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Gender, Genius and the Artist's Double Bind: the Letters of Camille Claudel, 1880-1910

Feminist scholars have long observed that the posthumous reputations of creative women, even the few who were celebrated during their productive lifetimes, have typically been short lived.¹ The name of the accomplished French sculptor Camille Claudel, who was hailed as a genius by contemporary critics, was consigned temporarily to oblivion after her death from cold and hunger in a psychiatric hospital, thirty years after her committal, in 1943.² Her reputation was revived during the 1980s as part of the feminist challenge to male dominance within the canon of Western art.³ Her dramatic life story – from a turbulent collaboration and love affair with Auguste Rodin, to the contrasting fate of her celebrated brother, Paul Claudel – has inspired novels, films and biographies, too often at the expense of objective assessment of her work.⁴ Fascination with her life, loves and losses has resulted in a dominant public perception of Camille Claudel as the victim of her intolerant family and the envious and narcissistic Rodin. The most recent discussions of her life have, however, suggested that this tragic narrative is a distorted projection. These revisionist accounts have nuanced the hagiographic dramatizations of previous decades, in which Claudel has played the role of martyr to art, proto-feminist, and 'artiste maudite'.⁵ Instead, they offer dispassionate assessments of Rodin's complex role in the artist's life and the difficult events that led to her incarceration, and they challenge the view of Claudel as a victim of fate and circumstance.⁶ This article adds significant weight to these accounts by analysing Claudel's letters in the light of theoretical discussions of gender, genius and the concept of the *femme artiste* in fin-de-siècle French culture.⁷

Camille Claudel was born in 1864, in Fère-en-Tardenois, Aisne, in northeastern France. She grew up in a typically bourgeois and rather conservative family, in which the children's artistic ambitions were encouraged: her sister, Louise, was a gifted musician and her brother Paul went on to become one of the most celebrated poets in recent French history. In 1881, Claudel's father moved the family to Paris to enable Camille to study at the Académie Colarossi, and Paul to attend Lycée. From 1882, for several years, Claudel rented a shared studio with a group of young British artists who were already graduates of the Royal College of Art: Amy Singer, Emily Fawcett and Jessie Lipscomb.⁸ By 1886, these colleagues had returned to the UK and theirs and Claudel's respective career paths diverged, as will be explored in this article.

At this time, Paris was an important international cultural centre which was at the artistic avant-garde, but which was, paradoxically, in other respects behind comparable countries. Many artists, male and female, were drawn to Paris to study, and yet women were subject to multiple exclusions in the art world. First, in contrast to the USA and many European countries, where women were allowed to enter public art colleges and obtain formal qualifications, French women were not admitted to the Paris École des Beaux-Arts until 1897, 26 years after the Slade School in London, for example, opened its doors to both men and women.⁹ Second, by comparison with

other metropolises it was socially difficult for women in Paris to work and move in the public sphere. One observer, the English artist C. R. W. Nevinson, who studied at the Académie Julian in Paris, noted important cultural differences between London and Paris in terms of the treatment of women. In his autobiography, he recorded an incident as late as 1912 when he met a young woman who was studying at the Sorbonne and trying 'to live a life à l'anglaise' in the manner of his artist friend Dora Carrington. He observed that 'the treatment she experienced and the insults that were heaped on her would simply be disbelieved in England. She had ventured down the Boulevard Saint Michel alone and on foot, and as a result of what was said and done she cried the whole way.'¹⁰ According to Claudel's contemporary, Elisa Bloch, who addressed the 1889 Paris feminist congress on the subject, the exclusion of women sculptors from serious consideration by the critical establishment also operated powerfully at a rhetorical level: 'Qu'elles exposent au Salon, soit une figure, soit un groupe, *Sculpture de femme*, dira-t-on! [...] Elève de la nature pour les artistes est synonyme d'amateur.'¹¹ These institutional, social and ideological constraints were a complex set of obstacles to women artists.

