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# Beyond Rodin: Revisiting the Legacy of Camille Claudel

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# Beyond Rodin: Revisiting the Legacy of Camille Claudel

## **Abstract**

French sculptress Camille Claudel has gained recognition in the past 30 years due to a focus on her tragic life rather than her artistic talent. Despite critical acclaim and respect amongst her peers during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, her affair with Auguste Rodin and her struggles with mental illness have cast a dark, dramatic shadow over modern interpretations of Claudel's oeuvre. Considering how difficult it was for a woman to be working as an artist at this time, Claudel's sculptures should not be outweighed by her personal life. In order to challenge the reader not to accept a simple biographical analysis of her oeuvre, I am looking at select works and considering how Claudel incorporated other art genres, daily life and literature references. Just as Claudel is often overlooked in a biography of Rodin, this investigation into Claudel's inspirations does not simply accept him as the driving force behind her pieces, but instead chooses to go beyond Rodin in search of a renewed acclaim, and a new legacy, for Camille Claudel.

## **Keywords**

Rodin, Camille Claudel, female artists

## **Disciplines**

Cultural History | History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology | Women's History | Women's Studies

## **Comments**

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**Beyond Rodin: Revisiting the Legacy of  
Camille Claudel**

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## Introduction

In recent years, scholars have rediscovered many female artists who had previously been overshadowed by their male counterparts; Camille Claudel is one of those artists. Born in 1864, Claudel was a French sculptress during the Belle Époque. Depending on which critic you consider, Camille was either a genius or merely a pupil of Rodin. After her death in 1943, her work was lost in history for some time, but her life became a sort of a cultural phenomenon in France after the publication of two works in the early 1980s. *Une Femme: Camille Claudel*, published in 1981 by Anne Delbée, was a historical fiction novel based on letters collected from Camille, her brother Paul Claudel, Rodin, and others. Then in 1984, Claudel's grandniece Reine-Marie Paris wrote a biography of her life entitled *Camille*. Though they were responsible for bringing Claudel back into conversation surrounding *fin-de-siècle* art, these books also allowed her tumultuous relationship with Rodin and her subsequent mental illness to overshadow her oeuvre.<sup>1</sup> The focus on these two topics undermined Claudel's technical mastery as well as her ability to include significant art historical and literary references. Since the publication of these books, Claudel has had much more written about her, yet time and time again, biographers choose to reinterpret her relationship with Rodin and the progression of her work or seek to prove that her mental illness can be tracked through her art. These two factors likely had influences on her work, but Claudel's oeuvre deserves an evaluation that goes beyond Rodin and her paranoia in order to consider literary, contemporary, and historical influences more deeply.

Such a fixation on her biography perpetuates an emotional evaluation of her sculptures that this paper seeks to refute. Claudel overcame many institutional setbacks – like a lack of access to the female nude and a strong mentorship, to name a few – that have traditionally been

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<sup>1</sup> Camille Claudel. *Camille Claudel: 1864-1943* ed. Monique Laurent and Bruno Gaudichon. (Paris: Musée Rodin, 1984), 8.

marked as hindrances to women artists<sup>2</sup> and proved she was determined to make it in the art world. In today's interpretation of Claudel, however, Rodin is mentioned in every chapter of her biography and most of the sculptures are discussed in relation to their blooming or crumbling relationship.<sup>3</sup> Comparatively, Rodin's biographers, like Frederic V. Grunfeld, tend to neglect Claudel's influence on his art, devoting only one chapter to their affair and admitting that she lived in his shadow.<sup>4</sup> Throughout Rodin's first biography, written by his loyal friend Judith Cladel, Camille is not even mentioned by name, but rather is referred to as "une grande passion (a large passion)."<sup>5</sup> The use of the word passion immediately suggests a relationship that is strong but fleeting. Biographers' conclusions are based either on the fragmented correspondences between Rodin and Claudel or on the opinions of friends and family, but it is useless to make assumptions about Claudel's sculptures based on these letters alone. Critics and art historians alike have a tendency to gloss over academic influences when analyzing her work, as doing so frees them from having to rethink gender expectations within the world of art.<sup>6</sup> When considering female artists, the biography is often regarded as the most significant influence,<sup>7</sup> but this is a bias that can be eliminated in the case of Claudel when highlighting how she applied her knowledge of art history, literature, and contemporary themes to her work.

This paper will focus on three of Claudel's most dynamic works, considering them chronologically and looking at the technical skill as well as the inspirations behind their creation.

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<sup>2</sup> Linda Nochlin. *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 149-158.

<sup>3</sup> Reine-Marie Paris. *Camille: The Life of Camille Claudel* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1984), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Frederic V. Grunfeld. *Rodin: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 1987), 242.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Cladel. *Rodin: Sa vie glorieuse et inconnue* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1936), 225.

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Mathews. *Passionate Discontent: Creativity, Gender, and French Symbolist Art* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999), 145.

<sup>7</sup> Claudine Mitchell. "Intellectuality and Sexuality: Camille Claudel, the Fin de Siècle Sculptress," *Art History* 12, no. 4 (Dec 1989): 419-447, 419.

The focus is on large-scale pieces, *Shakuntala*, *Clotho*, and *Persée et la gorgone*, and this paper will show Claudel at various points in her career, choosing to examine the inspirations with which she was working. Unfortunately, there are not many documents in which Claudel attests that “X” was her motivation, so much is left to speculation, but what is known includes her concern with material and process over art theory.<sup>8</sup> Claudel’s work draws stylistic comparisons to antiquity, Renaissance art, and/or contemporary art, and as her work is considered, it will become evident that Claudel was selecting themes that were not “feminine” in favor of engaging in stylistic innovations popular with male artists during this time. Her sculptures are varied, showing a prolific artist who was able to take in many inspirations and translate them in her own voice. Though she was first written out of history when 30 years in a mental institution caused her to disappear from public attention, Claudel has now resurfaced as a pop culture sensation. Rather than engage in a limiting discussion of her personal life, this paper will instead broaden the scope of interpretation of Claudel’s work to include her deliberate selection of subject matter as well as her technical influences, proving that her name deserves to be written in history as more than just a fleeting, *grande passion*.

