2012-03-08

Redemption in the Life and Work of Camille Claudel

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts

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April 2012

ABSTRACT

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Camille Claudel is a sculptor who has traditionally been approached in terms of her relationship to Rodin and his influence on her work. Indeed, the two shared a passionate relationship and there are certainly similarities between the two sculptors' work which provide for fascinating analyses. However, one of the acknowledged but previously unexplored speculations on Claudel's art suggests that it involves a measure of veiled spirituality sealed within its stone. It is precisely this sacred element within her sculptures that offers viewers an opportunity to experience transcendence while identifying with fundamental themes. Furthermore, Claudel created her figures as a method of interior healing and deliverance. This theme of redemption will be essential to arriving at the more profound, multifaceted interpretations of her sculptures.

To highlight the connections to the various artists and movements discussed in the thesis, Claudel's piously thematic art can be compared to the nontraditional illustrations by Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, and the religious depictions of James Tissot, as well as being seen as engaging with the idea of theosophy and the Symbolist art movement. It is true that in fin-de-siècle France, due to the advancing secularization of society, viewers did not understand religious and spiritual symbolism in art as comprehensively as they had in the past. However, it will be necessary to show that Claudel was not the only artist interested of her era who persisted in conveying spiritual themes within supposedly secular scenes.

Yet, Claudel's work remains unique in that it communicates the theme of redemption through its creation as well as through its creator. Chez Claudel, the art and the artist are united and one cannot be fully understood without the other. Moreover, through her masterpieces, she did not only offer insight into the meaning of existence; through her redemptive works she found momentary salvation for herself and for others from the excruciating outward oppression present at the close of the 19th century.

Unfortunately, since the moment she began to successfully achieve recognition for her work critics have been content to view each of Camille Claudel's sculptures as a deliberate response to her tumultuous relationship with Rodin. This thesis will investigate more enlightened interpretations made possible when one simultaneously considers the role of her spirituality. It will become unmistakably clear that Camille's brother Paul was right when he stated that her work is vastly different from all other artists' "because it welcomes light and radiates the inner dream that inspired it" (Ayral-Clause 157).

Keywords: Redemption, Sculpture, Spirituality, Symbolism, Camille Claudel.

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INTRODUCTION

"You find me at work; excuse the dust on my blouse. I sculpt my marble myself," said the young French sculptor Camille Claudel to Auguste Rodin, who had happened upon her atelier and her talent for the first time. It was only a matter of moments before he realized he had no choice but to make this creative genius his apprentice. Yet, he could not have foretold the impact she would have on both his artistic and personal existence.

Through the course of their years together, Rodin and Claudel became involved in a torrid love affair. She became not only his lover, but more importantly his model, his inspiration, and his confidante. Yet, she often felt that she lived in Rodin's shadow and as a result, she continually endeavored to prove that her style was deep and distinctive. Though Rodin never denied his love for Claudel, he refused to separate from his longtime companion Rose Beuret and thus would not bestow the commitment she desired. It was during this tragic period that Claudel suffered from an unwanted abortion and her world began to collapse. However, she did not surrender to her demise without a battle. Between 1893 and 1905, after her rupture with Rodin, she completed her most influential pieces. Little by little, as she escaped her mentor's grasp, she wove emblems of her feelings concerning existence into each piece she created.

Through both the successful and agonizing moments Claudel encountered, she received little consideration from her family. Her mother was specifically agitated by her daughter's liberal strong will and artistic inclinations. And although her mother and brother were ashamed to see her revolt against the family's "traditionally" Catholic ways, Claudel incorporated a veiled spirituality sealed within her pieces which is precisely what renders her works so exceptionally touching. Marc Chagall stated, "Art seems…to be above all, a state of soul," which is why

studying elements of her life and subsequently the themes of ecstasy, the fall, and redemption in her works, will surely lead to "uncover[ing] the moving force or spirit behind her sculpture" (Caranfa 11). Tragically, her successes could not prevent the heartrending outcome of her life. In 1913, after Claudel showed signs of despair and despondency, her brother Paul and her mother Louise conspired together to have her confined to the psychiatric asylum of Ville-Évrard for the remaining thirty years of her life (De Bayser 44).

Why this extensive explanation of a life long vanished? Can one not admire her sculptures without this historical familiarity? Claudel worked in seclusion on the assumption—shared at least theoretically by her contemporaries—that artistic genius came from within an individual and would be recognized in proportion to its intrinsic merit (Higonnet 18). Thus, by weaving threads of experience from her tumultuous personal life into her masterpieces, Claudel aimed to enhance her destiny and artistic merit. This is precisely why we will examine her works hand-in-hand with her intriguing biography.

In 2008, as curiosity surrounding the works of Camille Claudel increased, the Musée Rodin along with *Le Figaro* published a special edition magazine entitled *Camille Claudel: La Femme. L'Artiste. L'insoumise.*[1] In it, readers are privileged to never-before-seen images, letters and records which comment on her works. In one section of the edition entitled "L'extase et l'agonie", there lies proof that many have noticed the fallings and risings in her work and understood that these are what give her pieces such diversity. Octave Mirbeau was among these perceptive observers. He stated, "Chez les natures ardentes, dans ces âmes bouillonnantes, le désespoir a des chutes aussi profondes que l'espoir leur donne d'élan vers les hauteurs." [2] He continued to explain that, "C'est de cette destinée tragique qu'est née une des œuvres les plus

[1] *Camille Claudel: The Woman. The Artist. The Unsubdued.*
[2] In those with passionate natures and effervescent souls, despair has its profound falls just as hope has its bursts of great heights.

profondes et les plus magistrales de son temps" [3] (De Bayser 23). The magazine carries these themes throughout its vignette-like critiques on her works.

Subsequently, a candid heading preceding the images of her works admits the struggle she faced in life. It states, "Durant sa longue existence, Camille Claudel aura tout connu: les joies et les peines de l'enfance, les plaisirs de l'amour, la gloire et les succès avant les souffrances des captifs" [4] (De Bayser 23). Furthermore, though Rodin's rejection was undoubtedly the core cause of the emotions behind the tragic fallen figures in Claudel's sculptures, it cannot be denied, as Higonnet says, that "their decade together was the most innovative and the most productive of both their careers" (Higonnet 18). Thus, it is not sufficient to simply uncover the pangs of disaster in these works. We must additionally search for the surrounding moments of ecstasy and redemption; two themes which convey a hope for deliverance from her worldly sorrows.

Camille Claudel is arguably the most gifted sculptor to create in the past several centuries, and tragically, very few attempts to disentangle her work from that of Auguste Rodin arose until after her death. She is not only often omitted from the growing body of feminist literature, but is also seldom integrated into the larger French artistic context (Caranfa 9). There is plentiful evidence that her works should be brought into the light and examined to a deeper extent. And though the majority of analyses insist on drawing parallels between her work and Rodin's, Angelo Caranfa explained why one must also acknowledge the disparity between the two artists in order to witness the magnitude of her sculptures and fully appreciate the transcendental depth they have to offer. He stated,

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[3] From this tragic destiny was born one of the most profound and superior works of its time.
[4] Throughout her long existence, Camille Claudel will have experienced everything: the joys and pains of childhood, the pleasures of love, glory and success, and finally, the sufferings of captivity.

> Behind this contrast lies the difference between two radically opposed views of artistic creation and of life itself. Claudel perceived artistic creation as the silence of perceptual experience, a silence that is actual, primary, and communicative. Rodin understood it as the silence of mental consciousness or perception, a silence that is unlimited potentiality, as well as an inarticulate void, a nothingness….Thus, Claudel's artistic creation does not lie with Rodin, nor does her life. She retained the spirit and style of the Italian Renaissance masters…rather than departing from them. She was concerned not with abstraction but with the real; not with thoughts or ideas, but with feelings; not with distortion of form and elimination of subject, but with retaining them (Caranfa Book Jacket).

As a result of Claudel's endeavor to communicate the emotional truthfulness of her existence, many art historians have ranked her as an "outstanding contributor to Symbolist art;" an important late 19th century movement in France. French Symbolist artists attempted to represent reality in its most honest form and often incorporated spirituality, the imagination, and dreams within their work. Thus, this thesis will examine what role symbolism played in the subjects of her sculptures. Chez Claudel, symbolism was not present in recognizable religious icons as it was in the work of many other artists. Her nontraditional approach to symbolism involved integrating sacred emotion within seemingly secular scenes. I will further discuss her unique treatment of spirituality later in this thesis.

Paul Claudel, the artist's brother and most sensitively appreciative critic, wrote of her work, "Camille Claudel is the first worker in interior[ized] sculpture…a work of Camille

Claudel…is…a kind of monument of interior thought" (Caranfa 15). Thus, there is no doubt that her work involved an intensity rooted in divinity.

Furthermore one area from which Claudel sought redemption was from the male oppression surrounding her. Women of the late 19th and early 20th centuries had limited access to artistic resources and their creativity was constantly stifled by tradition. In 1951 Paul Claudel said, "For a man, being a sculptor is a constant challenge to common sense; for an isolated woman, especially one with my sister's character, it is a pure impossibility" (qtd. in Ayral-Clause 30). He spoke these words years after Claudel was institutionalized and it seems as if he reluctantly but firmly believed that she failed in her sphere of sculpting. However, it is by examining and analyzing several pieces from periods in which she thrived that I will demonstrate precisely how she succeeded at surmounting this so-called impossibility.

Thus, after identifying the spiritual themes she integrated within her work, will it be possible to reveal specifically how these ideas led to the most poignant theme of all: spiritual redemption? Moreover, what were the components leading many French artists of this era and society to seek redemption through art of a spiritual nature? How did redemption through Claudel's sculpture function as a method of self-healing before her institutionalization? A thorough analysis of Claudel's life and works will help to answer these questions and many more. Finally, it is remarkable that in such a relatively short period of time (1881 through 1913), Camille Claudel produced a series of sculptures that *still* have the power to communicate to members of modern society. She created works of brilliance, many autobiographical, which continue to speak with passion to the human, and specifically female, condition. As a result of

the legacy she left, I hope those who read this analysis will agree with myself and with the 19th century art critic Mathias Morhardt that "Camille restera inoubliable"[5] (qtd. in Witherell 7).

[5] Camille will remain unforgettable.

CHAPTER 1: ECSTASY

If one is to fully understand the struggle and tragedy Camille Claudel suffered throughout the last half of her life, it is necessary to first understand the bliss she experienced in her earlier years. It is wise to begin with her sculpture *La Valse* or *The Waltz* (1890), one of her most poignant pieces, which expresses the feeling of bliss she felt as her heart and talent connected with Rodin's. The qualities they shared led them taking a path into passionate love. It is important to remember that Claudel sacrificed much for this, her first relationship, and that her soul was entirely invested in it. In one of her letters to Rodin which still exists she wrote that without him there, "Il y a toujours quelque chose d'absent qui me tourment"[6] (Rivière 2008 27). Initially, one might wonder what is to gain by looking at the idyllic themes and moments in Claudel's life. The 2008 article in *Le Figaro* cited earlier answers this question and many more. First, in the tension and confrontation depicted in the many artistic endeavors by both Claudel and Rodin, viewers learn that "La force de Claudel est de faire de sa vie elle-même l'essence de son oeuvre"[7] (Madelin 55). This shows that for Claudel, the line between interior feelings and artistic expression is blurred, and she intends it to be so. As a true artist, she aims to render her life and her art one melded entity.

Ecstasy and *La Valse*

In the early 1890s, Claudel was enjoying success at the art Salons as well as in her personal life. Her ardent rapture with Rodin as both a mentor and a lover was reflected in much of her work. One of the most moving sculptures from this era is that of a couple waltzing. This pair is not a simple swooning set of two; it is an ethereal, amorous duo in a moment of both sensuality and passion. In 1892 Claudel wrote to the Ministry of Fine Arts requesting materials

[6] There is always something absent that torments me.
[7] Camille's strength is making her life the essence of her works.

for a marble version stating that she had finished a half life-size statue of the piece and that Rodin, among many other artists, approved of it. In response to Claudel's request for the commission, the Minister of Fine Arts sent Armand Dayot, an inspector, to her studio to evaluate the piece (Ayral-Clause 102). His written report helps us to better understand the impact of the sculpture. He stated, "In her group *The Waltz* (1890, fig. 1) Mademoiselle Claudel presents two people…waltzing and intertwined. I want to state that all the details of this group represent a virtuoso performance, and that Rodin himself could not have studied with more artistic finesse and consciousness the quivering life of muscles and skin" (qtd. in Ayral-Clause 102). As a side note, Rodin was not unaware of his shortcomings. It was stated multiple times that, "Rodin enlace les corps, mais Camille fusionne les âmes,"[8] and that "Rodin le sent si bien qu'il cherche à acquérir chez Camille ce qui lui manqué"[9] (Madelin 55). In Caranfa's book, *A Sculpture of Interior Solitude* he also contrasts the tone emitted from Rodin's *The Kiss* (1889) with that of Camille Claudel's *La Valse.* He describes the former as suggesting "carnal love, melancholy intoxication, and distance between the two figures" whereas the latter is "inspired by a 'little of her soul, and a little of her heart,'" and the pair is thus "sincere and truthful, intimate and sensually tranquil" (156). Paul Claudel too insisted that his sister's sculpture was vastly different from her mentor's seeing as it welcomes light and radiates the inner dream that inspired it (Caranfa 41).

Even Claudine Mitchell, who in her article "Intellectuality and Sexuality: Camille Claudel, the Fin De Siècle Sculptress" focuses on the sexual nature of the piece, openly admits that the illusion Claudel wanted to create "of characters escaping the law of gravity also had a symbolic dimension: release from the material world" (Mitchell 423). She alludes to the idea of

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[8] Rodin intertwines bodies, but Camille unites souls.
[9] Rodin understood this so well that he looked to Camille to acquire what he lacked.

this couple waltzing toward exaltation, as well as mentions the "voluptuous chastity" to which Octave Mirbeau and Paul Claudel both referred (Mitchell 423). It is evident that as these two lovers seemingly take flight, more than mortal pleasure is visible; their expressions involve a perceptible measure of faithful trust. Léon Daudet, an influential friend of Paul Claudel, "gave a symbolic status to Claudel's sculpture…reading the non-representational aspect of the drapery as a disassociation from the material world" (Mitchell 424). He stated,

> The couple carried away in a whirlwind conveys admirably the impression of turmoil and vertigo…Around them and emerging from them is their atmosphere, dress, or cloud, folds of ecstasy or shivering air which are signified by indefinite and aerial curves (Mitchell 424).

Both Claudel's *La Valse* and *Clotho* demonstrate a preoccupation with the theme of destiny and man's incapacity to control it. Yet, viewers must remember that although Claudel sculpted scenes which explore the meaning of life, the subject of her sculpture is not existence, but rather "one's relationship with existence, involving the emotions which arise from human encounters with reality" (Mitchell 431). It is this powerful yet mysterious connection which compels viewers to contemplate the deeper implications of Claudel's masterpieces.

In an attempt to illustrate how Claudel conveyed her feelings of ecstasy through *La Valse* specifically, I will examine several of its formal elements individually. First, the stance of the two dancers is vacillating as the only point of visible contact to the ground is the male's back right foot, and even then, his knee is bent and he clearly does not appear to be firmly planted. This conveys the feeling of weightlessness and shows that this moment's movement is ephemeral. Ayral-Clause stated, "Mademoiselle Camille Claudel daringly took on what may be the most difficult to convey for a sculptor: a dance movement…So that it does not remain frozen

in stone, infinite art is required. Mademoiselle Claudel had this art" (103). Later in her analysis she adds that the imbalance created by the "oblique stance of the embracing figures, accentuated by the long flowing train of the woman, captures both the movement of the dance and the blend of spiritual and sensuality so characteristic of Camille's sculptures" (Ayral-Clause 103). This blend of both the sacred and the corporeal, which Paul Claudel coins as "voluptuously chaste," is what time and again renders her works so stirring. Continuing to examine the stance, the woman's posture is diagonal; however, it is important to notice that she is not leaning dependently on the man. Her arms are amorously clasping him, and it is evident that she is enraptured in this romantic moment, but she is not depicted as desperately clinging onto her partner for support. This, along with the fact that the scale of the woman is nearly proportionate to that of the man, would probably have been quite empowering for French women of this era.

Next, the anatomical detail and correctness with which Camille Claudel works is astounding. The muscles, skin, bones, hair and drapery are each meticulously crafted; and, in an undertaking as unforgiving as carving solid stone, this is truly a feat. This is especially true in the case of women artists who did not have access to sophisticated art training and particularly to the live and nude models.

Moving outward to the clothing on the woman, the choice to incorporate a flowing dress was not a simple decision. The previously mentioned report recorded by Armand Dayot, unfortunately, was not entirely positive. Concerning the original nude statue as a whole, he stated that, "…in spite of its unquestionable value, the realistic and violent accent that emanates from it forbids placing it in a public space" (qtd. in Ayral-Clause 103). If one hearkened back to the condition of French society at that time, one would learn that women were often locked out of certain subjects, such as nudes, and what's more, their talent was widely considered to be

inferior. One of Dayot's final remarks stated that he was bothered by the "surprising sensuality emanating from a sculpture coming from the hands of a woman" (qtd. in Ayral-Clause 103). However, possibly due to the inspector's friendship with Rodin, he did not dismiss the piece entirely. He advised Camille to "dress her figures" and to "choose the type of clothing that would allow her to reveal as much of the bodies as she saw fit" (qtd. in Ayral-Clause 103). Contrary to her nature, she conformed and in a letter to the Director of Fine Arts she wrote, "During the whole summer I did studies of draperies on the same group, and they are completed. I am now ready to submit them again…" (Ayral-Clause 103). After all was said and done, all viewers including Claudel agreed that the drapery added a whirling dimension that had not been present in the original version. In her biography *A Life,* Ayral-Clause stated, "What characterizes the lightness of the waltz, is the rapid twirling of veils, the rhythmic spinning of draperies, which gives wings to the dancers" (Ayral-Clause 106).

Continuing on to the facial expressions, the man's face is tilted downward and buried tenderly in the shoulder of his lover. This position creates an intimate tone, yet noticeably illustrates his devotion. Likewise, the woman's eyes are closed as she denies onlookers the privilege of fully understanding her bliss. The function of this piece is not to expose the beauty of the dancers; rather, its purpose is to capture a delicate emotion in its fleeting moment. Viewers ought to feel privileged to experience the ecstasy which exudes from the lifelike nature of the piece.