Claudel began working in Rodin's studio in 1883, and soon became his lover. It was a passionate, artistically productive but personally destructive relationship, which eventually broke down in 1899-90. Claudel's artistic activity lasted from the early 1880s until 1905-10. After her incarceration in 1913, the artist refused to work again. Rodin died in 1917, and the first retrospective exhibition of Claudel's sculpture was held in 1951 at the Musée Rodin in Paris.¹² Claudel's letters have been partially reproduced in the numerous biographical works on Claudel and Rodin since they were placed into the family archives following Paul Claudel's death in 1955.¹³ Following two decades of active interest in Camille Claudel's life, illness and death, the first complete edition of her correspondence was published in 2003.

Since their discovery, Claudel's letters have largely been leveraged as historical sources; when considered as epistolary texts, however, they add useful detail to these new perspectives, providing evidence of both remarkable individual agency and unwitting self-sabotage. The artistic and epistolary persona constructed in these letters reveals the typically conflicted experience of the nineteenth-century woman artist, who was placed in an intractable double bind. Theorists concerned with psychopathology developed the idea of the double bind during the twentieth century to explain the psychological distress caused by two simultaneous but conflicting injunctions.¹⁴ For women artists, this centred on the notion of genius, which in medical and cultural terms enjoyed its heyday in the later nineteenth century. Associated with originality and uniqueness, 'genius' was deployed in nineteenth-century discourses of art and literature, where women were concerned, to distinguish female from male artists or to highlight anomalous women.¹⁵ Christine Battersby, among others, has argued that it operated according to a 'rhetoric of exclusion', in other words a classic double bind, offering women artists an impossible choice: 'either to surrender her sexuality (becoming not *masculine*, but a surrogate *male*), or to be *feminine*

and *female*, and hence to fail to count as a genius.¹⁶ Women could be admitted as ‘geniuses’ only as outright exceptions to their sex, and at the expense of their femininity.¹⁷ In line with the image of the virilized, emasculating ‘New Woman’ that emerged at the end of the century, there was a discursive need to categorize exceptional women as essentially male, while of course retaining the cultural requirement that women conform to sex-role stereotypes.¹⁸

René Giraud’s theory of mimetic desire develops the concept of the double bind in ways that are useful to this analysis. According to Giraud, all desire is mimetic because when a person desires what another person desires, this leads to the injunction to imitate the ‘master’ in the desiring situation, but also to the contradictory imperative for the ‘disciple’ (as rival) *not* to imitate, since the object of desire cannot be possessed by two people at once. This impasse produces intense rivalry and indeed violence, which is rooted in these competing desires.¹⁹ In Claudel’s letters, we see this double bind worked out in her struggles with Rodin as precursor, master, lover and rival. Yet, on a broader level this impasse is emblematic of relations between female artists and the male critical establishment more generally: in this sense, Claudel’s letters are exemplary of not just one double bind, but, as Giraud affirms, ‘le réseau d’impératifs contradictoires.’²⁰

Taking as its corpus a number of letters from the period 1880-1910, corresponding to her active artistic career,²¹ this article shows that Camille Claudel was acutely sensitive to these conflicting injunctions because her exceptional talent led her to be singled out as a woman genius. Claudel was also specifically conflicted in her relationship with Rodin, which evidenced mimetic desire – and therefore conflict – because of her dual status as feminine lover and ‘male’ genius. The double bind is a site of conflict, and this article argues that Claudel’s writings reveal a personal struggle to evade its constraints that contains elements of success and failure that resist the formulaic, pathologizing explanations that her life story typically attracts. First, Claudel’s letters from the first phase of her career reveal an interesting level of plasticity in their construction of an artistic persona, which functions as a powerful commentary on these limitations. Second, the later letters show that the partial acceptance of an honorary male status and the rejection of the fashionable (and more socially acceptable) model of *art féminin* left Claudel somewhat isolated. The loss of the fellowship of women artists led to paranoia and violent misogyny that grew to be self-directed, ultimately resulting in her incarceration.