### **Early Years**

Camille Claudel was born on December 8, 1864 in a small town called Villeneuve-sur-Fère. She was the eldest of three children and belonged to a passionate family. According to her brother Paul’s journals, the family was always fighting.<sup>9</sup> He remembers that she was “often cruel” but also a vision of “beauty and genius.”<sup>10</sup> It seems that Camille and her father got along

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>9</sup> Paris, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Claudel. *Oeuvres en Prose* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 277.

best, whereas Camille did not have much of a relationship with her mother. Due to her father's job as a registrar, the family moved around, and in 1868 the family moved to Villeneuve. There was a kiln on this property, and it seems that it is here that Camille found her interest in sculpture.<sup>11</sup> More importantly, it is in Villeneuve where she made her first works: *Oedipus*, *Napoléon*, *Bismarck*, and *David & Goliath*. Though these sculptures are no longer in existence, their very titles show that Claudel was interested in biblical, classical and historical subjects that established male artists tackled long before she met Rodin in Paris.

When the family had moved to Nogent-sur-Seine in 1876, Camille and her siblings began to study privately under a Monsieur Colin. He had them read works like *Ossian*, the compilation of epic poems based in ancient Scottish-Gaelic folklore,<sup>12</sup> while her father had a strong library of classic literature to choose from as well. As a result, Camille became an educated and well-read individual at a young age.<sup>13</sup> In addition to learning under M. Colin in Nogent-sur-Seine, Camille was introduced to her first art teacher, Alfred Boucher. A native to the area and a sculptor himself, Boucher took an immediate interest in Camille's work after seeing her early pieces.<sup>14</sup> It is under his mentorship that she completed works such as *Buste de Paul Claudel à treize ans* or *Paul at 13* (Fig. 1) and *La Vieille Hélène* or *Old Helen* (Fig. 2), which I will discuss in the next section.

### **Arrival in Paris**

When examining Claudel's art education, it is important to understand the social constructions of Belle Époque France. All around Europe, countries were experiencing

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<sup>11</sup> Odile Ayral-Clause. *Camille Claudel: A Life* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 14.

<sup>12</sup> Howard Gaskill. *The Reception of Ossian in Europe* (London: Continuum, 2004), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Paris, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Ayral-Clause, 17.

industrialization and scientific innovation, but with these advancements there were political and economic tensions that threatened a worldwide crisis. Many French citizens were fearful that despite all of the progress that was happening, people could regress just as easily back to days of civil unrest like those of the Revolution.<sup>15</sup> For example, the women's rights movement was in full force in France at this time, yet the male dominated culture still expected women to be one of three things: *la madone* (a mother), *la séductrice* (a prostitute), or *la muse* (an object of a dream).<sup>16</sup> However *la femme nouvelle* (new woman) was entering the French work force, rejecting conventional gender roles.<sup>17</sup> Believing in "equality in difference," many French feminists looked to extend women's legal rights to work outside the home.<sup>18</sup> According to scholar Karen Offen, France had been experiencing a decline in population since the 1850s, which caused citizens to be fearful of too many women leaving domesticity in order to work.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, women in the art world were especially unwelcome, evidenced by the fact that they were not allowed to attend the Académie des Beaux-Arts until 1897. By this point, however, many prominent artists were moving away from formal art education.<sup>20</sup> For Claudel to have picked a career in art and to eventually live alone and unmarried embarrassed her conservative mother, who later would consider Camille to be living like a prostitute.<sup>21</sup> However, Claudel ignored all conventions of gender to pursue her personal desire to be a sculptress. Knowing at a young age that she wanted to pursue sculpture, Claudel would not be deterred by cultural or

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen Escritt. *Art Nouveau* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 65.

<sup>16</sup> Michel Winock. *La Belle Époque: La France de 1890 à 1914* (Paris: Perrin, 2002), 153.

<sup>17</sup> Cybele Gontar. *Art Nouveau* The Metropolitan Museum of Art Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, New York: 2000-2015, [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/artn/hd\\_artn.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/artn/hd_artn.htm), 3 April 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Karen Offen. "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siecle France," *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1984), 657.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 649.

<sup>20</sup> Winock, 344.

<sup>21</sup> Paris, 147.

familial expectations. Though she never actively joined the feminist movement in France, she serves as a strong example of a woman who was not afraid of patriarchal society.

After the Claudel family moved to Paris in 1881, Camille began taking lessons at the Académie Colarossi and rented a studio that she shared with several Englishwomen, including Jessie Lipscomb who would soon become a close friend. The Académie Colarossi, a progressive art school that placed a focus on sculpture, hired established artists to visit the ateliers in order to give advice to young sculptors and even allowed women to draw from the male nude.<sup>22</sup> While working in her own studio, Claudel continued to have access to models, as the women had help hiring them from Boucher. Claudel specifically had the power to choose the models, direct the poses, and be, as critic and friend Mathias Morhardt describes her, “the soul of the group.”<sup>23</sup> Boucher continued serving as Claudel’s teacher in this studio and would visit the women frequently to give free advice. He proved a worthy master for the women, as he won the Prix de Rome, the most prestigious prize awarded at the Salon, in 1881.<sup>24</sup> His aesthetic preferences followed a group of French sculptors interested in Italian masters.

Boucher belonged to a group in France who admired Florentine Renaissance artists and studied their approach to art. Among this group of like-minded professionals was Boucher’s friend Paul Dubois, the director of the Académie, who was inspired by the likes of Giotto and Michelangelo. At this point in France, they were desperate to have a Michelangelo of their own, and these artists hoped to achieve this goal.<sup>25</sup> The purpose of the neo-Renaissance sculptor was to make a work that embodied the influence of classical antiquity. In Boucher’s work *Le But* or

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<sup>22</sup> Ayrat-Clause, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Cassar. *Dossier Camille Claudel* (Paris: Librairie Séguier, 1987), 460.

<sup>24</sup> Ayrat-Clause, 29.

<sup>25</sup> Angelo Caranfa. *Camille Claudel: A Sculpture of Interior Solitude* (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1999), 50.

*The Runners* (Fig. 3), for example, you find three slim, muscular male figures that seem to convey a singular movement.<sup>26</sup> Each runner is on a different level, but they are all making similar gestures. Each figure is balancing himself on one leg, toes holding him up, and is reaching one leg back and one arm forward. Their faces are looking forward as they reach for their destination. The bodies of the male figures are idealized, and the muscles are highly defined. Though they are three individual forms, their movements work together to create this united gesture forward. One can recognize the Renaissance through the treatment of the figures and the interesting composition, techniques Claudel would also employ in her sculptures. Dubois, alternatively, felt it was necessary to capture the elegance and simplicity of forms in the way of Renaissance greats.<sup>27</sup> As shown in *A Fifteenth Century Florentine Singer* (Fig. 4), there is a direct parallel to the great Italian sculptor Donatello, who these French artists admired. The young musician is standing in a classic *contrapposto* and has the youthful grace and energy found in works like Donatello's *David* (Fig. 5), the first large-scale bronze since antiquity.<sup>28</sup> Dubois's figure is not as muscular as Boucher's group, nor is he nude. Instead, the young boy is playing an instrument, mouth open as though he were singing along to the music. Dubois's interpretation of antiquity does not match the heroic subject matter of Donatello's masterpiece, but the youthful energy and elegance in the treatment of the figure are very similar.