Now let us examine the pleasure this piece conveys, which perhaps parallels the same happiness Claudel was experiencing at this time in her life. Ardently in love with Rodin and finally receiving some recognition for her work, she approached the heights of a rapture that she would never know again. It is simple to find recorded proof of the source of Claudel's

happiness; for it seems much of Paris knew of Rodin's professional and private admiration of her. "Le sculpteur Jules Desbois témoigne, 'Rodin, qui a tout de suite reconnu en elle la grande artiste…la consulte lui-même sur toute chose. Sur chaque décision à prendre, il délibère avec elle'"[10] (qtd. in Madelin 53). Rodin felt and spoke like a bashful lover: "Rodin s'épanche en de nombreux courriers comme un amoureux transi auprès de 'la divinité malfaisante que j'aime avec fureur'"[11] (qtd. in Madelin 53). Finally, in a recently published collection of correspondences, an instance of Rodin's extreme love in 1886 can be found written in his own hand: "Je n'en puis plus. Je ne puis plus passer un jour sans te voir. Sinon, l'atroce folie. C'est fini, je ne travaille plus"[12] (qtd. in Rivière 2008 38).

Upon changing perspectives, after sorting through the correspondences that were not lost or destroyed and reading each letter that remains between Claudel and Rodin, it has been fascinating to witness the drastic differences distinguishing the ways they expressed their feelings for one another. Among all the letters, there are very few moments in which Claudel opens herself up to verbalize her adoration. The one instance which critics often emphasize was written at the height of their obsession when many believe her to have been carrying Rodin's child. In July of 1891 she ends her letter by saying, "Je couche toute nue pour me faire croire que vous êtes là mais quand je me réveille ce n'est plus la même chose"[13] (Rivière 2008 77). Apart from this, however, the majority of her letters are filled with less passionate, yet caring inquiries. She asks after his health, his work, and discusses their views on a variety of artists, critics, models, materials, and offers him advice. Her approach for conveying her ecstasy was

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[10] The sculptor Jules Desbois testifies, "Rodin, who instantly recognized the great artist within Camille, consults her in everything. With each decision to be made, he deliberates with her.
[11] Rodin pours out his soul in numerous letters like a bashful lover beside "the evil divinity that I love with a fury".
[12] I cannot go on. I can no longer spend one day without seeing you. Otherwise, it's dreadful madness. It's over, I can no longer work.
[13] I sleep entirely nude to make myself believe that you are here, but when I wake up, it isn't the same thing.

far purer than Rodin's. Comparisons between his sculpture *The Kiss* and her *Sakountala* (1905) have often been made to prove this. However, this piece will be addressed later as the theme of redemption is brought into the light. Finally, it is evident that in the early years of her career, Claudel considered redemption to be a quality accessible through love alone. It was not until she began to experience loss and suffering that she sought deliverance though different channels.

Along with reciprocal love, one can certainly imagine that Claudel felt buoyed up and validated by the constant support Rodin granted her. This comparison of their conveyance of feelings shows that even throughout the moments of passionate rapture, she did not lose focus. One might also attest that a significant portion of the cause of her happiness at this time is something apart from Rodin. She certainly merited pride in herself and pleasure in her success. For a French woman at the turn of the 20th century, she was making greater strides than many ever thought possible.

In May 1934, Louis Vauxelles, an unwavering supporter of Claudel praised her in *Le Monde illustré* by saying,

> With Berthe Morisot, Camille Claudel is the most beautiful name of feminine art at the end of the nineteenth century. Eugène Blot, [Claudel's] art dealer and defender, wrote justly that she was to Rodin what Morisot was to Manet. Each one working next to a crushing master, keeps her own personality. [Yes], Claudel…owes something to the master of Meudon (Rodin); he marked her with his touch, formed her as he modeled clay. But, this rustic woman from Lorraine, hard, willful, untamable, remained herself…Her portraits express more nobility, elevation, majesty; and the groups created by Camille Claudel are enduring masterpieces… (qtd. in Ayral-clause 242).

At the turn of the century, finally receiving recognition for her work, Claudel's talent during this period was publically recognized as being comparable to Claude Debussy's music. Claudel and Debussy's friendship was mutually profound seeing as Camille intended to "savor music that conveyed the emotions she was trying to express in her sculptures" and Debussy discovered in her works, "a deep feeling of intimacy, like an echo of secret or familiar emotions coming from within" (Ayral-Clause 107). After several smaller versions of *La Valse* were produced, Claudel gave one to Debussy, which he treasured. It was said that "*La Valse* left [Debussy's] study only when he did" (Ayral-Clause 107). It is safe to assume Claudel believed music to be a truthful form of outward expression of interior emotion just as she intended her art to be.

Despite her success in the eyes of the public, and her continued efforts to please the Ministry, she was found inadequate in the end. Ayral-Clause explained, "When Camille chose to symbolize rhythm, melody, and intoxication with a sexual undertone, she stepped into an area long off limits to women. Because of this, her marble version was never realized" (104). Octave Mirbeau intuitively expressed this fate of this metaphorical but symbolic couple when he asked, "Mais où vont-ils, dans l'ivresse de leur âme et de leur chair si étroitement jointes? Est-ce à l'amour, est-ce à la mort ? Les chairs sont jeunes, elles palpitent de vie mais la draperie qui les entoure, qui les suit, qui tournoie avec eux, bat comme un suaire"[14] (qtd. in De Bayser 36). The instance of *The Waltz* was only the beginning of many dreams failing to come to fruition. Sadly, this fairytale beginning meets a tragic demise as little by little, Claudel's life begins a spiraling descent.

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[14] But where are they going, in the euphoria of their souls and their flesh so tightly joined? Is it toward love, is it toward death? Their flesh is young, it pulses with life, but the drapery which encircles them, which follows them, which turns with them, beats like a shroud.

CHAPTER 2: AGONY

Clotho: Agony Personified

There can be no dawn without darkness and no pleasure without pain. Thus, it is wise to continue analyzing Camille Claudel's works by focusing in on two of her pieces which convey a theme of a desolate fall. The pair which exemplify it best are *L'âge mûr* or *The Age of Maturity* 1894-1902 and *Clotho* 1893. Due to the parallel events in the artist's personal life, the tragedy and pain projected through her characters reach viewers on a profound level.

Beginning with *Clotho* (fig. 2), completed in 1893, there is an abrupt and blatantly visible change in the thematic elements Claudel chose to incorporate in her work as distance grew between her and Rodin. This distance stemmed from the fact that though Rodin loved Camille, he refused to commit himself solely to her and because of this, she felt exploited. She humbly followed his artistic guidance, and gave him heart and soul without hesitation, yet the commitment was not mutual. In a letter to her brother Paul she attests, "[Rodin] uses me in all sorts of ways" (qtd. in Caranfa 34). This torment and frustration conveyed through *Clotho* and *L'âge mûr* begs to be examined.

One must first understand the history behind the Greek mythological character Clotho before being able to fully grasp the impact of the statue of this entangled woman. As legend teaches, Clotho was the youngest of the Three Fates but one of the oldest of the goddesses, and she was the daughter of Zeus and Themis. She was the spinner of the thread of human life and thus had the power to determine how long a certain person could live. She was also known to be "the daughter of night" a name which indicated the darkness and obscurity of human destiny. Her power over fate was so great that not even the gods dared disturb her (Thomas, "Clotho").

This being said, Camille Claudel purposefully chose her subject to parallel her fear and awareness of her forthcoming inevitably tragic fate. Caranfa, in his analysis, states that Claudel's choice and execution of this woman "reflects her understanding of the contingency and of the fragility of existence. Claudel's *Clotho* exemplifies existence as closed within this world, with no future hope but death itself (104). Before examining the public's reaction to this piece, it is necessary to examine the formal elements in both their realistic and symbolic detail in order to have complete conception with which to scrutinize.

First, in Claudel's sculpture *Clotho,* her Goddess of Fate, a female nude, stands as "…an image of physical decay and the intimations of mortality" (Witherell 5). This is visible through several aspects of the piece. First, her thin, sagging skin seems to hang loosely indicating exhaustion while her bones protrude as if under strain from the weight of life's hardships.

Her eyes, though somewhat hidden in the shadows, are weakly focused and appear to be partially closed. Caranfa describes them as being "…set in the deep sockets of this aging and ageless old woman, who has been drained of her previous bodily strength and beauty" (106). Her mouth, though just a grimace, is "toothless and tightly shut, an allusion to the silence of death" (Caranfa 106). Her neck strains in bewilderment at the brutality of fate and her left arm reaches out in a feeble attempt to free herself. "Her stance is that of a tree--rooted by eras of time passed and unable to stretch its limbs" (Witherell 5). The spiraling lines running the full length of the stone along with the perplexed, distorted and clenched jawbone convey that this tormented woman is unsure how she will carry on. Her head leans "heavily to the right under the weight of her long hair, which forms a kind of vault around her, encircling her down to her knees" (Caranfa 106).

The oppressive mane of hair is one of the most fascinating features of the sculpture. The long strands symbolically evoke the threads of Claudel and Rodin's relationship and the threads of Claudel's life before they are brutally cut. Their thick, tightly winding quality adds to the idea of entrapment. Le Normand-Romain states, "From *Giganti* to *La Petite Chatelaine* to *Clotho,* Claudel gives hair a life of its own: the locks of *Clotho* are dense shoots like the roots of a tropical tree, as malevolent as…a serpent…" (41). This description evoking brutal and unforgiving strength leaves no room for viewers to hope for any other fate for the sufferer than death. Paul Claudel himself described death as a very old woman, with hair white like cotton and the spider webs of many centuries blurring her figure (qtd. in Caranfa 106).

Octave Mirbeau described *Clotho* as a "Ghastly Fate…Old, emaciated, hideous flesh falling heavily like rags along her flanks, withered breasts falling like dead eyelids, the scarred belly, long legs made for terrible journeys that never end, agile and anxious legs in which the strides mow human lives, she laughs into her mask of death" (Caranfa 106). Indeed, the helpless, hopeless, anguishing, and painful theme that is emitted through *Clotho* encourages viewers to believe that the artist herself felt lost, powerless, and that life was meaningless at the moment of her sculpture's formation. Though viewers are strictly limited to one moment in the painful life of this woman's existence, one moment is sufficient to feel and even experience her vulnerability and dread. Caranfa describes her slow, relentless movement as being hopelessly "at the mercy of time" because "…in *Clotho*, life is consummated in an unending death" (104).

The most agonizing feature to observe is Clotho's perceptibly swollen abdomen. This sculpture was completed not long after she suffered the unwanted abortion of Rodin's child. This brutal reminder to him of her afflictions as a result of his love must have been difficult for him to swallow. He, in turn, responded defensively by reminding her of another allegory: he

made reference to Eugène Druet's *Fate and the Convalescent* 1898 (fig. 3) in which another personified version fate is portrayed as striving to protect the young girl in his arms. However, Rodin's actions as time progressed showed no more commitment than they previously had. Seeing as he shared an atelier with Claudel and they studied together, we see similarities to *Clotho* in Rodin's *She who was the Helmet Maker's Once Beautiful Wife* 1885 (fig.4) and Jules Desbois' *The Misery* 1894 (fig. 5)*;* but, "…far from [solely] dwelling on the sadness and physical degeneration of old age, [Claudel] transcends this…" (Le Normand-Romain 41). The symbolism taken from her existence along with the deliberate details, both render her version superiorly more commanding.

Several critics insist that in sculpting *Clotho,* Claudel alluded to Michelangelo's series of slave sculptures (fig. 6) as well as to Donatello's *Magdalene Penitent* (fig.7) (Madelin 53). The stance of each piece is similar, yet the expressions of the three differ significantly. While *Clotho* appears hopeless, entangled in her web of fate, Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* looks heavenward in an effort to transcend the material world. Donatello's Mary lends a similar expression as she peacefully offers a prayer. In comparison, *Clotho* involves a quite different sentiment. The question of existence seems to be woven through the woman's hair, and the fragile, fleeting nature of life is visible within the weakened state of her body. Claudel indeed succeeded at transcending an otherwise ordinary scene into a compelling, heart wrenching figure by what Le Normand-Romain calls "her spiritual vision" and what I believe to be an exceptionally complex and multifaceted approach. By hearkening to these historical masters and applying her own virtuosity, she triumphs fiercely.

Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) suggested that since artists were often refused an explanation by the modern, they had no other choice but to turn, in their perplexity, to the ancient

wise ones who went before them (qtd. in Harrison 747). Indeed, Rodin too looked back to Michelangelo and earlier masters, yet he did so in pursuit of technique-based inspiration. Claudel, in contrast, looked to the past for contextual insights. She sought to learn how these artists incorporated spirituality within their work in innovative ways. Caspar Friedrich, a 19th century German artist, said, "What pleases us most in the pictures of the Old Masters is their pious simplicity….However, we should not seek to become simple, as many have done, and so imitate their faults, but rather to become pious and imitate their virtues" (qtd. in Harrison 50). It was precisely this piety that Claudel aimed to emulate and one must conclude, then, that "*Clotho* thus appears as the cruelest of revenges, as Claudel decidedly turns Rodin's training against him" (Le Normand-Romain 41) and seeks to transform her talent, in order to integrate deeper meaning.

As far as the reaction from the public was concerned, it seems that some understood the level of skill involved in creating *Clotho*, yet most were horrified and/or confused with the subject and theme. The exposé from *Le Figaro* stated that, "Le public porta autant aux nues *La Valse* qu'il fut dérangé par *Clotho…"* [15] (Madelin 54). Claude Debussy, who had previously so deeply adored the bliss conveyed in *La Valse*, "'révérait avec une nuance d'effroi l'âpre Clotho' car les tresses de la fileuse débordent de la calotte crânière comme les intestins d'une personne éviscérée, et la violence de cette vision est a la hauteur de la douleur de l'artiste'"[16] (qtd. in De Bayser 36). His description poignantly describes what many felt but could not verbalize.

Le Normand-Romain explained, "The [French public] could not understand it and complained, 'Whatever the technical merit of a sculptor in tackling such themes, he deprives himself of the purest expressive resources of his art. By dint of intellectualism, he ceases to be

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[15] The public was as thrilled with *The Waltz* as they were disturbed by *Clotho.*
[16] Revered the fierce *Clotho* with a nuance of terror, for the spinster's tresses jut out from the skull cap like the intestines of an eviscerated person, and the violence of this vision is at the height of the artist's pain.

intelligible and plastic: he gives himself over to curiosity, instead of serving the popular ideal, in the noble and ancient sense of this word.' For Rodin, however, this language was intelligible" (Le Normand-Romain 41). However, as I will explain later as the theme of redemption is brought into the light, Claudel's purpose in sculpting was not to aesthetically please society; she created her art as a means to communicate honestly and convey her precise view of reality.

Yet, one must remember that she did not leave unscathed after the execution of this work. Debussy's aforementioned words remind viewers once more of Clotho's inevitable connection with the sculptor. Claudel portrays the woman in the same manner in which she views her own life—undeniably ruled by an inevitable fate. Hearkening back to the mythological origins of the character, we are reminded again that Clotho was not chosen by chance. Greek mythology taught that Clotho, along with the other two Fates, was tricked by becoming intoxicated by Alcestis (Thomas 1). Thus conceivably, Claudel saw herself as having been "intoxicated" by Rodin and ensnared by his influence. Yet, one thing is certain; she struggled for years to free herself from her love, thoughts, and connections with "the great man" and this challenge undoubtedly contributed to her hopelessness and miserable state of decline. Witherell maintains this idea as she adds, "It was too much for this proud, solitary soul to see that man whom she had nourished with her own genius walk into glory as she was being engulfed in the dark {of oblivion}…"(Witherell 6).

The Rupture: *L'âge mûr*

One of Claudel's most well-known works, *L'âge mûr* or *The Age of Maturity* 1894-1902 (fig. 8), undeniably evokes the theme of a desolate fall. This idea of plunging into desperation is portrayed in the multiple versions of the sculpture—an allegorical trio of figures representing the ages of man. Tahinci describes it as "the struggle between the freshness of youth and death"

(Tahinci 12). The middle male figure stands unstably as he is pulled between these symbols of life and fatality. He visibly leans toward the younger figure yet his face is painfully, yet decidedly, turned toward that of the elderly face. Though this is a struggle consistent with a universal reality and relevant to even contemporary viewers, it is deprived of its additional underlying meaning unless the sculptor's past is brought into the light.

Tahinci offers one convincing interpretation when she states that this middle-aged naked man torn between a young and an older woman is undoubtedly "a cruel statement of abandonment" (10). She argues boldly that the sculpture can be read as "Camille's Ecce Homo…a representation of Rodin leaving Camille, on her knees and begging him to stay with her, to go back to his old and aging mistress and companion, Rose Beuret" (Tahinci 10). This use of the Ecce Homo motif is a heartrending allegory as we envision the moment in Christianity when Jesus was cruelly condemned and reviled. He was surrounded, yet alone, as He faced the foreboding days to come. In a similar manner, through the sequential casts of the work, Claudel too apprehends her ominous future and leaves little room for hope in the framework.

A fascinating and often unnoticed feature is seen in the comparison of the various versions of *L'âge mûr* (fig. 8). In the final version of the work, which was completed in 1898, the position of the young woman has been significantly modified. "All physical contact between her and the man has been suspended, and her arms are outstretched in an imploring gesture" (Tahinci 13). "Mlle Claudel a séparé la main de son principal personnage de celle de la figure de la Jeunesse pour mieux en exprimer l'éloignement. Elle a de plus enveloppé la figure de l'Age, de draperies volantes qui accusent la rapidité de sa marche… "[17] (Pingeot 290).

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[17] Mademoiselle Claudel separated the hand of her main character from that of the figure of Youth to better express the distance between them. Furthermore, she enveloped the figure representing Age in flying draperies which accuse the rapidity of her departure.

As one begins to examine the youthful figure in both versions, one will notice that her head strains upward with a furrowed brow, eyes widened in an attempt to seize the gaze of the central man. In the earlier plaster, she has a strong grasp on his arm and shoulder, but more important than the force of her physical grasp, the power of her proportion in relation to the two other figures begs to be examined. In the earlier version, the youthful head with its pleading face is not half of an arm's length away from the man's heart. Yet, in the latter version, she is proportionately much smaller and on a significantly lower plane than the two seemingly-floating others. This can compellingly be read as a sign that Claudel, in her parallel private life, has lost confidence in her influence.

Next, as we move to examine the figure representing age on the left it is imperative to notice the variance in her glance between the two renditions. In the first, she glares defiantly at Youth and seems to taunt her while, as a precaution, she still encircles her arm around her target. However, in the later rendition, she guides the man gently away with a hand lightly rested on his arm which shows that her influence consists of more than physical force. Additionally, her gaze is now focused on her prize; she appears secure in her persuasive power and has a visible smirk of satisfaction. Age now claims the highest point of the scene and the drapery Claudel added insinuates blowing wings ready to take flight. Just as in traditional Christian symbolism, where the highly favored are placed on the right-hand side of God, Claudel depicted Rose, the victor, triumphantly occupying Rodin's right side. Again, examining these renditions with the two allegorical meanings in mind provides a much deeper reaction to this theme of succumbing to the fall.