The emergent artistic persona (c. 1880-90)

Tamar Garb explains that *art féminin* reflected a positive re-claiming of femininity for women artists in nineteenth-century France. Promoted by the *Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs* (formed 1881) ‘as a riposte to the prevailing notion that a professional woman was a de-sexed woman,’ *art féminin* represented ‘the utopian dream of a flowering of female culture, of an infusion of French art with the ‘feminine’ spirit.’²² Politically, it accepted the idea of separate spheres, and can be

aligned with Marguerite Durand's brand of feminism that distanced itself from the stereotype of the 'New Woman'.²³ Claudel does not seem to have been sympathetic to this definition of women's art; she refused to be defined 'only' as a woman artist and never joined the *Union*.²⁴ She seems to have found the more isolated and unfashionable 'New Woman' image more personally emancipating; as a youngster she enthused about her tomboyish behaviour, writing to her friend the English sculptor Florence Jeans, 'Figurez-vous que je fais une petite excursion dans le sud de l'Angleterre toute seule, avec ma boîte à couleurs, comme un garçon.' (41, 1888, 61). Later in her life, in a 1906 letter to the art dealer Eugène Blot, with some nostalgia Claudel refers to herself as 'un ancien bas-bleu!' (213, 1906, 224).²⁵ Anne Higonnet has also shown that this self-perception was extended to the way in which the sculptor was observed by critics: 'The painter Rosa Bonheur and the sculptor Camille Claudel, though women, were described as either neutral or masculine.'²⁶ While painters such as Berthe Morisot epitomized *art féminin*, the cross-dressing Bonheur was considered male.²⁷ Bonheur – an artist who 'gained recognition on her own terms and was judged solely on the work she produced' – seems to have comfortably internalized the role of honorary male, surrounding herself with female companions and disregarding naysayers.²⁸ We shall see that Claudel, by contrast, isolated herself from other women; the resulting despair she experienced was unique.

The French adjective 'féminin(e)' can mean both female and feminine, but we shall see from Claudel's use of the term, and conspicuous silence on the subject of *art féminin*, that the concept of the *femme artiste* was semantically broad and contained both types of female artist. *Art féminin*, on the other hand, clearly connoted art that was qualitatively feminine, rather than work produced by women artists in general. The flexibility of the idea of the *femme artiste* made it possible for Claudel to exploit it when advantageous to her, and to step outside of it when she wanted to emphasise her singularity.

Claudel's social and professional isolation, however, came upon her gradually. In the early stages of her career, in the 1880s, she forged significant connections with other women artists and took on a hybrid identity: whilst assuming the role of tomboyish rebel, she was nurtured in an environment of female artists and managed to reconcile her sense of exceptionality with the comradeship of other women. As Claudel's career progressed, close female colleagues abandoned their artistic careers, and these significant relationships were never replaced. During the period 1886-1889 most of the existing correspondence is between Claudel and the English women sculptors Jessie Lipscomb and Florence Jeans, fellow students of Rodin at the mixed Académie Colarossi in Paris.²⁹ Although Lipscomb enjoyed a moderately successful career, she and Jeans ultimately devoted themselves to family life, and gave up further artistic ambitions.³⁰ In these early letters, England emerges as a symbol of freedom from traditional constraints, but tensions with other women artists are becoming apparent, prefiguring the sculptor's later self-imposed isolation. Referring to her collaboration with a young British

sculptor, Amy Singer, during a visit to England in the summer of 1886, the young Claudel revels in the comparative freedom offered by being in another country, away from the stifling expectations of her family:

Amy a envoyé les épreuves de ce matin à m^r Elwin et moi je meurs d'envie d'en envoyer aussi chez nous pour épater toute ma famille et les de Massary et servir d'illustrations aux aventures que je raconte. [...] mes parents sont tout à fait étonnés de voir que je vais à Shanklin et me chargent de vous remercier mille fois pour tout le plaisir que vous m'avez procuré. (7, to Lipscomb, 1886, pp. 22-24).

Mes parents sont tout à fait étonnés que je fasse un voyage à l'Île de Wight pour une Française c'est tout à fait surprenant. (9, to Jeans, 1886, p. 25).