Studying under Boucher would have been of great educational benefit to Claudel, whose works *Buste de Paul Claudel à treize ans* and *La Vieille Hélène* show a classical treatment in line with Boucher's aesthetic. *Buste de Paul Claudel* shows a young boy, likely entering puberty,

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Greenhalgh. *Donatello and his sources* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1982),166.

who seems to have the pride and clothing of a Roman emperor.<sup>29</sup> The deportment of his head expresses a stoic, ambitious young boy, while the addition of regal Roman dress adds to the impression that this boy desires greatness, as did her brother in real life. Claudel is referencing antiquity as she models her brother, and her clean treatment of the material shows her appreciation for technique at such a young age. Comparatively, *La Vieille Hélène* presents an individualized old woman. As stated by critic and friend Mathias Morhardt, the portrait displays a face with eyes that are “soft and good” accented by a round, wrinkled face.<sup>30</sup> *Hélène* has her head turned to her left and is looking up slightly, as if calling on a memory. The individual and natural treatment of this portrait calls on the Roman Republic, which valued *verism*, a form of realism, in their portraiture.<sup>31</sup> Claudel’s portrayal of a young boy contemplating his future as he enters puberty juxtaposed with the old woman who is reminiscing on years past show Claudel’s ability to treat a sculpture as an individual and create a character. It is likely that she would have found inspiration for these works from the Louvre, which housed a large collection of antique portrait busts as well as many other examples of classical sculpture at this time.<sup>32</sup> These works show just how talented she was before coming into Rodin’s studio, and according to biographer and grandniece Reine-Marie Paris, this period of education kept her “immune to Rodin’s spell.”<sup>33</sup> Before Boucher left for Italy, however, he asked a friend to take over his mentorship of the women, knowing that Claudel’s talent should not be left alone.

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<sup>29</sup> Louise R. Witherell. “Camille Claudel Rediscovered,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 6, no. 1 (Spring – Summer 1985): 1-7. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1358057> 4 Feb 2015, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Cassar, 461.

<sup>31</sup> Jane Fejfer. *Roman Portraits in Context* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 262.

<sup>32</sup> *History of the Louvre: From Château to Museum*, Louvre Museum, Paris: 2015, <http://www.louvre.fr/en/history-louvre>, 3 April 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Paris, 7.

Auguste Rodin, a sculptor who was just beginning to see critical acclaim at this point, accepted the opportunity to mentor young women, and he was immediately impressed with Claudel's work. When he asked Claudel and Lipscomb to join his studio as his first female assistants in 1885, he quickly entrusted Claudel with the task of making hands and feet for him.<sup>34</sup> This fact is significant, as Rodin considered hands and feet to be the most important part of a sculpture and is known for exaggerating their size in his work.<sup>35</sup> In addition to contributing to Rodin's work, like the *Gates of Hell* (Fig. 6), Claudel also served as his model for sculptures like *Danaïd* (Fig. 7) and *La Pensée* (Fig. 8).<sup>36</sup> It is not clear exactly when their romantic affair began, but Claudel and Rodin were deep into their affair by 1886, as evidenced by a strange contract written in Rodin's handwriting with the declaration that Rodin will marry Claudel.<sup>37</sup> Aside from all the ways in which Claudel was involved with Rodin, she was dedicated to the idea of being a well-known sculptor in her own right and was not afraid to put in the hard work (Fig. 9). This image, taken in 1886, shows Claudel working on the plaster model of her first life-sized sculpture. Unlike Rodin and many other sculptors during this time, Claudel carved all of her own marble and did not take on assistants.<sup>38</sup> Marble is a metaphoric rock common in European sculpture.<sup>39</sup> Artists like Claudel would have large pieces of marble carved from quarries and have it delivered to her studio – an expensive task.<sup>40</sup> When marble is fresh from the quarries, it is

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<sup>34</sup> Ayrat-Clause, 50.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>36</sup> Paris, 9.

<sup>37</sup> Camille Claudel. *Correspondance* ed. Anne Rivière and Bruno Gaudichon (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 41.

<sup>38</sup> Ayrat-Clause, 53.

<sup>39</sup> Nicholas Penny. *The Materials of Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), 304.

<sup>40</sup> William E. Wallace. *Michelangelo: The Artist, the man, and his times* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 142.

softer and easier to work compared to a hard stone like granite.<sup>41</sup> To carve a block of marble, Claudel would have used a variety of chisels and a mallet to make large and small chips in the block, and after completing the composition in the marble, she would also have needed to polish the marble – a task that could take weeks.<sup>42</sup> Claudel's dedication to the material distinctly separates her from many artists and shows an early dedication to the technical side of making art. The work she produced under her own name is evidence of a woman who was able to transform prose into stunning sculptures as well.

### **Shakuntala**

After working as Rodin's assistant for several years, Claudel began her first life-sized work, *Shakuntala*. This sculpture was originally shown as a plaster model at the Salon in 1888, standing 6 feet tall.<sup>43</sup> Later cast in bronze (Fig. 10) and carved in marble (Fig. 11), this sculpture underwent several transformations in title as well. The sculpture most simply depicts two figures embracing one another. A woman sits on the edge of a tree stump and drapes her left arm over the shoulder of the male figure while her right hand clutches her bosom. Her head is resting on top of his, eyes closed. The male is on his knees in front of the woman, holding her at the waist. He leans his torso into hers, and his face is tilted backwards and burrowed into the side of her face. Claudel sculpted the lean muscles of the male, idealizing his form. She also chose to emphasize the tension in the woman's right leg through the defined calf and quad muscles. The rest of the woman's figure is soft and supple in contrast to the male. Both figures are nude, though this drew negative attention when placed in the Musée Bertrand in Châteauroux because

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<sup>41</sup> Penny, 40.

<sup>42</sup> Wallace, 142.

<sup>43</sup> Claudel, Camille. *Camille Claudel: 1864-1943*, 40.

the public there considered them indecent.<sup>44</sup> However, male sculptors were working with similar nude subjects, and so Claudel did not let this deter her from working with the nude form as she composed later works.