Finally, as we move to the focus of the piece, the torn man, it is again vital to compare his representation in the earlier and later versions. First, concerning his stance, in the beginning he

is nearly falling toward youth with his knees bent and his head thrown upward. However, in the later rendition not only has he leaned toward Age, but his head is tilted downward in firmer resolve and his limbs are more rigid as he steps away. Pingeot supports this same idea as she attests, "La première version…et la seconde racontent la lutte et la défaite. L'homme hésite d'abord…[et] l'axe de cette pyramide oscille vers la droite. Puis…tout bascule vers la gauche"[18] (290).

One may initially wonder why Claudel engages such immense inconsistency in the size, balance, and proportion of the figures in her works. However, as evident in her pieces such as *The Wave* 1897 (fig. 9), Claudel often sought to create visual instabilities and inequalities contrary to what the public often expected of sculpture. In this instance specifically, through her skillful creation, "…elle forçait le spectateur à recomposer en esprit la phase suivante, inéluctable"[19] (Pingeot 290). And, as was equally true in the Fall of man, there is no turning back.

Though the public saw *L'âge mûr* as an allegory "…qui reçut de nombreux titres et se prêta à beaucoup d'interprétations…pour Paul Claudel, l'allégorie était transparente"[20] (Pingeot 288). Tahinci informs us that Paul Claudel immediately recognized his sister in the young woman's image and was saddened by this "clear statement about her self-image" (qtd. in Tahinci 12). In his article "My Sister Camille" written in 1952, he observes,

> But no, this nude young girl, is my sister! My sister Camille…humiliated, kneeling, this magnificent, this proud woman, that is how she represented herself. Imploring, humiliated, kneeling and nude! Everything is over! This is what she left us forever to

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[18] The first version…and the second recount the struggle and the defeat. First, the man hesitates…and the axis of this pyramid oscillates toward the right. Then…all tips toward the left.
[19] She forced the viewer to reconstruct in his mind the next, inescapable phase.
[20] …which received numerous headlines and lent itself to many interpretations…for Paul Claudel, the allegory was transparent.

> contemplate! And even before your eyes you can see her soul! It is at the same time the soul, the genius, the reason, the beauty, life… (qtd. in Tahinci 13)

However, Paul's heart had not always been so sympathetic; in the beginning, it was entirely hardened to the piece. His following discriminatory statement informs, yet at the same time incites compassion for the unjust and intolerant manner in which Camille was regarded.

> La séparation était inévitable et le moment, hâté de la part de ma sœur par une violence effroyable de caractère…ne tarda pas à arriver. Camille ne pouvait assurer au grand homme la parfaite sécurité d'habitudes et d'amour-propre qu'il trouvait auprès d'une vieille maîtresse [Rose]. Et d'autre part, deux génies d'égale puissance et de différent idéal n'auraient su longtemps partager le même atelier et la même clientèle. Le divorce était pour l'homme une nécessité, il fut pour ma sœur la catastrophe totale, profonde, définitive. Le métier de sculpteur est pour un homme une espèce de défi perpétuel au bon sens, il est pour une femme isolée et pour une femme avec le tempérament de ma sœur, une pure impossibilité. Elle avait tout misé sur Rodin, elle perdit tout avec lui. Le beau vaisseau, quelque temps balloté sur d'amères vagues, s'engloutit corps et biens.[21] (Pingeot 288)

Claudel's boldness, which today would be seen as inspiring, was at that time considered frightening. The Claudels found it upsetting that their daughter persisted to commit herself to a domain which was physically demanding, unclean, but most importantly, entirely inappropriate for a woman of French society. This thus provokes the question: if their son had persevered in

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[21] The separation was inevitable, and the moment, hastened on my sister's part by her dreadfully fierce temperament, did not take long to come. Camille could not assure the great man the perfect, safe habits and self-esteem that he found in his old mistress (Rose). And moreover, two geniuses with equal power and different ideals would not have known how to share the same studio and clientele for long. For the man, the divorce was a necessity; for my sister, it was a total catastrophe, deep and defining. The profession of a sculptor is, for a man, a kind of perpetual challenge to reason; for an isolated woman with my sister's temperament, it is a pure impossibility. She had placed all her hopes in Rodin, and she lost everything with him. The beautiful vessel, who tossed for awhile on bitter waves, was eventually engulfed without a trace.

art with the same determination, would it not have been a source of pride for the family? Paul's quote certainly implies that for a man, sculpting was a character-building challenge, but for a woman it should not even have been attempted. However, despite prejudice, a lack of familial and social acceptance, and little help, Claudel continued to struggle. She would not allow this to be her downfall. Further on, as we delve into how her sculpture is redemptive in nature, we will examine how specifically she made these strides both for herself and for women of the late 19th and early 20th century.

Stepping back to the statue itself, there are those who interpret Claudel's rage as she created the solidified moment of *L'âge mûr* as a cruel, inhuman act as the figure delivers her lover to the hands of death. However, despite his frustration with her boldness in the piece and his distaste for her determination in a field that was not suitable for females, Paul did not see it this way; he saw his sister exclusively as "Rodin's victim…torn between desire and despair" (Tahinci 13). Moreover, the formal elements of the sculpture tend to side with Paul.

Additionally, examining *L'âge mûr* with a symbolist perspective reminds us yet again of the complexity of the piece. Henri de Régnier explained the poetic nature of symbolist works by saying that they start with a word, next work through images and metaphors, then go on to include emblems and allegory. In the end, the most complete figuration of an Idea is presented (Mitchell 426). In the case of *L'âge mûr,* the Idea Claudel aimed to illustrate was Destiny. It is this "expressive configuration of Ideas" that artists today still hope to achieve.

Finally, Tahinci's closing statement conveys the most critical moment of this sculpture's fallen state as she claims that overall, Claudel tries to "extinguish her own life and happiness and commits suicide in representational form" (Tahinci 14). Claudel's ultimate version of *L'âge mûr* undeniably supports this conjecture seeing as the finalized female figure is severed from its

foundational core and constantly seems to "reach out and grasp at an unattainable hope which unfortunately, she is never able to attain" (Tahinci 14).

As a final point, though much more could be said of Claudel's sufferings, the most essential lessons she taught through her art can be witnessed in those sculptures created after her rupture with Rodin. The anecdote Frisch and Shipley recorded helps us better understand the necessity of this break on her life as an individual artist. To set the scene, Rodin and Claudel had gone to Cannes to visit the Renoirs, whose house contained an aviary:

> As Rodin and Camille sat near this [aviary], one cheery afternoon, the songs of the birds outside made too sad for Camille the songs of the birds within; Rodin had to grasp her arm and pull her away, or she'd have freed the songsters. Life at best is too nearly a prison; for all her joyous times, Camille's love was behind bars. (Caranfa 23)

Caranfa adds that it was not only the question of Claudel's love being placed behind social bars by Rodin; it was also a question of Claudel's art being tied down. "…For Claudel, the birds may have simply been…the symbol of her longing to fly as high as the sky, to commune with the universe, if only she could free herself and her art from the constraints of Rodin…She instinctively knew that her life and her art belonged to a different world, to a freer, higher, and more silent world than the world of Rodin…" (23). This period, when Claudel finally broke free from her metaphorical cages and spread her wings, was an act that I intend to be the most significant focus of this thesis. It has been sufficiently proven that her art "overflows with images of her family, of pure or ideal love, of joy, of contemplation, of childhood" and of concerns (Caranfa 24). Yet, I affirm that there is something deeper to her sculptures: a veiled spiritually, encompassing specifically the theme of redemption within the stone.

CHAPTER 3: SYMBOLISM

Claudel as Part of the Symbolist Movement

As one begins an examination of the theme of redemption chez Camille Claudel, one must first have a firm background of the artistic circumstances present in her era. First, in the late 19th century, a movement came about in literature, music, and art known as the Symbolist movement. Symbolism was a reaction against realism and supported spirituality, imagination, and ideals. The purpose of the symbolic imagery was to suggest the state of the artist's soul. During the painful moments of Claudel and Rodin's relationship, it is interesting to notice that while Rodin, Claudel's supposed master, writes of his feelings, Camille uses those same feelings as a catalyst to create a masterpiece. The following excerpt from *Le Figaro* provides a clear image: "En l'année 1893, pendant que Rodin s'épanche dans ses lettres en larmoyant sur leur difficile relation, elle traduit son propre drame dans *L'âge mûr*...Transcendant sa propre expérience…"[22] (55).

Hearkening back to the roots of the movement, in 1886 Jean Moréas wrote *Le Symbolisme* which is today known as *The Symbolist Manifesto.* In it he argued that "…symbolism was hostile to plain meanings, declamations, false sentimentality and matter-of-fact description" and that its goal instead was to "clothe the Ideal in a perceptible form" (*The Art Tribune).* The symbolists were artists who emphasized dreams and desires, and often used mythological imagery. At times, the symbols they incorporate involve intensely personal, private, obscure and ambiguous references.

Concerning Claudel's alleged association with the Symbolist movement, there are two opposing, yet compelling arguments. Jumeau-Lafond, of *The Art Tribune* insists that with

[22] In the year 1893, while Rodin pours out his soul in letters weeping about their difficult relationship, Camille translates her dramatic moment into *The Age of Maturity*...Transcending her own experience.

Sakountala, Claudel takes on the symbolists' theme of the question of destiny. He states that because her work is more than simple autobiographical reflection and is marked by a metaphysical search, it consistently confirms a Symbolist orientation. He also adds that "the sinuous turnings of *The Waltz* [are] obviously meant to be compared more to a Symbolist vision than to any similar work from Art Nouveau" (1). One element which supports this is Claudel's close friendship with Claude Debussy. He admitted to being strongly affected by the Symbolist aesthetic in his composing. Thus, taking into account Claudel's adoration of his music, it is possible that she was in fact influenced and aimed to incorporate this same theme as she created.

When comparing Claudel's sculpture to Rodin's, where his pieces are indeed mysterious, hers are full of suggestion, musicality, and "aim to go beyond 'superfluous, inexpressive forms, lines or colors'" (Caranfa 141). This notion of, as Rodin put it, "awaken[ing] the imagination of the spectator without extraneous assistance" was central to Symbolist aesthetics. Participants of the movement intended the emotions of the spectators to "soar directly and freely toward the supposed eternal essence, the mystery of things, [and] their spiritual significance…" (Caranfa 141).

Rodin certainly integrated this idea as he mentored Claudel. For him, mystery was the key. It was the "spiritual significance of things, their essential truth;" in Rodin's own words, the mystery is "like the atmosphere in which very beautiful works of art bathe" (qtd. in Caranfa 141). He believed that in art, absolutely everything is "resolved" into thought and spirit; he stated, "The forms must be arranged in such a way as to accentuate lines that best express the spiritual state that I interpret, they must "permit the artist to listen to the spirit *answering* his own spirit" (qtd. in Caranfa 141). Caranfa adds that in this way, every artist who has this gift expresses a religious emotion. Claudel, as his student, apprentice, and adoring disciple certainly

would have appreciated this aspect of Symbolism and incorporated it into her transcendental method of sculpting.

Finally, the encyclopedia states that "The term 'symbolism' is derived from the word 'symbol' which derives from the Latin *symbolum*, a symbol of faith, and *symbolus*, a sign of recognition." Thus, if one considers symbolist techniques and features to truly be signs of recognition related to the creator's existence, I do believe that Claudel was sensitively aware of her various circumstances and represented them as candidly as she was able.

Conversely, though Claudel, as Caranfa states it, "Symbolically captures the narrative [and] poetry of her life," (101) I believe that she was not *solely* a Symbolist; her purpose entailed much more. The Symbolist Manifesto characterizes Symbolism as a style whose "goal was not attaining the ideal, but whose sole purpose was to express itself for the sake of being expressed". This is certainly not true of Claudel's pieces on the whole. Quite often, for her, sculpting was a healing process, a spiritual endeavor in which she sought, more than anything, for redemption. Rather than portraying her idyllic utopia, as many symbolists did, she confronted reality with brutal honesty in order to help herself come to terms with her situation, and resolve the anger, confusion, or feelings within her.

Like Rodin, Claudel did not struggle finding symbols that inspired her personally. We see proof of this in *Clotho* and the allegories of *L'âge mûr* and *Perseus and the Gorgon.* But, unlike Rodin, Caranfa states, "Claudel does not empty the symbols of their objective and rational meaning; her works 'are the fruits of her research and careful thought,' while the works of Rodin 'are the probes into his prolific unconscious'" (141). It is precisely this *duality* between the emblematic and the authentic that creates the gravity of Claudel's masterpieces. Caranfa later adds that chez Claudel, "Reality is never betrayed or diminished by her faithful hands, and the

whole is not only a real presence, but is also preserved by the harmony and internal tension of its parts" (141). She sought profundity and perfection and solace with each piece.

Again, was it for fame that she strove in such a determined manner? Claudel answered this with a resounding 'no' in 1892 as she struggled to break free from her master's grasp. She stated, "Je travaille maintenant pour moi"[23] (Madelin 57). Le Figaro, in its review of her life and works, added, "Alors que leurs vies se séparent, leur conception artistique les éloigne plus encore l'un de l'autre : Rodin s'attache à la diffusion commerciale et culturelle de son travail, notion à laquelle Camille Claudel ne pense guère"[24] (Madelin 58). Yet again, her intentions were rooted in a higher purpose.

Continuing down this transcendental path, at first attempt to examine the spiritual chez Camille Claudel, one may mock the endeavor seeing as her family, specifically her mother, rarely showed signs of Christianity or love. For proof one need only read of the way they exiled and neglected Claudel throughout the last thirty years of her life. As early as 1907, "both her mother and sister had stopped seeing her once they realized the extent of her departure from traditional values. In their eyes, her thirst for freedom had stained the family, and they no longer wanted to have anything to do with her" (Ayral-Clause 180). Furthermore, the Claudels were not initially pleased at their son Paul Claudel's decision to commit himself to devout Catholicism in his youth even though they themselves were "Catholic" by tradition. However, despite Claudel's predisposition to reject Christianity because of its hypocrites, she did engage a "veiled spirituality" within her works. Could she be considered a follower of Neo-Catholicism before its time?

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[23] I now work for myself.
[24] As their lives separate, their artistic conceptions further them even more from one another: Rodin is attached to the commercial and cultural circulation of his work, a notion to which Camille Claudel hardly gives a thought.

Although the term "neo-catholic" was not first used until 2002, the idea had been in preparation since the beginning of the 1900s. Its goal was to integrate *modern* human experience with church principles based on Jesus Christ. Between 1962 and 1965 a council took place known as the "Second Vatican Council" or "Vatican II". Its spirit, according to Catholic researcher David Cheney, was "meant to promote the teachings and intentions" of traditional Catholicism, but in ways "not limited to literal readings of its documents." Cheney quotes Saint Paul's phrase "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (Cheney "Second Vatican Council"). This offered Christians the opportunity to be Catholic 'in spirit' and follow its teachings in the sense in which one personally interpreted them (Cheney "Second Vatican Council"). Cheney also stressed that many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside orthodox Catholicism's visible confines ("Second Vatican Council"). It seems Camille Claudel did indeed live according to this Neo-Catholic spirit as she worshiped through her art. Cecilia Beaux, a portraitist showing in the salons at the same time as Claudel, stated, "In Art, as in Religion, faith is necessary" (qtd. in Ayral-Clause 24).

Additionally, Angelo Caranfa also maintains this idea consistently throughout his study *Camille Claudel: A Sculpture of Interior Solitude*. He says that Claudel's creative processes should be seen as "function[s] of self-understanding…and of spiritual experience" (11). To support this theory, near the end of his book, he draws a comparison between one of Rodin's pieces and one of Claudel's. The subjects are similar, which suggests they could have used the same models, but Caranfa focuses exclusively on the distinct differences between the two works. "While Rodin was preoccupied with the female body, the profane, and images of his own imagination or fantasy, Claudel, on the other hand, was inspired by the sacred…and by remaining close to the source of her representations…"(Caranfa 128). In this instance, the term

"sacred" is synonymous with holy truth; Claudel aimed to portray the divine nature of profound human sentiments as honestly as possible while still maintaining purity and aesthetic beauty.

Caranfa later insists, "Unlike Claudel's [*Sakountala*] (fig. 10), Rodin's *Eternal Idol* (fig. 11), where the man kneels and the woman is standing 'evokes something of the veneration and deification associated with the word 'idol,' in such a context it smells of sacrilege…'Rodin liked to play with this confusion of carnal and spiritual…In *the Eternal Idol,* the replacement of the symbolic body of Christ with the body of a beautiful woman is reminiscent of the backward masses of the Satanists'. He then goes on to contrast this with Claudel's *Le Psaume* or *The Prayer* (fig. 12) and then states that "because Claudel wants to express the sacred, wants to summon its presence, she employs mythologies…" and other features which provoke the meaningfulness of existence (128).

Not only Caranfa, but many of the critics who analyze Claudel's collection marvel at its powerfully divine aura, and describe the sculptures using terms such as innocence, sincerity, contemplation, solitude, receptivity, and hope. The secret of Claudel's art lies in her "willingness to explore lived feelings and to express them in forms that are not clichés, but rather as original, sincere and truthful, harmonious and whole. She achieves this in forms that communicate the aspirations of humanity to sincerely reveal the beautiful, the truthful, and the spiritual good" (Caranfa 128).

The Role of Spirituality and Religion in Art in Fin-de-Siècle France

Before examining the presence of specific artists and works which incorporate themes of a spiritual and/or religious nature, it is necessary to explore the distinct differences in the definitions and nuances of these two terms. First, how does one define an intangible concept such as the spiritual? To begin, it is necessary that one separates the idea of spirituality from that

of religion. Where religiosity implies an adherence to a specific denomination's beliefs and principles, and suggests that its disciples are of one mind concerning the sect's philosophies, spirituality, as used in this thesis, must be defined as a sacredness encompassing purity, sincerity, and true piety. Furthermore, those seeking the spiritual in fin-de-siècle France were concerned largely with truth. This was in consequence to the tumultuous situation of the Church in France beginning in the late 18th century.

Following the French Revolution, the Catholic Church lost much of its authority. Anti-church laws were passed and many acts of dechristianization took place. For example, street and place names with any sort of religious connotations were changed (Larkin 717). The French were determined to rid their land of any religious implications. Yet, they did not prevail: by 1795, a return to "some form of religious-based faith" was beginning to take shape and a law passed on February 21, 1795 legalized public worship; however there were still very strict limitations (Larkin 719).