The artist conceives of herself at this stage, as distinct from the stereotypically bourgeois 'Française', as altogether surprising and exceptional through the repeated element 'tout à fait étonnés' and 'tout à fait surprenant'. She also takes pleasure in the provocative idea that she can push the boundaries of her family's conservative values by espousing the 'bohemian ethic of outraging the bourgeoisie, *épater le bourgeois*'.³¹ Claudel vows to 'épater toute [s]a famille', whose values are shared by her in-laws, the de Massary family – presumably by sending examples of their nude life studies to her prudish mother. The respectable category of *art féminin* seems to work in harmony with contemporary expectations of women, and in implicitly refusing this label Claudel is negotiating different possible personas and positively embracing the role of 'adventuress'. In this sense, Claudel is doing more than falling beyond the expected norm: she is constructing a subtly subversive persona and forging a path through difficult terrain.

Many of these early letters express intense feelings of attachment and a sense of completion achieved through artistic collaboration. They also voice dread at the loss of integrity that separation would entail, reading more like love letters between intimates than exchanges between friends:

Je sens comme si mon cœur était tout à fait déchiré. Déjà quand vous êtes partie samedi, j'ai eu un vide affreux, je vous voyais partout, sur la plage dans votre chambre, dans le jardin: impossible de me faire à l'idée que vous étiez partie. [...] Je n'oublierai jamais mes beaux jours avec vous à Shanklin, ils sont certainement les plus agréables de toute ma vie. Tenez, j'ai les larmes aux yeux en y pensant. J'enrage d'être ici, c'est fini de tout bonheur pour toute une année. (13, 1886, pp. 30-31).

Claudé explicitly associates separation from friends with the loss of happiness: 'c'est fini de tout bonheur pour toute une année.' These hyperbolic exclamations recall Barthes' analyses of

elements of lovers' discourse, evoking in particular the figure of 'absence,' described as 'tout épisode de langage qui met en scène l'absence de l'objet aimé [...] et tend à transformer cette absence en épreuve d'abandon.'³² This 'mise en scène' evokes the friend's departure and the residual vacuum it has caused, 'un vide affreux', and a sense of loss is communicated via the physical metaphor of the broken heart, 'mon cœur tout à fait déchiré'. Claudel also draws on the figure of the 'regretté', whereby the person-in-love imagines life going on without the loved one.³³ Here, the writer can barely conceive of her life continuing with her friend gone: 'je vous voyais partout, sur la plage dans votre chambre, dans le jardin: impossible de me faire à l'idée que vous étiez partie.' These overwhelming feelings suggest a level of compartmentalisation in the writer's mind, revealing no implicit or explicit association of Rodin – who was at this stage already her lover, but whom she never mentions in these letters to friends – with the giving or taking away of happiness. Female comrades are, at this stage, experienced as the artist's primary emotional connections.

What is most surprising here is that none of Claudel's letters to Rodin contain such effusive outpourings of affection. One or two of Rodin's letters to Claudel exhibit evidence of the 'amour passion' for which the couple is famed; we find, for example such commonplace ideas as the terrifying, consuming power of the lover: 'je sens ta terrible puissance [...] Aye pitié méchante [...] toute mon âme t'appartient.' (18 and 19, 1886, pp. 37-41). By contrast, compared to her intimate letters to friends, Claudel's tone towards her lover is punitive, contractual and diffident. She opens one letter with the salutation: 'Monsieur Rodin, Comme je n'ai rien à faire je vous écris encore.' The same letter is closed, 'Surtout ne me trompez plus.' (54, * pp. 76-77). There is little tenderness in the letters from Claudel to Rodin, even during their affair, perhaps indicating an infantile need to exercise tyrannical omnipotence, out of fear of dependency.

However, the early letters to friends also exhibit incipient misogyny and a certain amount of paranoia. Claudel victimizes in particular her fellow sculptor Jessie Lipscomb, who emerges as a possible rival – if not for Rodin's affections then for his professional attention. Lipscomb was possibly the most talented and ambitious of her co-students, making their relationship both mimetic, in terms of striving for excellence, and beset with rivalry. In a letter to Jeans, Claudel includes a *mise en abyme* of the letter-writing process: 'Jessie m'écrit quelquefois des lettres incompréhensibles.' (17, 1886, p. 37). This focus on the act of writing and on missing interpretive links shows how Claudel's inability to understand her friend led to cruel attacks, and later a complete rupture. Their friendship and rivalry morphed into violent conflict:

Je ne vous étonnerai pas en vous disant que je suis complètement fâchée avec Jessie, et que nos relations sont rompues pour toujours (je l'espère du moins). [...] si je me permets de juger son moral d'après son physique je le trouve aussi laid aussi difforme que possible. (29, 1887, p. 51).