*Shakuntala* is a 5<sup>th</sup> century Sanskrit poem by famed Indian storyteller Kalidasa and contains themes of love, rejection and validation. Written in seven acts, the love story first came to the West when Sir William Jones, famed Orientalist and admirer of Hindu dramatic literature, translated the Sanskrit prose.<sup>45</sup> According to author Dorothy Matilda Figueira in her study of the history of Sanskrit texts in Europe, “oriental literature” was widely popular in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and its popularity continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the rise of colonialism, so Jones’s translation was quickly copied into several other languages, including French.<sup>46</sup> It is therefore probable that Claudel would have been acquainted with *Shakuntala* and chosen this title for the plaster version. Following the English translation by A. Hjalmar Edgren, the story begins when a king visits a hermitage, near the Ganges in India, and falls in love with the daughter of a nymph, Shakuntala.<sup>47</sup> The two marry, with the King giving her a ring as a promise to remain faithful to her back in the kingdom, but another character casts a curse on the lovers. Without the ring, the King will not be able to remember the events that transpired in the hermitage. After the King returns to his city, Shakuntala discovers that she is with child and goes to be with the King. However, she had lost the ring in the Ganges while praying, and, upon seeing the King, discovers that he has no recollection of her or their marriage. Humiliated, Shakuntala returns home and begins to raise their son with the help of the hermitage.

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<sup>44</sup> Claudel, Camille. *Correspondance*, 98.

<sup>45</sup> A. Hjalmar Edgren. *Shakuntala or The Recovered Ring: A Hindoo Drama by Kalidasa* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 1894), iii.

<sup>46</sup> Dorothy Matilda Figueira. *Translating the Orient: The Reception of Āśākuntala in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 1991), 1.

<sup>47</sup> Edgren, 18.

In a stroke of luck, a fisherman finds the ring some years later and goes to the city to try and sell it. The King's ring is given back to him, and his memory of Shakuntala returns with it. He is ashamed that he could have forgotten his love for her. When he is reunited with Shakuntala, he tells her:

Oh, banish, darling, from thy soul  
The bitter feeling of my act.  
Oblivion darkened then my mind,  
And darkened minds oft spurn their bliss,  
As shakes the blind from off his head  
A garland, deeming it a snake.<sup>48</sup>

Having proclaimed all of his shame, he falls at her feet. Rather than reject the King as he had done to her years ago, Shakuntala's reply is forgiving. "Rise, my noble husband," she says. "It was, no doubt, my own sins in a previous life which at that time bore bitter fruit, since my noble husband, whose soul is compassionate, could act harshly toward me."<sup>49</sup> With this, all is forgiven, and the pair is never to be parted again. Claudel chose to depict this moment of reconciliation in her work. Despite some criticism about the nudity of the figures, it was well received at the Salon. Critic Charles Morice stated confidently, "All that is sacred in the gesture of love, Mlle Claudel has placed in this exquisite work."<sup>50</sup> Morhardt added, "The work of a beginner, Shakuntala is the work of a master."<sup>51</sup> Though there has been some speculation by biographers like Odile Ayrat-Clause that the tenderness and closeness of the two figures is a direct parallel to her affair with Rodin,<sup>52</sup> it is not necessary to make it the only focus of this sculpture. In this work, Claudel successfully transformed prose into visual art, working maturely with the material to create a dynamic pair of figures abandoning themselves to one another as the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 188.

<sup>50</sup> Caranfa, 28.

<sup>51</sup> Cassar, 471.

<sup>52</sup> Ayrat-Clause, 90.

story describes. Claudel was not the only one experimenting with couples in Rodin's studio at this time, however, as Rodin himself had been creating several intimate groups as well.

While Claudel was working on *Shakuntala*, Rodin created a similar piece called *Le Baiser* or *The Kiss* (Fig. 12), originally created for his *Gates of Hell*. In this group, two nude figures are seated next to each other, twisting their bodies to meet for a kiss. The muscular male figure has his right hand on the woman's left hip, while his left arm is behind her back. His head is above the woman's, as she reaches her left arm around his neck to fall into him. Her right leg rests over his left leg, allowing the two figures to be in contact as much as possible. The female's body is soft and plump, attractive traits for a male audience. The couple's faces are close together, but they are not yet kissing. It is the moment right before the embrace that Rodin seems to be depicting in this work. Drawing from literature, as did *Shakuntala*, *Le Baiser* follows the story of Francesca da Rimini from Dante's *Inferno*.<sup>53</sup> Upon entering the second circle of Hell, reserved for sinners of lust, Dante meets Francesca and Paolo, two lovers damned to wander eternally through the fierce winds that plague this circle.<sup>54</sup> They had been reading the story of Lancelot and, "when [they] read how the fond smile was kissed by such a lover, he [Paolo], who shall never be divided from me, kissed my mouth all trembling. The book, and he who wrote it, was a Galeotto. That day we read it no farther."<sup>55</sup> After being caught in this moment by Francesca's husband, they were slain and eternally damned to Hell. It is this moment that Rodin chooses to depict in 1888; the same year Claudel began *Shakuntala*. By this point in their affair, Camille had moved out of her house and into a new studio for which Rodin paid.<sup>56</sup> They spent much of

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<sup>53</sup> Grunfeld, 187.

<sup>54</sup> John A. Carlyle. *Dante's Divine Comedy: The Inferno* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1899), 47.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>56</sup> Ayrat-Clause, 93.

their time working in this studio as collaborators, and so it makes sense that each would draw stylistic influence from the other in a professional atmosphere.

Compositionally, both Claudel and Rodin are working with a large-scale group. Though the positioning in the figures is different, both sculptors are aiming to portray an intimate moment between lovers. Critic Louise R. Witherell interjects here that the most significant contrast between these two works comes in the placement of the women. For *Shakuntala*, the female can be interpreted as the dominant figure, as she is seated over the kneeling male.<sup>57</sup> The male is at her mercy, yet she has chosen to accept and forgive his previous rejection of her. By contrast, in *Le Baiser*, Francesca “abandons herself to Paolo’s kiss,”<sup>58</sup> which gives the woman a more traditional, submissive role. Claudel’s work seems to subtly challenge gender roles with something as simple as who is on top. Other similarities can be found in the idealization of the male figures, as well as the soft figures of the females. Lastly, both artists enlarge the hands and feet of the figures, which refers back to Rodin believing these to be the most important part of sculpture. After completing *Le Baiser* and while Claudel was working on other models of *Shakuntala*, Rodin created another similar piece that is also useful in understanding the stylistic focus of his studio in general.