Just a few years later, the Concordat of 1801 was signed, reinstating the Catholic denomination as the majority church of France, and bringing back most of its civil status (Larkin 719). However, there was still religious freedom at this point despite majority influence. It wasn't until 1905 that there was a law declaring official separation of church and state for the French. Hence, at the peak of Claudel's creation, secularization could not be stopped, yet we find elements of the sacred struggling to break through. Nevertheless, because France could never return to the situation of ancien regime religion, its citizens, and specifically its artists, were forced to express their spiritual sentiments through nontraditional channels.

Thus, as previously mentioned, the French sought to communicate a new kind of credence: one no longer rooted in crosses or Latin recitations. Claudel's philosophic pieces

were centered in what she believed to be supreme truth. Harrison explained that this love of truth is "predominating over every desire of the soul, purifying it and assimilating it to the divine" (748). He added that individuals being directed by truth were following in the likeness of God and in a sense, participating and communicating with Divinity in every act they performed. Although Claudel's creations lacked God-like perfection, they were filled with truth, conviction, and purity. It is these intrinsic qualities which one perceives when one refers to her work as being "spiritual" in nature.

This is leads us to ask ourselves: can art be considered a form of worship? John Millais, a 19th century English artist, believed that art reached "beyond sensory pleasure" and that the artist was "a spiritual mentor of humankind," while his or her artwork stood as "a kind of visual sermon" (Harrison 438). Thus, if we adhere to this idea, Claudel's sculptures had and still have the power to release inspiration to their viewers. As in traditional worship, both the creation and contemplation of the pieces involve faith, a quest for meaning, devotion, and dedication.

Though art critics like Caranfa have studied the features of mystery and solitude in Claudel's life and works, it is time that the public see something more. Freidrich Shleiermacher in his article "On the Concept of Art" described art as a "refined and heightened articulation of the inner life rather than as the imitation or transformation of the external world" (Harrison 70). Rather than simply imitate her surroundings, Claudel accomplished precisely what Shleiermacher describes as she captured the qualities of her inner life and carved them into visual form. In the end, for this powerful sculptress, achieving spirituality meant expressly finding redemption through her art, and this idea will continue to be explored throughout the thesis.

Now, returning to our original examination, one might ask what the situation of spirituality and religious symbolism was like in the art world of Claudel's era. Was it present? And if so, did its audience understand the symbolism it engaged? Let us investigate the historical context surrounding the fin-de-siècle art world in order to answer these questions and more.

Many, such as the Goncourt brothers, believed that genuine religious representation in the modern era was an impossibility. While discussing the art at the Universal Exposition of 1855 and conversing about the role of the spiritual in art, "the Goncourts declared emphatically, 'And how could it emanate, with its ardor and ancient naiveté, from these triumphs of logic, from these apotheoses of science which are our own century?'" (qtd. in Driskel 3). An anonymous but explicit example of this opinion appeared in an article in *La Voix des artistes*. The author stated,

> Our century, which hardly knows the Apocalypse and the New Testament, has become less credulous and superstitious by the study of mathematical, physical and natural sciences, and as it has discovered a part of the secrets of nature, can no longer imagine these pious fables, these divine and allegorical fantasies which moralized Christians in the Middle Ages (qtd. in Driskel 3).

With a country of traditionally Catholic citizens, could this ignorance of faith be possible? Félix Jahyer affirmed that faith had departed from religious art, and modern consciousness was now filled with other thoughts (Driskel 4). Yet, if this was the case, why do we find so many spiritual masterpieces from that period filling museums today? To solve this mystery, let us begin to examine the religious context of nineteenth-century French society.

First, when critics discuss the nineteenth century, there is an idea that circulates known as ultramontanism. This term refers to the movement of ideas within the Catholic Church in this

era and with this shift came profound changes in both the ritual practice and organizational structure of the Catholic Church in France (Driskel 6). The root of the word, *ultramontane,* "designated those Catholics who looked 'beyond the mountains,' (signifying the Alps)…for direction of religious and social life and who had an inordinate respect for the principle of authority, which they believed to be embodied in the person of the pope" (Driskel 6). Thus, as Catholic members looked toward the Vatican for all instruction, the pillar of religion seemed to grow increasingly distant. With ultramontanism, Catholics were led less by faith and more by fear of Papal authority. The need arose to explore faith through other outlets than traditional worship, thus, many used art as an outward expression of their faith.

In H.W. Janson's book *19th-Century Sculpture,* there is a heavy emphasis placed upon the impact of the many political figures and war monuments which emerged in the century following the French Revolution, and indeed, logic, patriotism and science were ever-present in fin-de-siècle France. However, Grace Glueck in a 2001 New York Times review affirms that artists of this period "were instrumental in sustaining and refreshing the old traditions, continuing to produce viable religious art through times of social change and upheaval, from the restoration of the French monarchy in 1814 until the end of the century". She enumerates that among the religious subjects represented in this time are "Old Testament stories, Biblical landscapes and the depiction of Jesus and the Virgin, as well as scenes of religious observance and even satire". The artists of the century who embraced these themes included Gustave Doré, James Tissot, Adolphe-William Bouguereau, Albert-Léon Gérôme, Jules-Joseph Lefebvre, Édouard Moyse, the Princess Marie of Orléans, Ary Scheffer and many lesser-known individuals (Glueck).

As we analyze James Tissot in particular, we will gain a clearer visualization of the function religion played within the society of art and artists of fin-de-siècle France. Petra Chu, in

her article reviewing Tissot's work for the journal *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide,* offers several insights from which we can learn. She begins by explaining that "Even for the most enthusiastic and courageous revisionists, nineteenth-century religious art has long been the last frontier" ("James Tissot: The Life of Christ"). With the exception of Driskel, in whose book we recently learned of the presence of ultramontanism, art historians in general habitually dismissed fin-de-siècle religious art due to its "persistent survival, often in degraded form" (6). Chu noted contemporary prayer cards, religious calendars, and catechism illustrations as some of the contributors to this tainted genre. Dondaine explained in *L'image de piété en France,* "L'Église 'engage-t-elle la lute sur le terrain du rationalisme' et cherche-t-elle à récupérer le déisme en se servant du langage emblématique : œil de Dieu, symboles des fleurs, du cœur…"[25] (105).

In the mid 1880s Tissot experienced a religious epiphany which led him to devote the remainder of his life to portraying Christian religion in his art. Although this was a very admirable ambition, he was not the first from his era to do so. Chu said, "…the artist cannot have been oblivious to the enormous success of similar projects, most notably the famous Doré Bible (1865-66) (fig. 13), featuring illustrations by the French illustrator Gustave Doré….[These] illustrations, without text, were published in so-called Doré Gallery editions, which were enormously popular". Chu stated that Tissot had a "respect for tradition," and realized that if his art was to be successful, "the images had to be recognizable" and the spectators had to be able to feel "a connection to the familiar representations of the life of Christ". However, he did not simply imitate the depictions surrounding him; he always aimed to illustrate the familiar scene from a different point of view. A perfect example of this can be seen in his painting *Crucifixion, seen from the Cross* (1886-94) (fig. 14). This unusual approach, taking the perspective of Jesus

[25] Does the Church engage in the struggle against rationalism? And does it look to reclaim Deism by using emblematic language: the eye of God, symbols of flowers and of the heart?

looking downward, provokes a measure of heart-wrenching emotion deficient in typical interpretations.

Nevertheless, though Camille Claudel also hoped to inspire viewers to feel a spiritual connection with her work, she carried the challenge one step further. She took a risk and followed what Wassily Kandinsky termed her "inner necessity". Thus, rather than using traditional biblical scenes as her foundation, as Tissot and most of her other contemporaries did, she took on a much loftier goal: she captured the themes and emotions embodied *within* religion and portrayed them in an innovative way through her multi-dimensional sculpture.

Spiritual Symbolism

Having briefly witnessed the history of visual spirituality still strongly present in 19th-century France, let us now advance toward examining the theories and impact behind it. Before able to interpret Camille Claudel's work on a deeper level, one must have an understanding of the perception of symbolic representation that was present in the late 19th and early 20th century. Where Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) as well as earlier art historians concentrated on exposing the general meaning of a piece of art, for many critics in Claudel's era, the focus had shifted to using a very different method of interpretation. Where previously the common tendency was to ask what the implication of a sculpture might be, critics shifted to asking, "How is meaning made possible? What is the process whereby a few marks on canvas, or the shaping of a lump of marble enables us to come up with interpretations? How is it that we can look at an image and find a meaning in it?" (Hatt 200). How does one succeed at simultaneously analyzing the image and the interpretation of a work such as Claudel's *L'implorante*?

Hatt and Klonk in their critical introduction of art history methods taught that when analyzing an interpretation, one must be "concerned less with any individual utterance or

interpretation and more with the larger context which makes meaning possible" (200). For the purposes of this thesis, we will first seek out the signs and connotations which make personal interpretation possible. The theorist and critic Roland Barthes revolutionized the way many regarded artistic interpretation. He proposed that upon a piece's completion, there came about "the death of the author" and "the birth of the reader" (Hatt 200) which opened the door to accepted, individual interpretation. But what kind of system enabled such radical power to be put in the hands of the public? As we analyze "the rules of communication and expression [which] underpin" (Hatt 200) French culture, we will gain a clearer understanding of how nineteenth-century sculptors, and specifically Claudel, succeeded at conveying profound spiritual symbolism within their work.

First, D'Alleva, in her philosophy of analyzing symbolic interpretation, begins by explaining that the task of this branch of art history is "to analyze simultaneously the image and the interpretation of the image, the relation between the two (why does a subject interpret it in a particular way?), and the anchoring of the image in the interpretation and vice versa" (39). Before beginning to apply this method to Claudel's *L'implorante* or *The Implorer* (sometimes referred to as *The Beseecher*), it is necessary to elucidate the complex origins of the piece.

For the 1894 Salon Claudel created the sculpture *Le dieu envolé* or *The Vanished God* 1894 (fig. 16) to relay her despair as her tumultuous relationship with Rodin was slowly but inevitably coming to an end. This piece evolved into the pleading figure she used in her group of three in *L'âge mûr*. However, years after her separation with Rodin, she continued to tailor this piece into what we now know as *L'implorante* (fig. 17). Though the pose is incredibly similar to that of the severed young woman in the final version of *L'âge mûr,* Claudel continued to perfect

and produce this figure separately as an autonomous representation without the influence of Rodin blurring the scene. This framed moment is solely about her.

Before analyzing the figure itself, let us examine the powerful impact of which *L'implorante* was capable. In 1932, long after Claudel's internment, Eugène Blot wrote her a touching letter reminiscing of her astounding talent. In just a few short lines, it is clear that her skill involved much more than relieving figures from stone; her masterpieces held a transcendental quality. He wrote,

> X. garde un souvenir encore émerveillé de votre marbre de *L'implorante* (fondu par moi en bronze pour le salon de 1904), qu'il considère comme le manifeste de la sculpture moderne. Vous étiez enfin 'vous-même,' libérée totalement de l'influence de Rodin, aussi grande par l'inspiration que par le métier. L'épreuve de premier tirage enrichie de votre signature, est une des pièces maîtresses de ma galerie. Je ne la regarde jamais sans une émotion indicible. Il me semble vous revoir. Ces lèvres entr'ouvertes, ces narines palpitantes, cette lumière dans le regard, tout cela crie la vie dans ce qu'elle a de plus mystérieux. Avec vous, on allait quitter le monde des fausses apparences pour celui de la pensée. Quel génie. Le mot n'est pas trop fort[26]. (Rivière 2008 311)

Now, as we embark on analyzing the details of this sculpture as well as reading it according to the methods present in the 19th century, we must explore several features the visual symbolism of the work. First, after an initial glance, we must determine what, if any, part of the

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[26] X. still holds a memory filled with wonder of your *Implorer* in marble (which I cast in bronze for the salon of 1904) and considers it to be the manifesto of modern sculpture. At last you were "yourself," totally free of Rodin's influence, as great in your inspiration as in your skill. Embellished with your signature, the first cast is one of the magnum opus of my gallery. I never look at it without a rush of unspeakable emotion. I feel I see you again. Those half-open lips, those quivering nostrils, the light in the gaze, all of which speak of life and its most essential mystery. With you, one left the world of false appearances for the one of thought. What a genius! The term is not too strong.

image catches the viewer's eye first. Are certain elements larger than others? In the case of sculpture, are certain elements in greater relief? (D'Alleva, 40).

Consequently, as we view *L'implorante,* we do indeed notice primarily the woman's arms extending far out from the centralized, vertical visual column in which the rest of the sculpture is aligned. The strained, uncomfortable posture of the kneeling woman catches the viewer's eye and leads the gaze toward the tilted head. Her hips and abdomen are visibly larger in proportion to her legs and upper torso, a sign of the pregnancy she experienced.

Next, we must explore the denotative and connotative aspects of this image (D'Alleva 40). The denotative meanings of this piece are fairly straightforward. The figure kneeling represents a humble but distraught woman. The curvature seen in her arms indicates the void of a loss she suffers. Also, the tilt of her head and anxious expression signify profound thought and a beseeching request for consideration from an exterior and possibly divine source.

However, these signs have profound interwoven connotative meanings. While often Claudel's figures, such as *Le Psaume* and *Deep in Thought,* symbolize "harmony both with themselves and with God, the anxious pose of the figures in *The Vanished God*" and in the later version *L'implorante*, speaks to us of an existence that Caranfa describes as "fragmented within itself and separated from the source (99). He goes on to describe that "The facial expressions of the figures point back to a time when they experienced God's presence, although at present he is absent from their experience, and they long for a future reunion with Him" (99). Likewise, Mathias Morhardt pointed out the importance of the curve of the arms, which "record in space the idea of the one who is absent" (Ayral-Clause 122). However, more importantly he later compared the "elevated right arm [to] a kind of wing that nearly elevates her and that leads her toward the disappeared God" (Caranfa 99). This shows that the "absent *One",* in these

renditions, no longer represented Rodin as the youthful figure did in *L'âge mûr*: faith had triumphed over passion. As a side note, Rodin's *The Prodigal Son* (fig. 18) of 1889 shares a similar stance, yet the positioning of the arms in particular conveys the possibility of two different signs available to interpreters. While many believe that Rodin molded this sorrowful body with the fervor of a final prayer for forgiveness, the sign of the arms also functions as a possible indicator of the prodigal son's jubilation and relief in the aftermath of his father's mercy and acceptance.

Hearkening back to Claudel, it is interesting to note the historical dimension present even in the titles of the two works. Caranfa stated that "the titles themselves translate the poses…[and] the expressions into a continuous movement that integrates existence within a new and unifying relationship that links existence with a center beyond the self" (99). Initially, in *Le dieu envolé,* the woman believes all to be lost and appears hopeless that God will accompany her through her painful trials. The same can be inferred of the artist's parallel feelings at this time. However, months later, upon completion of *L'implorante*, both the artist and the subject seem to have at least partially acknowledged that divine help is possible and are now engaged in pleading with God for His intercession. Analyzing these connotative aspects of this sculpture gives viewers a foundation for better understanding how this piece was distinctively exceptional among sacred representations of the era.

Next, viewers must determine whether there are codes that are brought to bear on the interpretation of these images in question (D'Alleva 41). In *L'implorante,* viewers must have the code of a knowledge of love, loss, and human emotion as well as the code of the artist's background in order to fully and correctly interpret the image. Next, one must be aware of elements of intertextuality which are at work in the image (D'Alleva 41). To best understand

this, one must juxtapose the versions of *L'implorante* with their original trio *L'âge mûr*. The sign of the eventual complete separation of our kneeling subject is itself a symbol of permanent separation and uncertainty. Also, considering the striking similarities between the face of this piece and that of Claudel's *Le Psaume* or *The Prayer* (fig. 12), intertextuality encourages perceptive viewers to stop and balance the two. Witherell states that like *L'implorante,* "*The Prayer*... [is] a search for peace through religion" (6). However, despite the obvious similarities between them, D'Alleva states that discovering intertextuality should not be a form of drawing clear parallels, rather it "should make viewers aware of the uniqueness of the image" (42). Thus, where traditional representation of supplication, as seen in *Le Psaume,* involved gently closed eyes, a calm stance, and linear straight lines, in this rendition Claudel employed a new code of representing sorrowful despair. The woman kneels in prayer, which D'Alleva states is "a form of direct address to God…" (41). In contrast, an article in the *Le Figaro* special edition flawlessly described *Le Psaume*'s spiritual moment in the following comment: "*Le Psaume* est…encapuchonné, les yeux clos, *portant toute l'attention du spectateur sur la prière intériorisée*"[27] (De Bayser 36). This moment in which the viewer is truly pulled in by the interiorized prayer, results from Claudel's inimitable talent to embed an essence of her heart in her work. The article continues, " Camille restitue dans ses sculptures des états d'âme intimes, et cela personne d'autre ne le rend avec autant de talent" [28] (De Bayser 36). Though I believe the praises of this piece to be just as true with regard to *L'implorante,* the technique Claudel used to convey her signs was very different. In *Le Psaume,* the viewer is allowed to become part of the pain and experience, whereas the signs in *L'implorante* invite the viewer to feel but prevent him from participating in the scene.

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[27] *The Prayer* is hooded, with closed eyes, directing all of the viewer's attention on the interiorized prayer.
[28] Camille recreates in her sculptures the intimate states of souls, and no one else can do this with as much talent.

In terms of the formal issues raised through these signs, the concrete features which portray this woman fragilely and in need of divine deliverance vary greatly between those previously described in *L'implorante*. First, one must examine the cloth hood which shadows her face. It completes a circle connected with her neck which conveys feelings of both imprisonment and solace. In contrast, the subject of *L'implorante* is rendered entirely nude--a sign of her completely exposed and unprotected state. This sign alone opens the way for a more severe interpretation from the viewers.

Next, one of the most unique differences between this subject and most others is that her eyes are not engaged in an exterior gaze. They are closed, as was mentioned, to expose her state of sacred reflection. Also, though there are no visible tears streaming down, there is a subtly deeper path polished into the stone under her right eye which leaves room for a shadow to fall, and invites viewers to assume that tears had indeed fallen not long ago. Finally, moving downward, though the woman's jaw is loosely unfixed and the corners of her mouth are pulled downward, revealing a weak insecurity, we notice that her head is in a reverent and level position, revealing that she still holds out hope for a miracle of redemption. Thus, reexamining *L'implorante,* we see that Claudel has involved a very different code of representation. The same signs of humility, loss, despair, and a glimmer of hope are present, but Claudel's manner of transmitting them provides differences which "bear on the interpretation," an element which D'Alleva attests is important when analyzing the reading of a symbolic piece of art (41).