J'ai bien ri que Jessie a dégringolé les escaliers, je suppose que son enfant va naître bossu à présent, un charme de plus! (45, 1888, p. 64).

The use of the verb 'rompre' prefigures Claudel's later isolation and self-imposed distance from fellow female artists. The preoccupation with monstrosity, present in the adjectives 'laid', 'difforme' and 'bossu' reveals a strongly anti-productive sentiment that would emerge definitively in later letters. Woman-as-mother is one of the ideas that most horrifies Claudel. Like Simone de Beauvoir would find decades later, Claudel could not afford to be compromising on this issue. For both women, childbearing meant the death of creativity and intellectual endeavour, and both felt keenly the sacrifices necessary to pursuing an unconventional path.³⁴ Claudel's cruel and disparaging comments would later prove deeply ironic: Jessie Lipscomb would be one of the few friends who stayed loyal to Claudel, and the only one to ever visit her at the Montdevergues asylum, almost 40 years later – by which time the latter had clearly forgotten her earlier animosity.³⁵

As a nineteenth-century woman who rejected the sexist values of her milieu, and yet who mistrusted other women, Claudel broke significant taboos but cannot be described as a feminist. We might compare her with the iconoclastic, Decadent author Rachilde, whose best-known novels were written during the 1880s-90s and who later overtly rejected feminism in the 1928 pamphlet, *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe*. Rachilde explicitly states that her tract is not a principled objection to feminist aims, but describes her aversion to feminism as primarily emotive; her openly admitted misogyny was rooted in a negative experience of mothering, and in her father's disappointment that she was not born a boy.³⁶ Although Claudel never explicitly mentions the nineteenth-century women's movement, there are clear parallels to be drawn. Born barely a year after the death of a firstborn infant son, as the eldest daughter she was given the gender-neutral name 'Camille', plausibly a reflection of her parents' desire to replace their lost child. As Mattiussi and Rosambert-Tissier affirm, 'Cette transmission généalogique chargée de souffrance renvoie inmanquablement à l'élan brisé de l'artiste.'³⁷ This, it would seem, was the root of Claudel's often suspicious attitude towards women.

An early example of this contempt for the traditional feminine and female role is contained in a 'confession album', popular in the nineteenth century and now famously known as the Proust questionnaire, exchanged with Florence Jeans. Its dual-voiced structure is exploited to create a direct example of persona-construction: Claudel presents an image of herself as rebellious, ambitious and exceptional. Her expressed desire to remain childless links with the horror expressed at the news of Jessie Lipscomb's child, and hints at the substance of later rumours surrounding her own pregnancies by Rodin.³⁸ It is also further evidence of an intransigent character, which for a woman artist who sought to be taken seriously by men was

possibly an advantageous trait. The questionnaire is typed in English, highlighting the pro-forma nature of the enquiries, and Claudel's personalized responses are handwritten in French:

Your favourite qualities in man. *d'obéir à sa femme*

Your favourite qualities in woman. *de bien faire enrager son mari*

Your idea of misery. *d'être mère de nombreux enfants*

Your favourite heroines in real life. *Louise Michel* (43, 1888, p. 62)

A tongue-in-cheek reference to the radical, revolutionary feminist and communard Louise Michel suggests a level of identification with women who eschewed traditional femininity; it is also puzzling and ironic given Claudel's conservative background and opposing political sentiments.³⁹ Claudel's responses are bitterly subversive; they equate motherhood with misery, and humorously transfer power to the woman in each example. The wife requires obedience from her hypothetical husband and exhibits conceited satisfaction at the idea of enraging him, the use of the adverb 'bien' suggesting the action's deliberateness. These examples reject stereotypical femininity and reveal a shift towards fully identifying as a male artist. In Claudel's last letter to Jeans, there is a recognition that their lives were going in different directions: 'J'espère que vous n'êtes pas devenue trop sérieuse depuis votre mariage et nous pourrons encore rire beaucoup ensemble.' (70, 1893, p. 95). This letter associates marriage with an end to youthful fun and laughter, and by association the death of creativity. The fact that Claudel grew distant from these relationships reflects her friends' acceptance that their careers would be limited by marriage. Claudel, on the other hand, could not accept the same fate.