*L’Eternelle Idole* (Fig. 13) was a group also meant for the *Gates of Hell*, and though this piece lacks a more direct literary connection, there are other visual elements to consider in comparing these sculptures. In this group, there is once again a male and female figure engaged in an intimate moment. For *L’Eternelle Idole*, the woman is on her knees, leaning back slightly as the male kisses her stomach. He is also on his knees, but is situated lower in the composition. He holds his hands behind his back as he presses his face just under her bosom. The woman

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<sup>57</sup> Witherell, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Grunfeld, 189.

looks down at this figure, watching him without the gentle look that Shakuntala's face expresses. Once again, both figures are idealized, and the positions of their bodies highlight their musculature. Compositionally, *L'Eternelle Idole* is more sexually aggressive than the other two group works. The woman here seems to be leaning away from the male in stark contrast to the close embrace that occurs in *Shakuntala*.<sup>59</sup> Rather than being a sexual object, Shakuntala has the power to accept or deny her King, emphasizing a lack of gender difference in Claudel's sculpture that is so present in the works by Rodin. Rodin originally intended his works for the *Gates of Hell* and then made larger models of the sculptures, while Claudel envisioned *Shakuntala* as a large-scale work from the start and continued working on it until 1905.

Claudel struggled to have this work commissioned by the state, but in 1905 she was given the funds to carve it in marble by the Comtesse de Maigret, whose family was once considered nobility in France.<sup>60</sup> Friend and fellow artist Eugène Blot also paid to have Claudel's work cast in bronze during 1905.<sup>61</sup> Both versions were given new titles that change the interpretation of the work. The bronze version was titled *L'Abandon* or *Abandonment*, which adds to a more psychological evaluation of the piece. Under this name, a viewer may focus more on the way in which the two figures lose themselves in one another. Claudel's marble carving was entitled *Vertumne et Pomone*, perhaps at the request of the commissioner. The story of these two lovers comes from Ovid's epic poem, *Metamorphoses*. Covering a broad range of Greco-Roman myths, Ovid wrote *Metamorphoses* in order to show that common themes of love and

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<sup>59</sup> Angela Ryan. "Visions of Reciprocity in the Work of Camille Claudel," *A "Belle Époque"?* *Women in French Society and Culture 1890-1914*. Ed. Diana Holmes and Carrie Tarr, 167-179. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 170.

<sup>60</sup> Claudel, Camille. *Camille Claudel: 1864-1943*, 79.

<sup>61</sup> Ayrat-Clause, 171.

transformation linked them together.<sup>62</sup> If Claudel was responsible for the name change, it is likely that she would have known this writing as it had been translated in French since Jacques Amyot completed the task in 1559.<sup>63</sup> The story describes Pomona, the Roman goddess of fruits, and Vertumnus, an Etruscan god. Vertumnus is madly in love with Pomona, and comes in many disguises to convince her to love him back.<sup>64</sup> However, Pomona rejects every suitor who comes to her, as she loves her fruits more than any man. One day, Vertumnus comes to Pomona in the guise of an old woman and falls to her feet, begging Pomona to see how wonderful Vertumnus is. The old woman tells a quick story about Iphis and Anaxarete. In this tale, the princess Anaxarete rejects Iphis time and time again. She mocks his love for her, until one day he cannot take it anymore and kills himself in front of her house. When his funeral procession passes by her house, Anaxarete looks from her window and begins to turn to stone. It appears as though her cold heart has taken over her entire body, and she is forever a statue. After telling this story, Vertumnus sheds his disguise to plead with Pomona one last time. Thankfully, “the nymph was entranced by his radiant form and responded with passion.”<sup>65</sup> The composition of Claudel’s original plaster version still fits in with this new story.

When viewing the details of the two faces up close, one can feel the power of Vertumnus finally being accepted by Pomona that was first evoked by Shakuntala and the King (Fig. 14). Pomona’s eyes are closed, and her face is gentle, while Vertumnus has lost himself completely in Pomona’s embrace. Whether a viewer interprets this sculpture as *Shakuntala*, *L’Abandon* or *Vertumne et Pomone*, one can learn that Claudel executed a successful large-scale work that

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<sup>62</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses: A New Verse Translation* by David Raeburn. (London: Penguin Books, 2004), xiii.

<sup>63</sup> Stanley Wells. *Shakespeare: A Life in Drama* (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), 13.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 582.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 587.

impressed critics and showcased her progression as an artist while she was still developing her own aesthetic. She had the mentorship of Rodin, or also a friendly rivalry, to help her composition, but the simple fact that Claudel had such an eclectic knowledge of literature so early in her career is impressive and should be noted as more of her sculptures are examined.

### **Clotho**

Claudel continued working in large scale with another major work, *Clotho* (Fig. 15), but she seems to be experimenting with a different technique here. Though she again referenced literature in this sculpture, its outcome is stylistically different than that of *Shakuntala* or even of *La Valse* or *The Waltz* (Fig. 16), which was shown alongside *Clotho* at the 1893 Salon. A marble version has been lost,<sup>66</sup> but the plaster original is still on display at the Musée Rodin. This sculpture stands three feet tall and shows a singular figure, Clotho, the youngest of the three Fates from Greek mythology.<sup>67</sup> Despite this, there are no signs of a young figure in this work. It marks a progression of style for Claudel, as she chooses to depict a woman so aged and frail that you can see her ribs through her sagging skin. The legs are elongated and rooted into the base of the work, which is not carved into anything other than maybe rocky ground. Her body is so skeletal that there are no curvy hips or plump breasts, taking away from the femininity of the figure. This Fate seems to be holding her head up and succumbing slightly to the weight of her spindly hair falling around her. The hair is textured and in thick clumps, winding its way around her arms and legs and even reaching the base of the sculpture. *Clotho* is a most peculiar work that does not follow the tradition of the young, shapely female nude as is shown in the *Shakuntala* group.

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<sup>66</sup> Ayrat-Clause, 174.

<sup>67</sup> Claudel, Camille. *Camille Claudel: 1864-1943*, 52.