Next, a careful viewer must determine whether materials and techniques signify actual meaning in a work (42). Although marble itself is neither a symbol nor motif, D'Alleva taught that it can certainly be a signifier. She stated that it was possible to treat the material as productive of meaning (42). Thus, Claudel's use of marble invited interpretations which focused

on the rigid state of the figure's worry, as well as the universal and eternal nature of sorrow. Furthermore, taking into consideration the complexity and difficulty involved in sculpting a single, large-scale figure from solid marble, as D'Alleva claimed, "the artistry…signified value" (42).

Finally, the last step of our detailed analysis involves revealing the deixis, the enunciative structure, of the image. "Who is being addressed by this image, and how?" (D'Alleva 42). In *L'implorante,* this question becomes complicated due to the fact that the female had originally been separated from *L'âge mûr.* However, she no longer appeals to the metaphorical Rodin; she now addresses the heavens in her faithful, upward gaze. As D'Alleva said, if "no figure looks out of the frame at the reader," the image "does not engage its viewers directly," in visual terms (42).

Through this thorough examination, it is clear that indeed, "pictorial language must be deciphered" (D'Alleva 39). Furthermore, we have seen the benefit of analyzing not only the image itself, but also the interpretation of a specific image. Consequently, in keeping in mind all elements which play a function individually and cohesively in a work, one is much more likely to reveal the most compelling and convincing of interpretations.

As we next embark on an analysis of *L'implorante, La petite châtelaine* in its various versions, and other masterpieces, in the former, we will see how the statue provides a visual experience depicting the act of pleading for redemption, whereas, in the second, redemption is personified. But first, in each case, we must reflect on the allegory portrayed. Beginning with *L'implorante,* when one considers the tragedy Claudel was suffering at the time of the figure's creation, the pleading woman is undoubtedly meant to represent the artist herself. If one searches for the roots which caused her sorrow, there are many. The most painful of these

causes was, without a doubt, the abortion she was forced to have. We will examine this more in the analysis of *La petite châtelaine* 1892-96. Additionally, Claudel suffered immensely from the treatment she received from all sides. Her family complained constantly of the indignity she brought to their reputation and her mother rarely showed her any sincere love. In the professional domain, Claudel was frustrated at the fact that her voice was rarely heard among the voices of male artists, discouraged that she had to sacrifice so much for what came so easily to others, and exasperated that Rodin did not always treat her with the commitment and devotion she deserved. Keeping each of these causes and more in mind while examining *L'implorante,* it is clear that this is Claudel's allegorical self-representation. As a final point, I agree with Van Straten that stylistic and historical approaches should not be ignored (165), and with each of Claudel's works studied in this thesis, I will certainly incorporate an analysis to each of those ends. However, it is when one examines a piece of art with multiple perspectives that more nuanced understanding is achieved.

As we leave our theoretical analysis, now conscious of the complexity fin-de-siècle sculptures involve, is it possible to draw out the intrinsic spiritual meaning sealed within the stone? Van Straten quotes Panofsky in affirming that when entering into an iconographical interpretation, one must regard the deeper content as part of a "world of symbolical values" (166). To locate how these are represented in Claudel's sculptures, it will first be necessary to see how they are portrayed in other works of art of the time period. Thus, armed with my human and religious experience, along with what Panofsky calls my "synthetic intuition…personal psychology…and comprehensive world view" (Van Straten 166), I am prepared to embark on an analysis to prove that the theme of redemption is indeed visibly and undeniably present in Camille Claudel's works.

While delving into how this theme is represented in sculpture, it is important to define the idea of redemption as Claudel would have understood it. As was the case of most of French society in the late 19th century, Claudel was raised in a traditionally Catholic family with a brother, Paul, who was intensely religious and devoted a great deal of his life to studying and sharing the gospel. Thus, it is highly probable that Claudel too would have been reasonably well versed in Catholic theology. Catholic ideology, rooted in the Bible, teaches that Christ suffered the atonement to provide the gift of redemption to all men not only to free them from their sins, but also to lift their burdens of any nature. In many biblical instances, men plead with God for deliverance and later, redemption comes in an unlikely form such as a soul soothed, patience granted, or a worry lifted. A clear example can be seen in the case of Jeremiah of the Old Testament. He pleads in chapter 8 verse 22, "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?" And though his release does not come immediately, God reassures him saying, "I will deliver thee…thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall…because thou hast put thy trust in me…" (Jeremiah 39:17-18).

Though Claudel may have not been familiar with this particular story, she would have identified with other biblical accounts in which redemption was sought after and found. Caranfa reminds us that from 1869 to 1876, her education "had been entrusted to the Sisters of Christian Doctrine" (29). This influence from her upbringing is an integral part of the spirituality one can see and feel in her work, and her brother Paul attested to it many times. He often referred to her work as containing a "voluptuous chastity" that other artists lacked. Furthermore, the investigation into Theosophy and the long-established practice of weaving spirituality into

secular art was still present in the work of artists surrounding Claudel during her creative years. Let us continue to examine these influences in closer detail.

CHAPTER 4: SPIRITUALITY AND REDEMPTION

Spirituality and Redemption in the Works of Claudel's Partner Rodin, and her Contemporaries

Inasmuch as Claudel was Rodin's apprentice for so many years and that they shared models, a studio, and knowledge, the first source in which I searched for redemption in early 20th century sculpture was within Rodin's collection. Among art historians, it is a widely accepted theory that Rodin often created versions of himself in the figures he sculpted. Specifically, his sculptures of Adam are often understood to dually represent the artist himself. Alicia Faxon supports this theory in her article "An Interpretation of Rodin's Adam" and within it, she delves into the spiritual facets of the figure in its various adaptations.

First, there is an interesting juxtaposition to be noticed when considering divinity in Rodin's *Adam* (fig. 19). In his lifetime, other sculptors referred to Rodin's first version of Adam as "*L'Esclave* (The Slave) suggesting…[that it resembled] Michelangelo's…*Slave* sculpture in the Louvre" (fig. 6) (Faxon 89). They also affirmed that its features additionally bore a resemblance to the Adam Michelangelo painted on the Sistine ceiling, and indeed Faxon explains that the left hand is no doubt a close replica. However, more careful observers witnessed that Rodin sculpted Adam's right hand almost identically to the hand of *God* in Michelangelo's fresco (see fig. 20). "The thumb and the index finger," which point powerfully, "are in a similar position" (Faxon 90). This shocking juxtaposition implied that the first man should be viewed as both a creation and a creator. Philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) taught that when we consider that while creating art, artists have the power to decompose and recompose not only space and form, but in a way, life itself, we better understand the magnitude of their skill and creations (Harrison 141).

Faxon concludes, "If Rodin's *Adam* is seen to embody both the first Adam and the last Adam, that is Christ, his gestures suggest not only the creation and the fall of man, but also his redemption through Christ's sacrifice of death on the cross" (90).

This is not the only instance in which Rodin imitates classic sources and summons spirituality through his sculpture. His acknowledged source for *The Gates of Hell* was Dante's *Divine Comedy* and though most who view this masterpiece see it to be a despairing depiction of "grief stricken guilt and unalterable alienation from God," I would like to emphasize Faxon's conclusion: "If…the gestures of *Adam* embody both the creation of man and his ultimate redemption and resurrection through Christ, this transforms the meaning of the figure and also, by extension, suggests a dimension of hope to *The Gates of Hell*" (91). The original text confirms this idea as consistently, when Adam is referred to, he is linked with Christ. At the point when Adam explains how Christ redeemed him and all humankind, Faxon quotes canto 13 of the *Paradiso* and I would like to highlight lines *41* and *43-35:*

…for past and future He paid the fine…

Such light as may in human nature shine

Was all infused by Him that did create

Both one and other with His power divine

Do Faxon and I step too far in affirming that Rodin was more than slightly sensitive to religion and therefore applied its themes, such as the idea of redemption in his work? Rodin himself supported our argument in 1906 when in an interview he said, "I have always combined [the] religious…with art; for when religion is lost, art is also lost." And when asked whether the public was right in interpreting his work as both secular and spiritual and if he had intended it to be so, he said that some interpretations might well be too ingenious, "But," he said, "You may

rest assured that the masters are always conscious of what they do…" (qtd. in Faxon 91). It is safe to say that Camille Claudel worked with these same attitudes.

Finally, it is obvious that Rodin believed in redemption with certainty and sought to integrate the theme into more than one of his sculptures, but what reason did the successful master have to seek it personally? Some may believe he sought redemption from the sinful way he often lived and the lustful depictions he created. Faxon suggests it may be from the grief he felt at the death of his sister Maria, who was preparing to become a nun at the time of her death. Indeed, in his anguish, as a further sign of penitence "he joined the order of the "Pères du Très-Saint Sacrement" in 1862 as Brother Augustine (Faxon 90). Yet, whatever the reason, his incorporation and effective application of the redemptive theme within his autobiographical works are sufficient to prove that his student Claudel was not stepping out of conventional bounds by including the same spiritual themes in her work.

As one aims to draw comparisons between Camille Claudel and other artists who incorporated forms of nontraditional spirituality in their art, it is wise to consider the parallels between the work of Vincent Van Gogh as well as that of Paul Gauguin. Deborah Silverman in her book *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art* offers significant insight into several unique and devout representations. She begins by affirming that Van Gogh sought out the "presence of an eternal and infinite divinity in and through the stuffs of matter" (Silverman 163). This is evident in many of his pieces, but is most visible in his painting *The Starry Night* of 1889 (fig. 21).

His reason for creating this piece is itself rooted in his need for a connection with the divine. In an 1881 letter he stated, "When I have a terrible need of — shall I say the word — religion. Then I go out and paint the stars." Though he used the term "religion", it is necessary

to understand that he was not implying that he desired organized, formal Catholic worship. Rather, he described a yearning for a transcendental experience. In the same letter he explained that he was inspired to paint this starry scene as he read a collection of poems by Walt Whitman and was moved by their imagery. Referring to Whitman he said, “He sees...under the great starlit vault of heaven a something which after all one can only call God—and eternity in its place above the world." And, as his talent progressed, Van Gogh was recorded as achieving the same reassurance. Silverman said, “He considered the music of his colors to be a means of imparting spiritual comfort” (262). This soothing consolation extended not only to his viewers, but also to himself. Like Claudel, as he tried to put a sense of life's mysteries into paint, his work provided him with a therapeutic, healing outlet to his disturbed mental state. Yet, while Claudel eventually lost all hope for redemption through love, Van Gogh continued to believe that love and God were intertwined and were the only true sources of deliverance.

A final parallel to Claudel can be witnessed in the fact that for Van Gogh, the distinction between spirituality and religion was essential to his life and his work. The latter, meant very little to him after he had been exiled from his mission because of his overzealous nature. In the aforementioned letter, he affirmed:

> That God of the clergymen, He is for me as dead as a doornail. But am I an atheist for all that? The clergymen consider me as such — be it so; but I love, and how could I feel love if I did not live, and if others did not live, and then, if we live, there is something mysterious in that. Now call that God, or human nature or whatever you like, but there is something which I cannot define systematically, though it is very much alive and very real, and see, that is God, or as good as God. To believe in God for me is to feel that there

> is a God, not a dead one, or a stuffed one, but a living one, who with irresistible force urges us toward *aimer encore*; that is my opinion.

Next, Silverman presents an interesting juxtaposition as she investigates the works of Gauguin, who was known to have associated with Van Gogh. While the latter focused on uplifting spiritual attributes and elements, Gauguin "expressed an enduring preoccupation with the themes of misery, profanation, and suffering" which he attempted to project through allegory (137). For example, Gauguin's use of poverty-stricken women invited not faithful hope, but rather severe despondency. In reference to his female figures, he often used the term "pauvresses", which not only signaled the social condition of poverty, but even more strongly, signaled "a state of spiritual transgression and desolation" (Silverman 230). As one examines the formal elements of his work, this pain becomes evident.

In the 1880s, artists began to use more intense colors as they depicted scenes such as the physical suffering of Christ's passion, with blood flowing and covering His body. These types of images "gave visual expression to the newly emotionalized piety of the later nineteenth century…and [to] the heightened interest in contemplating the wounds and the pains of the Savior" (Silverman 107). The public of this era showed a new interest in the emotional realm of religiosity and artists such as Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Claudel fed this new desire with nontraditional artistic renditions.

Let us use this new perspective as we analyze Gauguin's adaptation of *Vision After the Sermon* 1888 (fig. 22). This painting, which is considered Gauguin's first Symbolist work, depicts a scene from the Bible in which Jacob wrestles with an angel. However, the focus of the piece is on a group of women who, following a sermon in church, see this struggle transpire

through a vision. Silverman suggests that the flatness and brightness of the colors are not simply reflecting the trend of the era's popular art. In fact, Gauguin's colors correlate directly to "a critical religious dimension and present interesting correspondences to the spiritual aspirations he associated with the subjects he depicted in the painting" (107). I affirm that Gauguin involved such heightened luminosity and saturated patches of color specifically to relay the intensity of this sacred scene. The intense infiltration of red offers a power akin to the images of Christ's suffering. This is juxtaposed with the distribution of white and lightness surrounding the women, a radiance which illustrates their pious, faithfully calm, and trusting nature. Silverman later adds that Gauguin "identified with the peasant women not as effortful workers in the fields but as mesmerized collaborators in the visionary harvest of the soul" (107). Thus, like Claudel and Van Gogh, Gauguin appears to have worshiped through his art as a means of symbolic veneration. These artists' works were sanctified by the harmony of the figures that they brought to life. Silverman finishes her analysis of *Vision After the Sermon* by stating, "The flowing red ground abounds in the spiritual fruits sown into Gauguin's interior world" (107). These same evidences of Claudel's interior holiness are visible in her sculpture *Psaume* or *The Prayer* which we examined earlier. Although she did not use colors to communicate the sacredness of her themes, she incorporated the same emotion through the expressions, movements, and allegories she sculpted.

An additional lesser-known sculpture which expressed redemption in traditional form is Albert Bartholomé's *Adam and Eve* (fig. 23) in which the artist portrays the earth's first man and woman at the moment of their fall. Yet, the difference seen when one compares this work with a piece by Rodin or Claudel is that from every angle, the position of the couple overwhelmed with sorrow exudes a sense of despair. The possibility of their redemption and emancipation is barely

visible beneath their hopeless, strained faces. Eve's hands cover Adam's face and his hands seem to be reaching to push her away.

Next, it is important to recognize that many artists of Claudel's era attributed their guiding influence in art to their adherence to the idea of Theosophy. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* in its entry on Theosophy teaches that it is a form of "speculation or investigation seeking direct knowledge of the mysteries of being and nature, with particular concern on the nature of Divinity. It also [refers] to…hidden knowledge or wisdom that offers the individual enlightenment and salvation. The theosophist, and in our case theosophical artists, "seek to understand the…bonds that unite the universe, humanity, and the divine world" (Eliade "Theosophy"). While Gauguin, as mentioned earlier, focused on the symbols of misery and suffering which bond mankind in existence, Claudel focused on representing signs of the purpose of life and the universally shared emotional themes. The encyclopedia adds that theosophists "must apply active imagination in order to draw forth symbolic meanings" from life (Eliade "Theosophy"). In regards to Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Claudel, they certainly wove both imagination and inspiration within their creations which allowed their viewers the possibility of drawing out the most profound of interpretations.

Helena Blavatsky, mentioned earlier, was one of the first visionary women and founders in this movement and taught that "The knowledge of the Theosophists, culled from books and temples and audacious dreaming, was powerful enough to point artists toward a new inwardness and the possibility of translating that inwardness into visible form (Lipsey 37). She later wrote, "*Where,* WHO, WHAT *is* GOD?" (Lipsey 33) and through theosophy strove to answer these questions. If we consider Claudel to be a theosophist, she too applied the idea in her creations to answer the same aforementioned questions. This is plainly visible in the early version of

L'implorante which was entitled *Le dieu envolé.* Through the autobiographical sculpture, Claudel sought divine comfort and heavenly knowledge. Although there have not yet been studies done on whether she specifically adhered to the idea, its components were evident through what her brother called her "veiled" artistic spirituality. Furthermore, considering the unorthodox nature of late 19th century Theosophy, the fact that non-traditional forms of spirituality were given value gives compelling support to Claudel, as she was not traditionally devout. Continuing to examine the surrounding context, Helena Blavatsky's ideas concerning Theosophy were particularly influential in the art world seeing as Naturalism had given way to the widespread embrace of mysticism, orientalism, and other exotic philosophies (Harrison 747). She, like Claudel and many others, thrived in a societal environment where conventional views were being threatened. This climate along with Theosophy's ideas provided "fertile ground for those seeking a new spiritual orientation" (Harrison 746). Later, it will be evident that Claudel adhered to this idea as she created her *Sakountala* (1905).

In the article "Falling Apart And Holding Together" by Donald Kuspit, we learn of the distinction between the idea of "redemptive beauty" and Claudel's idea of redemptive fervor. First, Kuspit teaches viewers of the importance of shades and shadows and dissects the properties inherent in certain shades of color and light. He states that for many fin-de-siècle artists, "White is a deep, absolute silence, full of possibility. Black is nothingness without possibility, an eternal silence without hope, and corresponds with death. Gray corresponds to immobility without hope; it tends to despair when it becomes dark…" (175). Although those artists working with paint regarded this contrast on a color spectrum and sculptors such as Claudel may have considered it as a contrast between light and shadow, it succeeds in both cases as a method for juxtaposing despair and redemption.

Next, Kuspit helps viewers better understand the structure existing in 19th century artists' work and the stability that comes as a result. He describes several works of this period which encompass two phases: "self-and-world breakdown" and "self-and-world redemption" and explains this process as "the rendering of falling to pieces and of coming together in glorious new form" (175). This redemptive-almost resurrecting-idea can certainly be seen when comparing the young, imploring woman from *Le dieu envolé* to the single young figure from *L'âge mûr* which evolves into *L'implorante.* In the earlier versions, she is portrayed as being severed from her foundation and falling. Specifically in *Le dieu envolé,* she reaches up almost vertically with seemingly no purpose. Whereas, in the latter rendition, she has indeed come "together in glorious new form" as Kuspit describes it. No, she is not yet redeemed nor rendered whole, but she kneels firmly and independently and is now reaching horizontally outward, toward a concrete hope.

