice. Auguste returned to the floor, and when he saw that one of the table legs did not quite touch the floor, he shoved the drawing paper under the leg and with his crayon drew its outline on the paper.

This disturbed Papa. The bowl with the potato soup shook. Papa almost missed his mouth with his spoon, and splashed some of the food onto his chin whiskers. He regarded Auguste with annoyance and disgust while his son continued to draw. Now Auguste was staring at the potato in Papa's bowl and drawing it. Papa pushed the potato aside and covered it so that Auguste would stop sketching it, but Auguste started to draw the small plate that covered the potato.

Papa's voice rose. "Give me that paper." His red hair was streaked with gray now, and there were many new work lines on his face.

Auguste had never disobeyed Papa openly before, but he shook his head no.

"Mama, get me the strap."

Auguste wavered. His fist about the paper unclenched.

"Put it in the fire." Papa had the strap now, thick and heavy. Mama looked unhappy, but she never argued with Papa.

Auguste felt like the fire itself.

"*Mon dieu*, do I have to tell you twice?"

He had no alternative. Papa reached for the paper and he acquiesced. He thrust the drawings into the fire, feeling stricken.

"And the crayon. Quickly!"

"Please, Papa?"

"Now?" *Mon dieu*, was his son possessed of the devil?

The boy's clutch about the crayons was so tight his fingerprints could be seen, but the crayons went into the fire also.

"Auguste, go to bed!"

"Without supper?" Mama was upset. She hurried to Papa's side, implored, "Jean, he will get sick."

"Next thing we know, there will be crayons in the soup. Put him to bed. And don't give him a howl when I'm not looking."

Mama cried, "He's too thin as it is. I'll say another Mass for him."

"No!" shouted Papa, his voice hoarse. He ignored her to concentrate on the pale, frightened boy. "You will not waste any more

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