Based in ancient text, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos are believed to be the daughters of Zeus and Themis.<sup>68</sup> According to Richard Buxton's *The Complete World of Mythology*, the Fates are responsible for the spinning, measuring, and cutting of a woolen thread whose length corresponds with the length of a person's life.<sup>69</sup> A person who tries to change their fate will not succeed, as is evidenced each time they appear in mythology. Clotho is the Fate responsible for *spinning* the woolen thread,<sup>70</sup> which makes sense when you consider the winding thread-like hair coming from her head. Claudel created a successful work in Clotho through her experimental treatment of form and references to classical literature. By this point, Claudel had started separating herself from her romantic relationship with Rodin.<sup>71</sup> However, there do exist parallels between *Clotho* and two other works that had previously come out of Rodin's studio.

As stated previously, Rodin took on many assistants in his studio. One of them, Jules Desbois, began working with Rodin in 1889 on a study of bone formation, or osteology, in sculpture.<sup>72</sup> The results were *Celle Qui Fut La Belle Heaulmière* or *She Who Was The Helmet Maker's Once-Beautiful Wife* (Fig. 17) by Rodin and *La Misère* or *Misery* (Fig. 18) by Desbois. Both sculptures show a seated old woman who is so frail and thin, she seems to be nothing but sagging skin and bones. There is no youthful energy in these works, no idealized figures with soft skin and supple breasts. Instead, there is just a decrepit woman with her head bowed as if she is waiting for death. In both works, there is a sense of shame in aging that is amplified by the

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<sup>68</sup> Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology* by Robin Hard, (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 29.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Buxton. *The Complete World of Greek Mythology* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 86.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>71</sup> Ayrat-Clause, 112.

<sup>72</sup> *Camille Claudel and Rodin: Fateful Encounter* Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit: 2005-2006, [http://www.dia.org/exhibitions/claudel\\_rodin/preview3.asp](http://www.dia.org/exhibitions/claudel_rodin/preview3.asp), 3 April 2015.

crouching figures. Though Claudel began *Clotho* in 1893, there are undeniable similarities between these three works. Claudel's aged figure resembles the studies completed by Rodin and Desbois; in fact, she used the same model.<sup>73</sup> She too seems to be experimenting with the portrayal of the aged body; however, Claudel takes her interpretation one step further by creating an allegory about Fate. Her sculpture does not show a woman crouching in shame, but rather a standing figure who is becoming trapped by the spinning thread that determines everyone else's life. The woman's thinness, sagging skin and old age is traditionally considered ugly, but becomes beautiful in the eyes of the artists.<sup>74</sup> It is also interesting to note that Jules Desbois became very interested in Art Nouveau after being introduced to it at the 1889 Universal Exhibition.<sup>75</sup> Though these works are not the decorative, whimsical pieces generally associated with the movement, it is possible that Claudel and Desbois entered into a dialogue about the style. *Clotho's* spindly hair, for example, speaks to the sinuous lines that were so revered in Art Nouveau. Claudel may also have been introduced to this budding movement when she visited her friend Jessie Lipscomb in England during the summer of 1886.<sup>76</sup> Art Nouveau originated in England around this time,<sup>77</sup> so it would be interesting to discover with further research if Claudel was in fact thinking of this aesthetic while working on her sculpture.

Through *Clotho*, Claudel is able to show the viewer once again that, though she may be working from similar themes as Rodin and his other assistants, she still has the creativity and skill to create an individual work of art. Not only did she create a sculpture that called upon

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<sup>73</sup> *Misery Jules Desbois* Musée Rodin, Paris, 2015 <http://www.musee-rodin.fr/en/collections/sculptures/misery> 14 March 2015.

<sup>74</sup> *She who was the helmet maker's once beautiful wife Auguste Rodin*, Musée Rodin, Paris, 2015 <http://www.musee-rodin.fr/en/collections/sculptures/she-who-was-helmet-makers-once-beautiful-wife> 14 March 2015.

<sup>75</sup> Jean Lahor. *Art of Century: Art Nouveau* (London: Parkstone International, 2012), 8.

<sup>76</sup> Ayrat-Clause, 66.

<sup>77</sup> Lahor, 13.

classic literature, but she also found technical inspiration in Rodin's studio – and possibly even Art Nouveau – in one work of art. She continued working and exhibiting in an attempt to earn commissions, but soon she would run low on funds – a factor that likely caused her to begin sculpting in a much smaller scale. The works that came out of this period, like *Les Causeuses* or *The Gossipers* (Fig. 19) and *La Vague* or *The Wave* (Fig. 20), are celebrated works that draw definitive influence from Art Nouveau, Japanese woodblock prints and *la vie quotidienne* (daily life). However, at the turn of the century, Claudel was able to complete one last large-scale work that also drew inspiration from Renaissance and classical art, but also containing interesting parallels to Art Nouveau as well.

### **Persée et la Gorgone**

While she developed an intimate aesthetic with works like *Les Causeuses* and *La Vague*, Claudel continued to draw on classical sources in later sculptures, as well. She first showed a plaster version of *Persée et la Gorgone* (Fig. 21) at the Salon in 1899, which gained the attention of the Countess de Maigret who asked Camille to sculpt it in marble for her garden.<sup>78</sup> This sculpture depicts a popular heroic tale that takes place in Ancient Greece.<sup>79</sup> According to the myth, Perseus was the son of Zeus and a mortal, Danae, and he is considered the founder of Mycenae. His grandfather had been warned that Perseus would kill him someday, which caused the grandfather to become paranoid. When Perseus was born, he and his mother were shipped off to sea and were taken in by the brother of a king. This king, Polydektes, was in love with Danae but despised Perseus, so he gave Perseus a challenge that would surely kill him: decapitate the gorgon Medusa and bring her head back to the kingdom. Medusa was the monster with snakes

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<sup>78</sup> Claudel, Camille. *Camille Claudel: 1864-1943*, 76.

<sup>79</sup> Lucilla Burn. *Greek Myths* (London: British Museum Pub, 1990), 63.

for hair who could petrify anyone who looked directly at her. Perseus accepted this challenge and went to kill Medusa.<sup>80</sup> He was successful in his quest and became a celebrated hero to his people.