It is important to point out that in contrast to artists seeking fame for their grandiose masterpieces, for Claudel, true success was achieved when a piece of her soul remained embedded within her sculpture. Wassily Kandinsky described the feeling in the following way: "In the final analysis…every serious work resembles in poise the quiet phrase, 'I am here.' Like or dislike for the work evaporates; but the sound of that phrase is eternal" (Lipsey 49). It is precisely this eternality that Claudel sought out. Her whisper of "I am here" can be felt through the passionate love whirling within *La Valse*, through the hopeless despair entangling *Clotho*, in the crushing pain emitted from the imploring woman of *L'âge mûr*, and in the reminder of the invisible mother of *La petite châtelaine.*

Next, though the majority of the redemptive religious symbolism discussed thus far has been related to Catholic theology, it is essential that we examine one of Claudel's pieces which

emanates sentiments of a different yet equally sacred nature. This brings us back to the idea of Theosophy, which as mentioned earlier, seeks to understand the mysteries of being, nature, and Divinity as well as aims to understand the bonds that unite humanity and the divine world (Eliade "Theosophy"). Claudel's masterpiece *Sakountala* certainly fulfills these purposes, and although its roots come from Hindu theology Driskel reminds us that the spirituality is equally prevalent. He stated, "In studying…sacred monuments of all religions…that which distinguishes them is exterior calm, an expressive sign for strength, force, power, and all of the attributes of divinity….this exterior calm has been regarded by all nations as creating a predisposition to the exercise of thought, to the elevation of the soul and to the acquisition of knowledge of God and things divine" (65). Claudel sought truth without regard to whether it came through Christianity or another means. Many similarly open-minded ideas had begun to circulate through French society.

In Caranfa's analysis of *Sakountala* (fig. 10), he said that Claudel employed mythologies in her work expressly *because* she desired to convey the sacred and summon its presence (128). "Our mythologies synthesize our views as emotional judgments into a coherent dramatic framework, organizing the dull facts of the world…into meaningfulness. And so it is that Sakountala…refers us to Claudel's emotional responses to or judgments about an existence that is justified, complete, happy or harmonious (Caranfa 128).

Ayral-Clause describes the mythical history behind the sculpture beautifully:

> The Hindu legend…tells the story of King Duchmanta, who fell in love with Sakuntala, a Brahmin girl, and gave her a wedding ring. When a curse wiped out the king's memory, Sakuntala was not recognized as his wife and was forced to hide in the forest, where she bore a child. Only the ring could have restored the king's memory, but it had been lost in

> the lake. Years later, a fisherman found it and the lovers were reunited. Camille chose the moment of reunion when the king, on his knees with his head lifted toward Sakuntala, receives the graceful woman...(19)

Despite the passion of such a scene, there is an undeniable purity included as well. Ayral-Clause affirms that "the eroticism of the naked bodies reaching out to each other is transcended by the delicately modest posture of the woman, whose hand hides her breast while her head rests upon her husband's forehead (19). The critic André Michel also appropriately commented that the sculpture conveyed "a profound feeling of tenderness both chaste and passionate" (qtd. in Ayral-Clause 20). This passionate chastity was notice by Paul Claudel on more than one occasion. In claiming that this work was a reaffirmation of his sister's spirituality he stated, "Dans le groupe de ma sœur, l'esprit est tout, l'homme à genoux, il n'est que désir, le visage levé, aspire, étreint avant qu'il n'ose le saisir, cet être merveilleux, cette chair sacrée, qui, d'un niveau supérieur, lui est échue…Il est impossible de voir rien à la fois de plus ardent et de plus chaste" [29] (qtd. in Ayral-Clause 90). The critics of *Le Figaro* confirmed these ideas pertaining to Claudel's technique and added, "Dans *Sakountala* déjà, elle donne sa version d'une passion intérieure plus que physique…"[30] (Madelin 53).

Let us now move in closer to examine the more finite details of this ethereal masterpiece. As Claudel worked on this sculpture in its various mediums, she refused help and rarely slept. In a snippet found from one of her correspondences, she states that she had been coughing and sneezing for days as she was "polissant avec rage le groupe destructeur de ma tranquililité" [31] Her eyes were weeping and throbbing as she was determined to finish this peace "de

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[29] In my sister's group, the spiritual is everything, the man is on his knees in pure desire ; his face lifted, he embraces this marvelous being, this sacred flesh given to him from above, before he even dares to seize it….It is impossible to see anything at the same time more passionate and more chaste.
[30] Already in *Sakountala* she conveys her version of an interior passion rather than a physical one.
[31] Polishing with rage the group which destroyed my tranquility.

façon…comme il faut convient à des amoureux parfaits"[32] (Tasset 72). In another letter to her dear friend Florence Jeans she wrote, "Je travaille maintenant à mes deux grandes figures plus que grandeur nature et j'ai deux modèles par jour : femme le matin et homme le soir. Vous pouvez pensez si je suis fatiguée ; je travaille régulièrement 12 heures par jour…en revenant il m'est impossible de tenir sur mes jambes"[33] (Rivière 2008 42). Believing firmly that these perfect reunited lovers deserved the utmost dedication and attention to detail, Claudel also ensured that each muscle, strand of hair, and bodily curve was full of life and movement.

If one examines Sakountala's face as she leans her head on her husband, her expression conveys a feeling of redemption from an oppression that has been looming uncontrollably over their lives for so long. Her hip appears to be barely resting on the rock behind her, insinuating that she feels entirely ungrounded and can scarcely believe in the reality of this miraculous moment. The couple is, at this salvational moment, liberated, free to love, renewed to regain life as it was meant to be. Next, we notice that her eyes are closed and her forehead is relaxed; this frozen moment in time seems to be the culmination of all she has so long desired. As we move toward her husband, his stance stretches upward toward Sakountala and he reaches around her with tightened arms, showing he intends to never lose her again. He abandons all reserve as they embrace in a pure yet private rapture. His body is also subtly placed behind her front leg, making him secondary in prominence. Such a gentle portrayal of a powerful male is a feat that would have been quite daring considering the inferior views and treatment toward women that were still present in the 19th century.

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[32] In a manner worthy of these perfect lovers.

[33] I'm now working on my two figures which are bigger than life-size and I have two models each day: a woman in the mornings and a man in the evenings. You can imagine how tired I am; I regularly work 12 hours per day…and upon returning home it is impossible for me to stand on my legs.

We also see the theme of redemption in the element of equality presented in the sculpture. Through the power with which she endows Sakountala, Claudel delivers her feminine figure from the oppressive and restrictive bondage time and tradition have placed upon her. Critics have often enthusiastically compared Rodin's *The Kiss* (fig. 24) to Claudel's *Sakountala,* yet Paul Claudel could not have been more angered by this comparison. He deemed the latter to be "immensely superior" and stated, "In the first, the man is, so to speak, seated to dine at the woman. He sits down to better enjoy her" (90). Furthermore, Paul published an article in *L'Occident* praising his sister's feat, and according to his record, "Camille's sculpture…welcomes light and radiates the inner dream that inspired it" (169). He who understood her better than most, immediately and undeniably recognized this spirit.

Additionally, *The Kiss* differs from *Sakountala* in that Claudel places her figures on a more equal plane. Charlemagne Layton notes this same idea as she describes the posture Claudel chooses. She says, "[Camille's] draped sculptures stand as emblems of a powerful feminine creativity and a male-female bond that signifies equality between the sexes (Layton). Furthermore, *Sakountala* is not only a careful blend of the sensual and the emotional; it is also a "careful balance of the masculine and the feminine: even though the man is [humbly] on his knees, he supports his overwhelmed companion" (Ayral-Clause 90). We see this as his left arm encircles his beloved while his right arm supports her, for she appears to be almost fainting under the force of her emotion (Ayral-Clause 90). It is precisely these attributes which instill in the masterpiece "the redemptive power of love" as Caranfa refers to it (182).

The creation and completion of the work is an act of miraculous redemption in itself. This is due to the fact that the commission for the final marble version of *Sakountala* was initially denied in favor of a full scale commission of one of Rodin's sensual works. Its success would

not have been possible without the aid of the Countess of Maigret who aided in the funding and support of the project. In a letter, Claudel insisted, "Ce groupe…ne sera réellement fini que dans le marbre"[34] (Rivière 2008 75). Why this determination to carve this piece in stone? I will address this more in the analysis of *La petite châtelaine,* but it is vital to understand that this idea of eternalizing her subjects in marble was her way of immortalizing her testimony of the divine.

In her years working and reworking this piece, Claudel aimed to redeem herself completely from Rodin's shadow and create something new and superior to all other works that would be shown in the salon. One cannot deny that she succeeded in this ambition; many critics have been recorded as saying that this was the "most extraordinary new work in the salon" (Ayral-Clause 91). Many said it was a remarkable achievement that such a young woman was able to conceive and create so successfully a group of this importance" (Ayral-Clause 89). Though some were determined to see Rodin's influence, many others saw the originality of her interpretation. Nevertheless, despite her incredible pleasure connected with *Sakountala*'s success, Camille Claudel undoubtedly saw herself reflected in the innocent Sakountala, who trusted the king and was left in a difficult position. "Like Sakountala, Claudel was forced to hide one aspect of her life and to hope that she would eventually be recognized" (Ayral-Clause 90).

Redemption in and Through *La petite châtelaine*

For Claudel in 1893, life took an even more isolated and solitary turn. Her brother Paul had recently gone to Boston and she was left alone in her atelier. Because she rarely had visitors, she often walked through the working-class neighborhood on the boulevard d'Italie, a path which Mathias Morhardt said, "offered scenes fit to stimulate the imagination of an artist" (Ayral-Clause 121). In December, she excitedly wrote Paul of her new prospective projects. Glimpses of hope and faith are visible in the following letter revealing her excitement:

[34] This group…will only be really finished once it is in marble.

I have many new ideas that would please you enormously; you would be absolutely thrilled. They agree with your thoughts….

Graces: Very small people around a large table listen to a prayer before a meal.

Sundays: Three men in new outfits perched upon a very high cart leave for Mass.

The Sin: A young woman crouched upon a bench cries; her surprised parents stare at her. (Rivière 97)

As witnessed here, now liberated from Rodin's influence Claudel includes even more Christian virtue and purity than before. She aimed to prove that her work was intentionally different than his. "Since Rodin worked on the grand scale, she chose to work small; since he dealt with the nude, she would dress her figures. Her head was working feverishly…" (Ayral-Clause 121). Though this introduces another form of redemption which she sought--deliverance from male oppression, which I will address later---redemption in its *most powerful* form was achieved through her ongoing creation of *La petite châtelaine* (see figures 29-32).

As briefly just mentioned, following Rodin and Claudel's final separation in 1893 Claudel began to see her art as more "antithetical" to Rodin's, and as an art "of the unspoken, of inner solitude…of the ideal of beauty and truth" (Caranfa 35). It is truly at this point that she breaks free and little by little, achieves redemption from the oppression she had suffered for more than a decade. Claude Debussy himself confirmed this visible change. In a letter to Robert Godet he wrote, "In the works sculpted by Camille Claudel, [*The Little Manor Lady* is one among several which are mentioned] there is fixed a kind of beauty...[that] has a plastic eloquence of an extraordinary power blended with a deep accent of intimacy, as an echo of secret or familiar emotions sprung from a strong interior where they sing at mid-voice" (Caranfa 35).

To better understand how this transformation came about, let us first examine the history surrounding the creation of this moving bust.

In 1892 Camille Claudel was forced to undergo an unwanted abortion. Though very little is known of the details surrounding this tragic event, it is undeniably clear that this experience had a devastating and lasting effect on her life. She was shunned by those who hardly knew her as well as those with whom she was closest, in particular her brother, Paul. A 1939 letter from Paul Claudel to his friend Marie Romain-Rolland, who had admitted a past abortion, lifts all doubts regarding the merciless fury with which he insensitively condemned Claudel's painful experience. He stated, "Note that a person who is very close to me committed the same crime and that she has been paying for it in a house for the insane for *26 years*. To kill a child, to kill an immortal soul, it is horrible! It is awful! How can you live and breathe with such a crime upon your conscience…I do not speak to you with the indignation of a Pharisee, but with the compassion of a brother" (Ayral-Clause 115). Though he includes this last line of unconvincing reassurance, it is evident that he felt scornful contempt toward his sister. Claudel was no doubt wounded by such condemnation from a brother she held in the highest esteem.

The combination of humiliation, sorrow, and remorse…weighed heavily upon her and tormented her body and mind. In a troubling letter to Rodin on June 25, 1893, Claudel alluded to this resulting burden. She said, "…As for my health, I am not feeling any better because I cannot stay in bed, having constant cause for walking…Mademoiselle Vaissier came to serve me and [spoke] concerning me at Islette. They say I leave at night by the window of my tower, hanging from a red umbrella with which I set fire to the forest!" (Ayral-Clause 114). Though time's mystery conceals what really happened it is probable that after the abortion Claudel "may have unconsciously viewed herself as a witch destroying life…" (Ayral-Clause 114).

Thus, as part of her recovery, she began to sculpt *La petite châtelaine* and put all her energies into this piece which would ultimately evoke a powerful measure of healing within her. Record occasionally states that the subject of this bust is the six-year-old granddaughter of Madame Courcelles, owner of a castle at Islette where Claudel spent several months presumably healing from the abortion. Indeed Camille did take the time to teach the girl drawing and wove what *Le Figaro* describes as, "…une relation tendre avec cette enfant, dont on imagine qu'elle compense une perte maternelle"[35] (36). Which leads to the more common belief: that Claudel created this sweet face as she imagined her own child would have resembled years later. She carefully and tenderly dedicated years to sculpting multiple versions of this little girl as if she believed that this poignant act of redemption was, in a sense, bringing back the life that had been lost.

Proof of this redemptive conviction can be seen in the exceptional formal elements of the pieces. First, the child's chin is tilted upward as she looks with wide, searching eyes that seem hopeful yet uncertain. In Angelo Caranfa's analysis of the girl's eyes he states, "Here…the figure is completely attentive, as though nothing disturbs the serenity of her inner vision, a vision that takes her to the realm of the eternal…All is wonder around her!...all is contemplation…all is enrapturement before the eyes of this delightful child…" (Caranfa 70). Next, her expression is timidly vibrant and holds delicate youthful vigor. Roger Marx noted in *La Revue Encyclopédique* that "Mademoiselle Claudel's bust is endowed with the intense and inspired radiance of young life." Furthermore, Ayral-Clause stated that the piece "does not convey the expected characteristics of innocence" we would imagine, "Instead, with the intensity of the child's expression radiates a surprising blend of knowledge and fragility" (Ayral-Clause 117). Perhaps Claudel endeavored to integrate her own feelings of fragility within this unusually

[35] A tender relationship with this child, from which she compensates for a maternal loss.

intricate image of youth. Concerning the smooth stone Caranfa beautifully describes, "…every pore of her soft and tender skin radiates with an inner impulse of the heart" (70). *Le Figaro* published in sincere agreement, "Camille restitue dans ses sculptures des états d'âme intimes, et cela, personne d'autre ne le rend avec autant de talent"[36] (36). Additionally, Maurice Hamel wrote in *La Revue de Paris* "How touching and beautiful she is!...The sculpting of the marble is both sweeping and tight. One feels the hand of the artist and not just the scissors of the *praticien*. It is a real masterpiece" (qtd. in Ayral-Clause 169). Clearly Claudel continued to satisfy the emotional desires of the public with each new adaptation of this figure.

Mathias Morhardt, editor of *Le Temps,* went so far as to compare Claudel's bust with various masterpieces of Florentine artists. He said that like the Florentines, "Claudel shows a great care for the form, which she translates, interprets, and penetrates with as much intelligence as with noble sense…[Her work] is unified…well balanced…and perfectly serene. It is this intimate alliance with, and participation in the pure or tender feelings of the heart that Camille Claudel's art shares in the spirit and style of the Florentines" (Caranfa 68). Caranfa adds that she renders everything with truthfulness, faithfulness, harmony, as do the Florentines.

Continuing to examine the physical details, one instantly remarks the difference in the muscle development and hairstyles among the various versions. It is not until 1894 that Claudel solidified in bronze the lifelike nature she hoped to capture. One will instantly notice the realistic muscles straining in the neck and shoulders, as well as the nuanced facial expressions beginning to take form. In reference to the 1895 version, the curators of the Piscine de Roubaix museum near Lille, France commented, "Le traitement de la chevelure, construite comme une carapace de volutes noueuses dont la fragilité extrême est évidemment menacée à chaque

[36] In her sculptures, Camille recreates the states of intimate souls, and that, no one else does with as much talent.

nouvelle attaque du ciseau dans la matière" [37] (Picandet 2). Ayral-Clause added that one can see how this bust was such a technical feat in that the child's hair was rendered "entirely with open strands, and the bust itself hollowed out to let the light play on the face [and hair] and increase its mystery" (117). The Roubaix curators also added that not only was this delicate head intricately coiffed, the luminosity from each angle rendered it stunning. Their following words describe how such skilled technique led to such a radiant result: "[*La petite châtelaine a été*]…creusé pour devenir un piège à lumière et ainsi illuminer le marbre poli, sans doute avec un os de mouton selon le procédé habituel de Claudel qui pensait le partager avec les sculptures de Michel Ange" [38] (Picandet 2). Claudel was determined to use only the most refined techniques as she chiseled away at the delicate life she endeavored to revive.

Intense effort is clearly visible in the careful contours of the marble. The openness that Claudel achieved in the shaping of her bust is equivalent to the allegorical openness with which the child views "the eternal mysteries," as Caranfa terms it (70). The choice that Claudel made to use marble rather than earth for this particular piece shows that despite the challenges of the medium, she desired above all else to eternalize her subject. The fact that she finished several versions of this piece, each with slight nuances of difference, also adds credence to her attempt at redeeming a life so sadly lost. The little girl's slender neck, delicate collarbone and slightly slumped yet perfectly rounded shoulders are all features which add a dimension of femininity to Claudel's style that Rodin does not engage. Ayral-Clause agreed that these distinctive elements signified "le détachement de Rodin dans lequel s'engage alors Claudel" [39] (117).

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[37] The head of hair is constructed like a shell of knotty curls in which the extreme fragility is evidently threatened with each new attack of the chisel on the subject.
[38] *The Little Lady* was constructed to become a trap for the light and thus illuminate the polished marble; it was most likely done with a sheep's bone. This was the usual procedure that Camille, as well as Michelangelo's sculptors used.
[39] The detachment from Rodin in which Camille engages herself.

Angelo Caranfa, in his analysis, compares *La petite châtelaine* to one of Claudel's earlier busts *Charles Lhermitte as a Child* 1889 (fig. 25) and states that both of these sculptures have Florentine traces and, more importantly, share a common spiritual theme. His description of the Florentine traces shared by both child figures is, yet again, another testament to the element of spirituality Claudel incorporated into every piece she created. He described that like *La petite châtelaine, Charles Lhermitte* too "is completely absorbed by the presence of something indefinable, which touches him with an air of silence, mystery, and sadness. He is…waiting…with such faith, that his existence seems indeed eternal. His face vibrates with tenderness, sweetness, calmness, and melancholy. The finished work is highly polished and it exhibits a…lightness, and a harmony that are matched only by the works of the Florentine goldsmiths. Here, light and shadow endows the work with a grace of sense, a transcendence, as though the child is divinely inspired" (Caranfa 68). The replication of these divine qualities in Claudel's work is evidence that her quest for redemption began even before her finalized rupture with Rodin.

Caranfa later goes on to explain that both *La petite châtelaine* and *Charles Lhermitte* share the theme of "the miracle of existence" (68). He explains that in both children's eyes, as they glance heavenward, there is a "radiancy that indicates their vision of the inaccessible, which fills [the viewer] with awe" (68). As each child looks with fervor, I echo Mathias Morhardt in affirming that each "small, ambiguous face...is strangely intelligent" (Caranfa 68).

As we strove to understand the multidimensional nature of *L'implorante,* let us do the same while examining *La petite châtelaine.* Limiting oneself to a superficial interpretation of the piece, the subject was simply a little girl with charming features. Children at the turn of this century were not often permitted in adult society. Thus, the focus given by a prestigious artist as

well as her dedication of precious materials to a subject who was initially not even commissioned would have been astounding.

However, if one looks deeper into the allegorical nature of the piece, the analysis presents a slight challenge seeing as Claudel does not employ a recognizable mythical figure as she did with *Clotho*. Yet, one conclusion can be drawn which originates from the title of the 1895 Salon version: *Jeanne enfant* (fig. 30) or Joan as a Child. It is said that she chose this name for this marble copy in honor of Joan of Arc. Thus, the reputable appellation instilled an element of heroism that the child would have otherwise lacked. Claudel's decision to connect her lost child to the soul of the woman who redeemed France was a powerful one. This association invited viewers to unite this innocent face with qualities of a woman who was honorable, virtuous, and divinely guided throughout her life. Furthermore, it is probable that many would have observed the similarities between Claudel's sculpture and other renditions of Joan of Arc done around the same time period. For example, in Jules Bastien-Lepages' *Joan of Arc* 1879 (fig. 27) the young woman looks heavenward with inquisitive eyes, hoping for answers and waiting for inspiration. An earlier but equally poignant rendition is that of John Everett Millais' *Joan of Arc* completed in 1865 (fig. 28). It too depicts a young girl with a glance akin to Claudel's *Jeanne enfant* in which her eyes, widened and upturned, gaze patiently yet hopefully toward heaven. Unfortunately, there are no records which explain why the subsequent copies of *La petite chatelaine* did not include the same stirring title.

Though to the French public, elements of the piece would have clearly signified spirituality, such as the child's inquisitive stare searching for deeper meaning, or her heavenward glance inviting divine participation, in this era it was not typical for children to be included in sculpture with the role of conveying such poignant themes. As confirmation, one need only view

Rodin's revered piece, *Ugolino and his Children* 1881 (fig. 26), in which Ugolino is in the process of eating the corpses of his children after they have died by starvation. Thus, Claudel's use of a child to convey such a powerful spiritual theme as redemption was revolutionary.

Finally, it is in examining the ethereal, intrinsic meaning embedded within the sculpture that we find redemption personified. Instead of symbols, we now see symbolical values. Taking into account the tragic origin of *La petite châtelaine*'s creation, we can now see clearly how the continual sculpting and re-sculpting of the bust was a performed as measure of penance, resurrection, and self-healing on the part of the creator. In order to better understand what art historians refer to as the "symbolic value" of the sculpture, let us assess the responses and victories which resulted from sharing this piece with the public.

To begin, the solace she found while creating these multiple versions is evident even between the limited lines of her letters to Rodin. In June of 1892, as their relationship was tumultuously reaching its end she wrote, "Monsieur Rodin, Ne venez pas ici…Du reste, je vais mieux merci.… Je reviendrai l'année prochaine"[40] (Rivière 2008 84). She no longer needed him to distract her from her pain; she had found an outlet and was enraptured in its possibilities. For the first time in her life, she received the recognition she deserved without standing in the shadow of Rodin. "Eugene Blot 'organisa deux expositions *personnelles* pour Camille Claudel, en 1905 et 1908. Il présenta…une Petite Châtelaine en marbre'"[41] (Rivière 2008 188).

Furthermore, Antoine Bourdelle, a brilliant sculptor who, in 1893, became Rodin's assistant, admired *La petite châtelaine* and inquired whether it was possible to have a replica sculpted for his friend Henri Fontaine's collection. Claudel stipulated that it would take her three months to produce another version in marble, but was thrilled to have the request. Upon first

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[40] Mr. Rodin, do not come here…besides, I'm doing better, thank you. I will return here next year.
[41] …organized two *personal* expositions for Camille Claudel in 1905 and 1908. He presented…*The Little Manor Lady* in marble.

hearing of the request, she responded immediately, "Je suis très flattée de l'admiration que vous témoignez pour mes œuvres; le suffrage d'un artiste comme vous est très précieux pour moi "[42] (Rivière 2008 113). In a second letter after the price had been agreed upon and Fontaine had confirmed his commission, Claudel was amazed that the men's idea had come to fruition. Appreciation coming from both Bourdelle and Fontaine meant *justification* in Claudel's eyes.

Her joy was not rooted in mere recognition and monetary success; it was much more than that. She felt vindicated that both an artist of such high caliber and a chance enthusiast saw the depth of her rendition and understood, as she did, that this little girl's soul was destined to be eternalized in marble. Another chance to attain redemption herself and this life lost was more than she could have hoped for. Her words in the following letter exude the hope and salvation she had so long been seeking.

> Monsieur Bourdelle,
>
> Vous me causez une grande joie en me disant que vous êtes parvenu à me faire commander mon petit buste en marbre à un prix plus élevé que je ne pensais. Je vais me mettre au travail tout de suite et vous me rendez un peu de courage qui commençait à me manquer. J'en suis très touchée venant d'un artiste tel que vous et l'admiration spontanée est une chose rare et précieuse. Recevez avec mes remerciements l'expression de mes sentiments dévoués. (113)
>
> Camille Claudel[43]

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[42] "I am very flattered at the admiration that you attest to have for my work; the approval from an artist like you is very precious to me".

[43] Mr. Bourdelle, You give me cause for such great joy in telling me that you have succeeded in acquiring a commission for my little bust in marble at a price much higher than I had expected. I am going to put myself to work immediately; you give me the courage that was I was starting to lack. I am very touched; praise coming from an artist such as yourself, as well as spontaneous admiration, is a rare and precious thing. Please receive my gratitude and the expression of my devoted sentiments. Camille Claudel

Unfortunately not every response from the public came in the form of the overwhelming appreciation she so desired and deserved. In 1894, buoyed up by the recent praise and emancipation she had received, she wrote the following letter to the minister of the arts.

> Monsieur le Ministre,
>
> J'ai l'honneur d'appeler votre bienveillante attention sur un petit buste d'enfant en bronze que j'ai exposé au Salon du Champ de Mars où il figure sous le n° 36 et de le proposer pour être acheté par l'Etat. Si j'en crois les encouragements que j'ai reçus au sujet de cette œuvre je ne pense pas me montrer trop téméraire dans ma sollicitation. Je suis avec le plus profond respect monsieur le Ministre votre très humble et dévouée servante,
>
> Camille Claudel[44]

En marge : accusé réception le 28 avril 94 / Refus d'achat le 7 juillet 94 (Rivière 2008 101).

In the recently published compilation of Claudel's correspondences, along with historical annotations, we learn that after the Ministry's unreasonable refusal to purchase this bronze version of *La petite châtelaine,* Claudel sold the piece to Baron Alphonse de Rothschild, who then offered it as a gift to the Joseph-Denais de Beaufort-en-Valée Museum in 1896 (Rivière 2008 101). Given that she desired the memory of her little girl to live on, selling the piece into hands which would be far from the eyes of the Parisian public must have been devastating. But, without considerable financial support from her family, Rodin, or from the ministry, Claudel was urgently in need of money and left with no other choice. It must have been infuriating for her to struggle so intensely to convince the public of *La petite châtelaine's* precious worth, only to be repeatedly ignored and rejected.

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[44] Mr. Minister, I have the honor to call your benevolent attention to a little bust of a child in bronze that I exhibited at the Salon of the Champ de Mars where it appeared under the number 36, and I propose it to be purchased by the State. If I believe in the encouragements that I have received concerning this work, I do not think I am acting foolishly in this request. I am, with the deepest respect Mr. Minister, your very humble and devoted servant, Camille Claudel. (In the margin: received April 28, 1894 / Refusal July 7, 1894)

Interestingly, the documentation for the purchase refusal has never been found in the Ministry's archive files. Moreover, the deeper I delve into the details of Claudel's interactions with the government, the more it appears *multiple* secrets were kept and records "lost". This same tragedy extends to the records relating to her treatment in the asylum. It can only be presumed that with the modern resurgence of information confirming Claudel greatness, the French government and public are ashamed that their own society could have treated such an artist with so much injustice.

Seeking Redemption from Male Oppression: Her Role and Contribution as a Woman

"A Revolt against Nature: a Woman Genius". –Octave Mirbeau

Let us now embark on a different approach to examining Claudel's works. Not only did Claudel seek redemption for her unwanted abortion and from the guilt caused by her subservient affair; as illustrated earlier in the analysis of her agony, she desired desperately to be free from the male oppression that was ever-present around her. Thus, let us consider her contribution to a possible female redemption.

Until the very end of 19th century French society, women who desired to express individual creativity and profound themes in their art were immediately stifled. They were confined to superficial subjects such as landscapes, still-life, and fully-clothed mundane figures. It was rare that a woman had the opportunity to work from a live, nude model. Rodin's invitation to Camille Claudel, her friend Jessie Lipscomb, and a choice few other females to work in his atelier must have been viewed as an incredible privilege and a shock to the public.

Caranfa attested that Claudel has often been "omitted from the growing body of feminist literature" (9). Additionally, from the few records I have come across, on the rare occasion that she was given a place among Western women artists, it was often to show that her choice to

work outside of appropriate societal domains inevitably resulted in madness. In her book *The Female Malady,* Elaine Showalter clarified the source of this peculiar idea. In her effort to make up for the lack of "gender analyses and feministic critiques missing from…history…" (6), she argued that "mental breakdowns [were] the result of a sociocultural context that deprived women of social or intellectual outlets or expressive options" (147), and the right "to speak and act…in the public world" (161).

Parallel to our theme of redemption, Showalter argues that the silent, spiritual and introspective method which Claudel used to create should be seen as "a way to escape subjection and exploitation by male-dominated institutions" (Caranfa 11). Caranfa, though opposed to Showalter's argument, agreed that society and "cultural context" were catalysts to the artist's tragic downfall (11). Prominent musician and member of society Claudel Debussy, despite his close friendship with Claudel and his constant esteem of her work, was shocked that such talent could come from a woman (Caranfa 35).

Though record states that there were indeed other women who had the privilege to sculpt in Rodin's studio, none shared Claudel's remarkable gift. For instance, her dear friend, roommate and studio partner Jessie Lipscomb admitted that despite her efforts, the caliber of her pieces was not equal to that of Claudel's. Ayral-Clause said, "[Jessie] was interested in visual truth, not in emotional expressivity…In her works, she produced 'the same freshness and plasticity' as Claudel, 'but never the same interest in the idea of the correspondence between extreme emotion and the life of the material in the hands of the artist'" (Ayral-Clause 56). She lamented that her pieces simply did not have the same impact upon the viewer as her friend's. Yet, we must bear in mind that Claudel's spirituality is what gave her the upper hand. Lipsey, in his book described the "spiritual" as an unstoppable "force" when harnessed and integrated

within art (6). It is precisely this force with which Claudel surpassed those around her and surmounted one obstacle after another.

Another, more subtle form of redemption can be perceived in Rodin's approval of Claudel. In view of the fact that after 1887 Claudel did not please her parents in living up to their bourgeois expectations, she found release in Rodin's satisfaction with her work. Moreover, despite our efforts to detach her from his name and reputation, it was his appreciation that gave her the foundation of confidence she needed to compete in the public realm. Even late in his life Rodin admitted that "The happiness of always being understood, of always seeing his expectations exceeded was, he himself said, one of the greatest joys of his artistic life" (Le Normand-Romain 16).

Subsequently, Ayral-Clause says, "It is interesting to note that at no point [in her struggles] did Claudel turn toward other women artists" (165). She argues that this was due to her poor relationship with her mother and sister, and because of them, she did not trust women. Moreover, from what is recorded of her interaction with women, she viewed them as unwilling to help. In 1897, Claudel wrote a letter to Rodin which plainly illustrated her frustration with women. In it, she protested that commissions by powerful men such as Mathias Morhardt were not always nobly given. She stated that oftentimes, it required artists to become "amis intimes de Madame Morhardt"[45] (Rivière 2008 139). She also complained that he only readily helped those "du meme pays, de la meme religion"[46] and certainly du même sexe.

In this same letter she offered Rodin a metaphor to illustrate the injustice she felt. She described her doom as "[une] haine noire…de toutes les femmes aussitôt qu'elles me voient paraître…" and added, "jusqu'ã ce que je sois rentrée dans ma coquille, on se sert de toutes les

[45] Intimate friends with Mrs. Morhardt
[46] From the same country, of the same religion, and certainly of the same gender.

armes, et de plus aussitôt qu'un homme généreux s'occupe de me faire sortir d'embarras la femme es là pour lui tenir le bras et l'empêcher d'agir"[47] (139). This image of a creature ensnared in its shell truly exposes the prison-like situation that the late 19th century French society imposed.

Furthermore, not only did Claudel believe women to be unwilling to help in her "unsuitable" plights, she truly deemed them incapable of effectively making a difference. Her female models were "meek, without civic or political power, and totally dependent upon their fathers and husbands" (Ayral-Clause 165); and, although some may argue that Claudel's own father was a generous enabler, Monsieur Claudel himself admits that the majority of his assistance was given without request. In 1909 he wrote to his son Paul, "She asks for 20 francs, we send 100 francs; or she asks for nothing and we send 100 francs anyway, often several times in a trimester" (Ayral-Clause 165). Unfortunately these small gifts were a rarity; despite Claudel's talent she lacked adequate support.

Yet, admittedly, things were changing for women and small but significant measures of improvement had sprung up in Paris. As 1868 approached, the Académie Julian opened and began to offer alternative classes to both women and men who desired serious art instruction. By 1873, several students at the academy were privileged to work with live, nude models and twice each week, prominent artists came to review both the men and the women's work. "These masters played a crucial role in sustaining the confidence of their female students, who were too often discouraged by the bias they encountered in the art world" (Ayral-Clause 23). Marie Bashkirtseff, a former student, both praised and criticized the school. In one breath she wrote, "In the atelier, everything disappears…we are ourselves, we are individuals and we have art and

[47] A black hatred women feel toward me as soon as they see me…until I return inside my shell, they use every possible weapon, and moreover, as soon as a generous man tries to help me out in a difficult situation, a woman is there to hold his arm and prevent him from acting.

nothing else in front of us" (Ayral-Clause 24). Yet, in the next breath she recorded, "These men feel contempt for us…and only when they find a strong and even a coarse composition are they happy, because these flaws are rare among women. It is the work of a man, they said of me. It is energetic, it is natural" (Ayral-Clause 25).

By 1881, when Camille Claudel enrolled, equality had taken another step forward within the walls of a competing institution, the Academy Colarossi. She chose this school specifically due to its equality in tuition between men and women, its strong focus on modeling, its flexibility, and its willingness to offer equal opportunities to both genders (Ayral-Clause 25). Regarding further advances brought by the end of the 1800's, Ayral-Clause said, "As some women were throwing their old confining clothes out the window, other women were challenging the traditional roles assigned to them" (165). Debora Silverman in her consideration of women's positions in late 19th century France said, "In the 1890's the legal and professional possibilities for middle-class women in France changed significantly….[and] although the actual number of French women affected by the changes was small, the visible and unfamiliar character of the new bourgeois woman generated a powerful symbol of the *femme nouvelle,* the "New Woman" (63). Furthermore, understanding the controversy behind the idea of the emerging *femme nouvelle* at the turn of the century will enable us to better understand Camille Claudel's role as a woman who, for years preceding, had already been asserting her role among men and fighting to hold her ground.

"The menace of the *femme nouvelle*, who left home and family for a career, pervaded contemporary journals between 1889 and 1898" (Silverman 63). Examples illustrating the threat society felt began in the form of popular caricatures patterned after Daumier's *Les Bas bleus* (The Bluestockings) which appeared in the pages of bestselling books and magazines. In these,

women who left their traditional domestic roles in their familial havens were shown "transformed into '*hommesses,*' desiccated and rigid characters divested of all feminine" qualities (Silverman 69). The French public was preoccupied with the menace of the *femme nouvelle* and Silverman offers some ideas as to why this was the case.

The first factor, she suggests, is the social question (65). Between 1889 and 1900, 21 feminist periodicals began in France, (65) and though Camille Claudel was never seen wearing pants nor riding a bicycle to join feminist unions, feminist influence could not have been disregarded. However, in contrast to today's often intense view of feminism, the women of the 1890s shared what Karen Offen has aptly called the ideology of 'familial feminism' (Silverman 65). They searched for a type of separate-but-equal justice, and although they resented their inferior treatment, they led generally peaceful campaigns for limited reform (65). In these early years of feminism, their demands hardly seemed unreasonable. For example, the existing Civil Code relegated a married woman to the status of a dependent minor, requiring that she give over to her husband all her financial resources. Thus, women simply hoped to be treated as adults with a fraction of the respect men so effortlessly received. Nevertheless, despite this injustice, in her younger years when she was passionately in love with Rodin, Claudel would have resolutely made this sacrifice had he consented to marry her.

"The second factor contributing to the perception of the *femme nouvelle,*" Silverman notes, was "the new access of some French women to higher education and professional careers" (65). Claudel was fortunate to have attained higher education than most girls at an early age because both she and her brother Paul were privately tutored in Latin, math, literature and other areas. She was only twelve years old when, along with schooling, she experimented with simple modeling and set her mind firmly to become a sculptor.

Other reasons the *femme nouvelle* immediately posed a threat to men and conventionally minded society included the fear of females' imposing physical presence, and a "decline in the birthrate and the relative stagnation of the French population" (66) as women delayed having children in favor if pursuing newly available accomplishments. The Parisian public was concerned that "Gender equality would contribute to a new world of sensual impoverishment and uniform ambitions…" (Silverman 69). Hence, as many women minimized their coquettishness and avoided "opulence and decoration," they challenged their longstanding role of "an orchestrated objet d'art" (Silverman 70). This change was not a welcome transformation in the eyes of most. The following declaration by Frantz Jourdain made in 1900 precisely illustrates the bitterness men experienced: "The new woman is not beautiful. She looks rather like a boy, and illustrates more than anything the expression of a firm character…a robustly harmonious body….They are no longer women of pleasure…but women who study, of very sober comportment….[They] express firmness,…roughness, and decisiveness" (qtd. in Silverman 70).