The part of the story that Claudel chose to depict is just after Perseus has in fact succeeded in killing the Gorgon and is looking back at her head through the reflection of an object he is holding in his right hand. The figure stands on top of the headless Medusa, leaning onto her lifeless body. He is not holding a shield, with which he is typically depicted, but it is unclear exactly what object Claudel chose to give Perseus. He holds this T-shaped piece that has a shorter, blunt side and a longer, curved side that comes to a dull point. Perhaps the shape is incomplete, but no textual description was found to determine the significance of it. In his left hand, Perseus holds the gorgon's head just behind his own. It appears that Perseus is using whatever object he is holding to look at the reflection of Medusa. His face appears to be calm yet stern, and Medusa looks surprised and almost lost in thought. Claudel chose to omit the three traditional iconographical markers of Perseus: winged boots, the Cap of Hades, and a special bag known as a *kibisis*.<sup>81</sup> When wearing the winged boots, Perseus is able to fly away and escape the other gorgons after completing his mission, but Claudel's Perseus does not wear any sort of shoe. The Cap of Hades allows Perseus to approach Medusa without being seen, but Claudel does not give Perseus any headgear. Lastly, the *kibisis* is a bag in which Perseus placed Medusa's head, but one does not seem to be present in Claudel's interpretation.<sup>82</sup> It is not clear why she chose to exclude common iconography, but in spite of these omissions, Claudel still successfully

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>81</sup> Daniel Ogden. *Perseus* (London: Routledge, 2008), 40.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 43.

introduces the viewer to the myth, as Medusa is easily recognized as the character with snakes as hair.

Since Claudel has worked with classical subject matter before, it should not come as a surprise that she chose to depict this myth. Here, it is interesting to explore the possibility that, in addition to using mythology, she also may have referenced a revered Florentine work in her depiction of Perseus. Benvenuto Cellini created a bronze *Perseus and the Head of Medusa* (Fig. 22), which stands in the Piazza della Signoria in Florence. Cellini created this work with the intent of creating a masterpiece to match the likes of Michelangelo's *David*, which was already in the Piazza, and he took great care in writing about his creative process.<sup>83</sup> The artist was known for being a goldsmith, but wanted this work to show that he was a talented sculptor, as well.<sup>84</sup> His interpretation of Perseus also shows the hero standing on top of a crumpled and headless Medusa. Rather than looking at Medusa in the reflection of a weapon, Cellini chose to have Perseus's gaze downward, allowing Medusa to turn the other two marble works in the Piazza to stone.<sup>85</sup> Perseus is wearing winged boots, a *kibisis* and a winged helmet – the Cap of Hades – and he holds a sword in his right hand and Medusa's severed head in his left. Standing *contrapposto* with the left leg slightly bent and the right holding the weight, Perseus is depicted in the classical stance popularized in ancient Greece. His body is also muscular and idealized, as was common throughout antiquity, though Cellini chose to elongate the muscles according to

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<sup>83</sup> Mario Scalini. *Benvenuto Cellini* (London: SCALA 1995), 3.

<sup>84</sup> Michael Cole. "Universality, Professionalism, and the Workshop," *Benvenuto Cellini: Sculptor, Goldsmith, Writer* ed. Margaret A. Gallucci and Paolo L. Rossi. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 55.

<sup>85</sup> Michael W. Cole. *Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 69.

Mannerist ideals, giving more elegance to the sculpture.<sup>86</sup> There is evidence that Claudel may have been familiar with this work, as there are some distinct similarities between the two.

Benvenuto Cellini wrote his autobiography from 1558-1563, in which he detailed his artistic process and views on his art, including his *Perseus*.<sup>87</sup> Thomas Nugent translated it into English in 1828,<sup>88</sup> and by 1900, there was a version in French.<sup>89</sup> Even if Claudel did not read this autobiography, she could have become acquainted with his work while studying under Boucher, an avid admirer of the Renaissance. Regardless, there are visual similarities and differences in both interpretations that help make the argument that Claudel was inspired by the Cellini original. Compositionally, the sculptures are similar with both Perseus figures standing overtop of a headless Medusa. However, in Cellini's version, Medusa's wings and figure are not as large as Claudel chooses to depict. The effect is that Cellini's Perseus seems grander and more heroic, while Claudel's large-winged gorgon shows the difficulty and significance of defeating such a monster. They have similar, calm expressions on their faces, as they are triumphant in their mission. Perseus is nude and has well-defined muscles in both figures, which, again, was an expectation for Renaissance sculptures. Lastly, the way that Claudel and Cellini are most similar comes in their experimentation with Medusa's head. Cellini's interpretation experiments with smaller, more tightly wound snake curls, while Claudel's are larger and almost rope-like on Medusa's head. Cellini's version shows spiral gushes of blood coming from her head and out of the contorted and decapitated body on which Perseus stands. Claudel also shows the blood coming from Medusa's head. It gushes down the hero's arm, and may continue down the rest of

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<sup>86</sup> Scalini, 38.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>88</sup> Nugent, Thomas. *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini, a Florentine artist* (London: Hunt and Clarke, 1828).

<sup>89</sup> Cellini, Benvenuto. *Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini* (New York: Modern Library, 1900).

his body, reaching the gorgon's. The thickness of blood may also be a drapery that Claudel was forced to add to Perseus to cover his private parts. The treatment of the dripping blood also calls upon a specific artist from the *fin-de-siècle*, Arthur Beardsley.

A final influence in this sculpture may have come from the Art Nouveau movement popularized in Paris at the Universal Exhibition in 1900, but beginning in the 1880s.<sup>90</sup> Art Nouveau was a movement that sought to combine fine and decorative arts, focusing on nature and drawing inspiration from Japanese woodblock prints. Characteristics of this style include flowing lines, “whiplash” curves and natural leitmotifs.<sup>91</sup> At this time, Claudel would have easily noticed the Metro signs by Hector Guimard (Fig. 23) or the decorative architectural work by Jules Lavirotte (Fig. 24) scattered about Paris. Additionally, Claudel may have been influenced by Art Nouveau while reading a play by Oscar Wilde. Aubrey Beardsley was a British writer and artist who used Art Nouveau style to creating compelling, grotesque prints that call on Japanese woodblock printing. His most famous illustrations come from Wilde's play, *Salomé*.<sup>92</sup> This one act play was originally written in French in 1891 despite being written by an English author. It is a twist on the story of John the Baptist's execution that places Salomé, the stepdaughter of the tetrarch Herod Antipas, in a position to ask for anything after dancing the “dance of the seven veils” for her stepfather. Upon finishing the dance, Salomé says, “I would that they presently bring me a silver charger [platter]... the head of Iokanaan [John the Baptist].”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Gontar, 2.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>92</sup> Linda Gertner Zatlín. “Wilde, Beardsley, and the Making of *Salome*,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 5, no. 2 (Autumn 2000), 343.

<sup>93</sup> Oscar Wilde. *Salome: A Tragedy in One Act* (Portland: The Floating Press, 2009), 80.