Camille Claudel, with her robust and battered figure, firm character, roughness, and decisiveness would have fit this stereotype considerably well, and she undoubtedly upset onlookers who witnessed her roaming freely and unescorted through all walks of society. Silverman added that continuously after 1889, "Doctors, politicians, and scholars…rallied to defend the traditional female role and sought medical and philosophical rationales to consign women to the home" (67). Still, Claudel was one of the brave few who openly fought these restraints. In the end, she lived alone, worked alone, and refused an intermediary when dealing directly with men in the art world. Nevertheless, as admirable as her choices appear today, in all probability, they ultimately contributed to her family's decision to deem her insane and have her institutionalized, leading to her tragic, thirty-year demise.

As Ayral-Clause addressed the topic of female contribution to the nineteenth-century art world, she offered a valuable comparison between Camille Claudel and one of her contemporaries, Hélène Bertaux. However, simply because Bertaux was a female sculptor in Paris in this same era and suffered similar repression, a closer examination of her life will reveal whether she and Claudel truly fulfilled parallel roles in contributing toward progress and redemption for women.

Hélène Bertaux was fortunate to be raised in the home of an artist, her father, and later had the privilege to work under the prominent sculptor Augustin Dumont. "He provided her with a technical competence and competitive edge unusual for a woman at that time" (Easterday). However, the divide between her attitude toward creation and Claudel's was in the execution of their work. Bertaux conformed "to a conservative, academic ideal" (Easterday). That is to say, she succeeded at appealing to a wide range of patrons, but it was at the expense of limiting her true creativity.

For example, although she created her own art society *L'Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs* in 1881 to help women exhibit their work, she did not progress toward changing the fact that equal opportunity in the public as a whole was still obstructed by tradition. What's more, she conformed to contributing and exhibiting "compromised" works. Her expositions were known for featuring "women [who] rarely ventured outside of sanctioned subject matters---literary,…genre, [and landscapes]—and second-rate works [which] were too readily accepted" (Ayral-Clause 166). Bertaux took pride in her medal from the 1889 Universal Exposition, however, seeing as it was an "*hors concours* designation", that meant her work was "…not subject to jury approval for the annual [and revered] Salon exhibitions" (Easterday). Claudel

would never have conceded to such actions which inevitably resulted in a lost opportunity to participate in the best of competitions.

Bertaux was also known for disregarding her integrity in pursuit of a commission. In her formal letters seeking materials or other requests, she knew her gender enhanced the possibility of rejection. Thus, she often appealed "to empathy, paternalism and discernment, [and] in each case she called attention to her unusual position as a woman facing the difficulties of succeeding in a male dominated profession" (Easterday). For instance, "In an undated letter from among the records maintained by the art bureaucracy…Bertaux asked an unnamed "Madame" to use her influence to persuade the administration to purchase her relief of the *Assumption*" (Easterday). She then proceeded to flatter and beg any man who had "any substantial influence over the art bureaucracy" (Easterday). In a subsequent letter she wrote, "See me as a woman, a wife and mother…who wants to triumph in her position…" hoping to gain enough pity and charity to sell her piece. She also included the following pitiful line: "[if] a work in marble or in stone would be entrusted to me by his excellence the Minister, I would [live] fulfilled in lofty obligations…I would owe [illegible word]…" (Easterday). Claudel would never have negotiated in such a way. She was confident that her talent was extraordinary and realized that her masterpieces were *worth* a fair purchase.

Regrettably, Claudel had so much talent but lacked the corresponding support. Unlike other prominent women artists, she did not identify herself as being prevented by women's struggles. "She would have been appalled by the compromises Bertaux was willing to make in order to move forward" (Easterday). Ayral-Clause said, "What is…disconcerting to a woman sculptor and to women in general are the expressions of incredulity scattered among the most glowing reviews of Claudel's works. A woman like Claudel was generally viewed as a

phenomenon and a source of constant amazement. 'Mademoiselle Camille Claudel,' said [Octave] Mirbeau, 'brings us works that, by their invention and the power of their execution, go well beyond what can be expected of a woman'"…(qtd. in Ayral-Clause 108). It was merely after seeing and critiquing *La Valse* and *Clotho* that Mirbeau offered a both flattering and cutting remark. He stated that these two works "conveyed so profound a poetry and so male a conception that we pause quite surprised in front of this artistic beauty coming from a woman" (108). Ayral-Clause added, "A woman could not be expected to have genius; if she did, she was perceived as sexually ambiguous" (108).

Even though Claudel did not join the fin-de-siècle women's unions, join the modern women riding bicycles, nor trade her dresses for more masculine clothing, she strove to represent women impressively in her artwork. This is visible in the powerful *Old Hélène* 1885, who represented a maid in her parents' home, *Mademoiselle Lipscomb* 1890s, *The Gossips* 1897 and in many self-portraits. With the exception of *The Wave* 1897, in which the women are inevitably succumbing to oppression, in many other cases the female figures are portrayed hopefully seeking redemption, meaning, and stand independently without the aid of a man.

Not once in her years of creation was Claudel willing to play the submissive game of compromise. She saw no reason for gender segregation and did the unthinkable by sharing a studio with a man. In the end, "Camille remained resolute in fighting in the same Salons as male sculptors, and with the same freedom of expression…" (Ayral-Clause 166).

Finally, although in each of the previously discussed instances in which redemption was sought we witnessed attitudes of humility, when it came to seeking redemptive emancipation for herself as a woman, Claudel did it through defiance. The arguments of many art historians maintain the idea that defiance was possibly the most visible characteristic of Camille Claudel.

She defied the prejudiced society in which she lived in almost every step she took: her choice of a career in sculpture, her entrance into a previously all-male atelier, her determination to sculpt the nude with as much freedom as her male counterparts, her persistence in soliciting state commissions for works that were sure to offend the warped notion of propriety favored by male officials, and so on. Each of these choices rebelliously challenged the prejudices of her time.

CONCLUSION

Having examined periods of ecstasy, agony, and redemption in the life of Camille Claudel, it is now indisputably clear that from the despairing depths of its darkness to the pinnacle of its enlightenment, the art of Camille Claudel generates a light, a spirit, a breath of spirituality, a feeling of deliverance, and a measure of faith that only an artist of true genius could have achieved. Through her idyllic sculptures, she conveyed the "voluptuous chastity" which Paul Claudel and so many others revered. Through her agonizing pieces, she learned how to channel her pain toward a loftier goal. And through her redemptive works, she found deliverance for herself and for others from excruciating outward oppression. She shone brightly amidst her contemporaries with her skill at symbolically conveying the spiritual, and her masterpieces emitted an ethereal sense of holiness that stirred the soul of any fortunate enough to sense it.

Furthermore, her tumultuous experiences endowed her sculptures with proof of "her own vision of existence; a perception that life is simultaneously tragic and lyrical, understandable and mysterious, fragile and durable, immanent and transcendent, changeable and eternal, concrete and symbolic, communicable and incommunicable" (Caranfa 107). As a woman of the nineteenth century, she came up against the social and artistic limitations imposed upon her and "vehemently affirmed her right to live outside the values of her time" (Caranfa 182). She struggled endlessly to be accepted as a sculptor in her own right, (Ayral-Clause 257). And through her struggle for redemption, she "left behind sculptures that were frequently as daring as any of Rodin's yet endowed with their own distinctive spirituality.…Her work [was] pure, serene fresh graceful, sincere, faithful…and bathed in inner light and truth (Caranfa 183).

Not only did Camille Claudel achieve redemption for her own pain and oppression, she also attained a remarkable measure of deliverance for women of her era. Critic Henry de Braisne published a review in the 1897 *Revue idéaliste* affirming that she "led the way for a more enlightened treatment of women in the art world…" He testified, "Mademoiselle Claudel is without rival when it comes to her willpower, her hard work, her incredible integrity, her faith in truth, which to her is Beauty" (Ayral-Clause 136).

It is true that in fin-de-siècle France, due to the advancing secularization of society, viewers did not understand religious and spiritual symbolism in art as comprehensively as they had in the past. Many art critics felt challenged by Claudel's innovative use of spiritual themes within supposedly secular scenes. However, Ayral-Clause stipulated, "The critics who condemned her for not being able to create a new style failed to understand that her battle was focused in a different direction" (257). Paul explained his sister's ambition in the following way: "A work by Camille Claudel…is a sort of monument to inner thought, the seed of a theme offered to all dreams…" and I must repeat his earlier statement when he said, "her sculpture is very different because it welcomes light and radiates the inner dream that inspired it" (157). If sought and pondered, Claudel's glorious talent will resonate to the depths of one's soul.

Camille Mauclair called her "the greatest woman artist of the present time" (qtd. in Ayral-Clause 156). Louis Vauxcelles, a critic in her own era, referred to her as "one of the most *authentic* sculptors of our time" (qtd. in Ayral-Clause 171). It is this spiritual authenticity that renders Claudel's work so effectively transcendent. I echo Angelo Caranfa when he affirms, "the beauty and the glory of the world…shine in Camille Claudel's art, and thus her works should be touched, observed, and encountered with the same love, the same joy, the same sincerity, and the same sense of solitude that created them...Claudel's works express the meaning

of existence….To those who look at them, chant them, or read them, they offer a moment of eternity" (184). *Will we seize this moment?*

FIGURES

Figure 1. Camille Claudel. *La Valse*. 1890.
Poitiers, Musée Sainte-Croix.

Figure 2. Camille Claudel.
Clotho. 1893. Paris, Musée Rodin.

Figure 3. Eugène Druet.
Fate and the Convalescent. 1898. London

Figure 4. Auguste Rodin.
She who was the Helmet Maker's Once Beautiful Wife. 1885 Paris, Musée Rodin.

Figure 5. Jules Desbois.
Misery. 1894. Paris, Musée Rodin.

Figure 6. Michelangelo.
Dying Slave. 1513-1516. Paris, Musée du Louvre.

Figure 7. Donatello.
Magdalene Penitent. 1453-1455. Florence, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo.

Figure 8. Camille Claudel. Early plaster (left) and final bronze (right) of *L'âge mûr*.
1894-1902. Musée Rodin and Musée d'Orsay, Paris, respectively.

Figure 9. Camille Claudel. *The Wave.*
1897. Musée Rodin, Paris.

Figure 10. Camille Claudel. *Sakountala*.
1905. Musée Rodin, Paris.

Figure 11. Auguste Rodin. *Eternal Idol*.
1890-1893. Musée Rodin, Paris.

Figure 12. Camille Claudel. *Le Psaume*.
1889. Musée Boucher-de-Perthes, Abbeville.

Figure 13. Gustave Doré.
The Doré Bible. 1866. London.

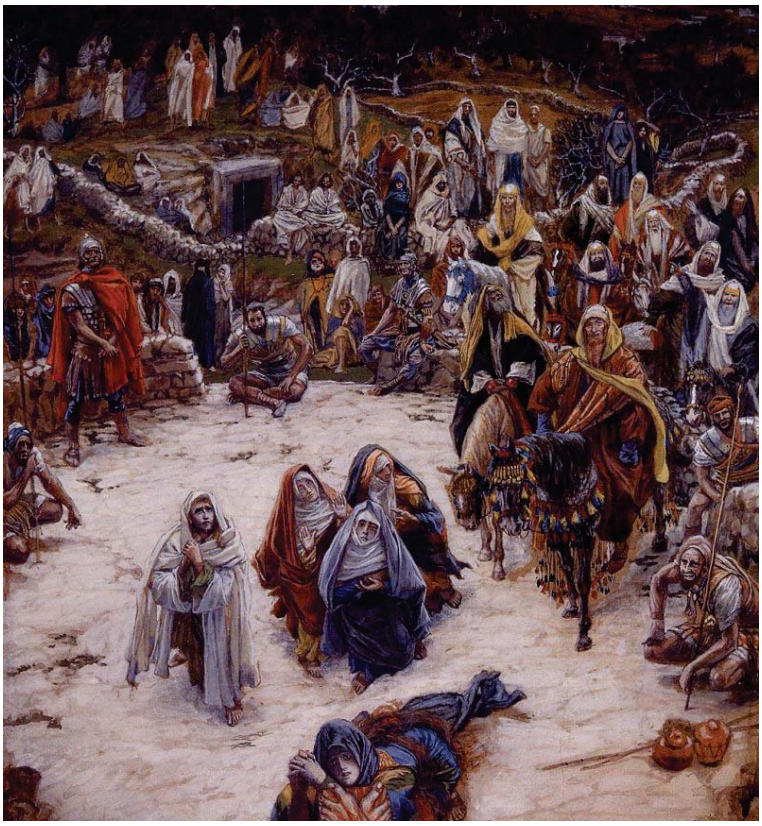

Figure 14. James Tissot. *Crucifixion, seen from the Cross*.
1886-94. Brooklyn Museum, New York.

Figure 15. Camille Claudel. *Bust of Rodin*.
1888-1889. Musée Rodin, Paris.

Figure 16. Camille Claudel. *Le dieu envolé*.
1894. Private Collection, Paris.

Figure 17. Camille Claudel. *L'implorante or The Implorer*.
1899. Private Collection, France.

Figure 18. Auguste Rodin. *The Prodigal Son*.
1884. Musée Rodin, Paris.

Figure 19. Auguste Rodin. *Adam*.
1880. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

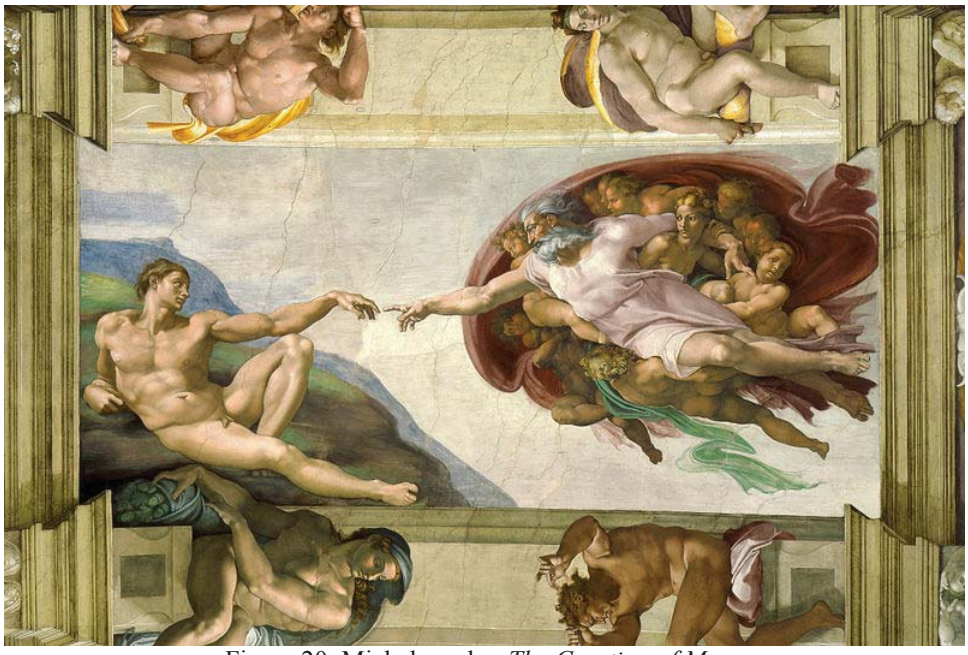

Figure 20. Michelangelo. *The Creation of Man*.
1511. Sistine Chapel, Vatican City.

Figure 21. Vincent Van Gogh. *The Starry Night* 1889.
Oil on canvas. New York, Museum of Modern Art

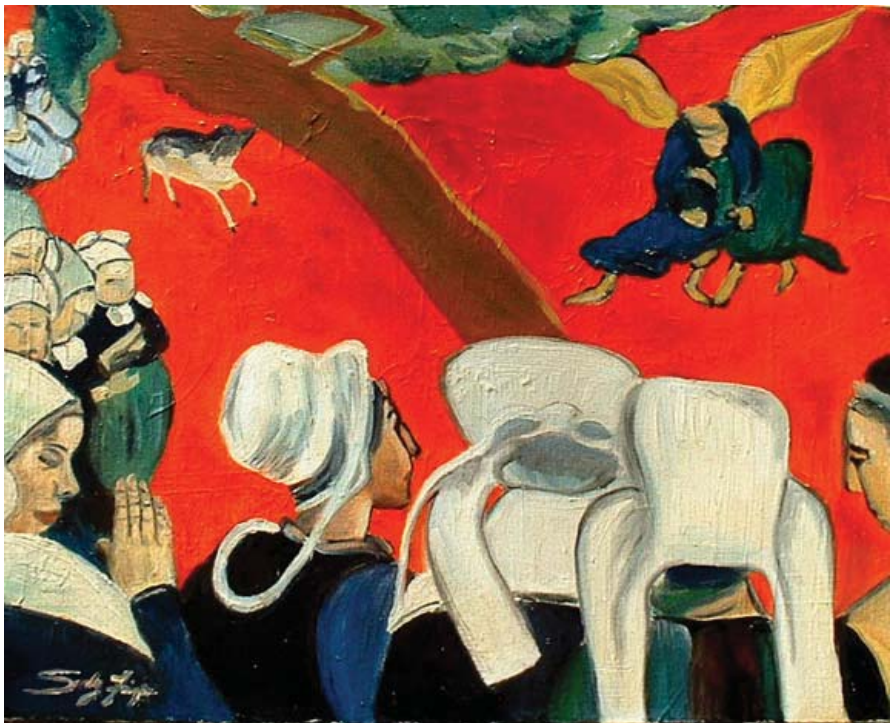

Figure 22. Paul Gauguin. *Vision After the Sermon.* 1888.
Oil on canvas. Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland.

Figure 23. Albert Bartholomé. *Adam and Eve*.
1900. Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

Figure 24. Auguste Rodin. *The Kiss*.
1889. Musée Rodin, Paris.

Figure 25. Camille Claudel. *Charles Lhermitte as a Child*.
1889. Musée Ingres, Montauban.

Figure 26. Auguste Rodin. *Ugolino and his Children*.
1881. Musée Rodin, Paris.

Figure 27. Jules Bastien-Lepage. *Joan of Arc.* 1879.
Oil on canvas. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 28. John Everett Millais. *Joan of Arc.* 1865.
Oil on canvas. Private Collection.

Figure 29. Camille Claudel.
La Petite Châtelaine / The Little Manor Lady.
1892. Private Collection, France.

Figure 30. Camille Claudel.
Jeanne enfant / Joan as a Child
1895. Musée Rodin, Paris.

Figure 31. Camille Claudel.
La Petite Châtelaine / The Little Manor Lady.
1894. Private Collection, France.

Figure 32. Camille Claudel.
La Petite Châtelaine / The Little Manor Lady.
1896. Musée d'Art et d'Industrie André-Diligent,
Roubaix, France.

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