The tetrarch must comply, and to illustrate the triumph of Salomé, Beardsley chose to show her holding the head of John the Baptist with blood still dripping from his head (Fig. 25).<sup>94</sup> The treatment of hair in this print is similar to Claudel's Medusa, choosing to have thick sections of unruly hair rather than flowing locks. Most importantly, however, is the decision of both artists to incorporate the dripping blood from the heads of the victims. It amplifies that actions that have just taken place in each story and adds a creepy sensation to the works. Claudel may have been familiar with Wilde's play and Beardsley's illustration since it was published before she began working on Perseus. However, no previous comparisons have been drawn between these two artists, as critics and biographers alike would rather dwell on a different aspect of Claudel's sculpture.

Biographers like Odile Ayrat-Clause choose to focus on the face of Medusa instead of these interesting comparisons to Renaissance art and Beardsley's grotesques since the gorgon's head appears to be Claudel's self-portrait (Fig. 26). From there, it is assumed that she is making a statement about her own self-deterioration.<sup>95</sup> At this point in her life, biographers tend to track Claudel's mental deterioration, but it is important to note that Claudel was then incredibly strapped for cash, as well.<sup>96</sup> Though it is easy for someone to assume that she was simply losing her mind, it is also possible that Claudel used her own face in that of Medusa's because she did not have the money to afford a model and needed to be more resourceful, or more simply, she chose to use her own face because it was more convenient than trying to hire a model. If one accepts Medusa's face as a self-portrait, he or she could speculate that Claudel was not making a

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<sup>94</sup> Zatlin, 346.

<sup>95</sup> Ayrat-Clause, 158.

<sup>96</sup> Paris, 122.

statement about her own self-deterioration, but rather about being destroyed by the constraints of being a woman in the art world during *fin-de-siècle* France.

All of these interpretations are pure conjecture, so it would be a better use of time to focus on what is known about this sculpture. There are simple facts that are being overlooked when biographers choose only to focus on psychological factors in Claudel's work. The first is that Camille Claudel was a well-read artist and made herself familiar with the myth of Perseus. Second, she had once studied under Alfred Boucher, an artist who found inspiration in Florentine Renaissance work and would have engaged Claudel in discussions about such reference sources. Lastly, despite admitting that she was frequently ill, Claudel was still able to tackle heroic subject matter yet again. This time she created a work that stood at almost 6 and ½ feet tall.<sup>97</sup> If she was in fact suffering from paranoia at this point, it is even more remarkable that she managed the technical difficulties of carving an larger than life statue of two figures. Through *Persée et la Gorgone*, Claudel showcased her technical skill in marble carving through the crumpled, winged figure of Medusa; the interesting and complex composition and the detailed musculature of Perseus. *Persée* was a commissioned work, which again proves that Claudel was still a sculptress working towards recognition and respect in Paris.

## Conclusion

After years of isolation, accusations against friends and family, and the death of her father, Camille Claudel was committed to a mental institution in 1913 where she would be sequestered for the rest of her life. She was diagnosed with systematic persecution delirium, or paranoia, though on several occasions, doctors recommended a release to reintegrate her into

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<sup>97</sup> Claudel, Camille. 76.

society.<sup>98</sup> Attempting to cipher through the motives behind her confinement can evoke passionate opinions. Some of Camille's friends criticized her family as they learned about her confinement in an effort to defend her sanity.<sup>99</sup> Other critics, like Patricia Mathews, are now convinced that Claudel was not paranoid because of the breakup with Rodin, but rather because the lack of recognition, poverty, and sense of professional betrayal eventually engulfed her.<sup>100</sup> Regardless, her confinement post-dates the works she produced, and so it is more important to consider Claudel's resourcefulness, inventiveness, and well-informed skillset. Despite being a female sculptress working in a male-dominated profession, Claudel was able to challenge cultural expectations and create a body of work that showcased her mastery of material and dialogue with other art movements, which has since been overshadowed by speculation over her illness and relationship with Rodin. No one says it better than Claudel herself: "If Monsieur Rodin really wishes me well, he can do it without having people believe that I owe the success of the sculptures on which I work to his advice and his inspiration."<sup>101</sup> To be a woman living alone as an artist was nothing short of a scandal at this time, but Camille did not allow this to dictate her career path.<sup>102</sup> After disappearing in history for many years, her work has been given new life. In addition to the biographies written about her life, several museums have curated exhibitions dedicated to a revival of Camille Claudel. However, these exhibitions still focus on the wrong details, allowing for reviews that are excited about the revival of a woman artist but present her biography as the main focus of their article. Though Claudel was a woman who worked with Rodin and though her life did not have a happy ending, journalists, critics, art

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<sup>98</sup> Ayrat-Clause, 217 and 221.

<sup>99</sup> Paris, 72.

<sup>100</sup> Mathews, 131.

<sup>101</sup> Claudel, Camille. *Correspondance*, 128.

<sup>102</sup> Paris, 20.

historians and biographers alike miss her incredible talent and savvy when bookending her to only be evaluated on her over-dramatized life story.

There is, however, an opportunity for museums and academia to take control over Claudel's artistic legacy in the near future with the opening of the Musée Camille Claudel in Nogent-sur-Seine in September 2015. Located where Claudel was first introduced to Alfred Boucher will be an entire museum dedicated to her: the first of its kind. Though it is unclear if this museum is being created in addition to or in replacement of the Musée Dubois-Boucher, it will nonetheless be interesting to discover how the organizers choose to share her story outside of Paris. The museum website is not fully developed yet, so there is little information available at this time, but it could be an exciting follow-up venture in hopes of finally finding a fair presentation and analysis of Camille Claudel's oeuvre.<sup>103</sup> There are numerous works by Claudel to rediscover – including two of her most celebrated pieces, *La Valse* and *L'Age Mûr* (Fig. 27) – that could benefit from similar further research and reassessment. Even within the pieces selected here, there is much left to explore. Claudel is still relevant as she continues to challenge the way the art world considers female artists in modern times. More importantly, however, her work retains a universal power through its ability to pull from a variety of sources in order to present a well-developed, masterfully sculpted work of art. Moving forward, art historians and biographers alike need to evaluate Claudel's oeuvre with the same critical eye they give to Rodin so that Claudel can become more than a dramatic interpretation of her life. Until her work is given more attention than her life, there will be no way to ensure a fair understanding of Claudel's talent and dedication to her work. With a more serious study of her sculptures, her legacy will go beyond

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<sup>103</sup> *Camille Claudel* Musée Camille Claudel, 2015, <http://www.museecamilleclaudel.com/> 3 Feb 2015.

Rodin and to a place where “talented artist” will finally be the first descriptor of Camille Claudel.

## Images

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