An honorary male genius (c. 1890-1900)

For contemporary critics, Claudel was difficult to categorize: her principal contemporary biographer, Mathias Morhardt, claimed: 'Mademoiselle Camille Claudel est moins, en effet, une femme qu'une artiste – une grande artiste – et son œuvre, si peu nombreux encore qu'il soit, lui confère une dignité supérieure.'⁴⁰ Leading critic Camille Mauclair would view things subtly differently: 'M^{lle} Claudel est la femme artiste la plus considérable à l'heure présent.' He paradoxically categorized Claudel as a *femme artiste*, thereby suggesting the idea of a collectivity, but singled her out as standing out from the rest.⁴¹ These two critics, I believe, demonstrate the semantic tractability of the concept of the *femme artiste* – a malleability that was exploited by Claudel. Morhardt conspicuously separates the ideas of 'femme' and 'artiste', implying the inherent maleness of the 'artiste' and the honorary inclusion of Claudel within this category, but Mauclair places her in an inferior position as the greatest 'femme artiste' of her times, hierarchically inferior to any male artist.

Claudél's exchanges with Rodin show that her sometime lover unambiguously imposes upon her the impossible subject position of honorary male 'genius', and that contemporary male critics, such as Morhardt and Maclair, contributed to this process. Where previously Claudél had occupied the position of muse, now she is enjoined to imitate the master's greatness. In Giraud's terms, it is also striking that Rodin seems unaware of the conflict that he is creating: 'Par un effet étrange mais explicable du rapport qui les unit, ni le modèle, ni le disciple ne sont disposés à reconnaître qu'ils se vouent l'un l'autre à la rivalité.'⁴² Rodin singles out his protégée as exceptional – but from this position of isolation she is also ordered not to be suspicious and mistrustful:

Je sais que vous avez la vertu de la sculpture. Vous avez l'héroïque constance, vous êtes un honnête homme un brave homme. [...] Ne parlez pas et travaillez comme vous faites. Votre réputation touche au but. [...] Et croyez mon amie, laissez votre caractère de femme qui a dispersé des bonnes volontés. Montrez vos œuvres admirables il y a une justice croyez le. [...] Un génie comme vous est rare. (121, 1897, pp. 137-8).

Rodin implores Claudél to leave behind her 'caractère de femme' and to embrace her status as male; she is emphatically told to remain silent, 'Ne parlez pas', and to work in solitude. In short, as an exemplary instance of the female artist's double bind, from the position of heterosexual lover and artistic master this letter annihilates Claudél's femininity, it silences her, and entrenches her isolation. The terms 'honnête homme' and 'l'héroïque constance' connote the Enlightenment masculine ideal of 'honnêteté', and the only possible response to this injunction is silence. Evidence from Claudél's letters suggests that this male status is only partially and ambivalently assimilated. As a *femme artiste* Claudél is called to be an exemplar, but the repeated evocation of her rare genius also reveals the conflicting expectation that she be exceptional.

Letters exchanged with art dealers the Durand-Ruel brothers show Claudél experimenting with the persona of male genius through the creative use of signatures. As Marguerite Eymery adopted the impersonal name 'Rachilde' as a pen name, and saw no conflict in calling herself 'homme de lettres', Claudél exploits the gender-neutrality of her first name and signs off using her surname. The artist does not correct the Durand-Ruel brothers, who in their 1895 exchange address her as 'Monsieur', and she signs her replies 'Claudél'. (78 and 83, 1895, p. 104 and p. 108). The gaps and silences here are significant. Claudél never claims to be a man, but she does not correct her addressee's assumptions. This is a strategic move, but it demonstrates the conceptual impossibility of femininity co-existing with the status of artistic genius, as well as at least a passive desire to be classified as male.

This fluid identity can be further identified in a fascinating act of ventriloquism. In 1898, a letter purportedly from Claudél's father was sent to the Directeur des Beaux-Arts in order to request payment for a previously agreed state commission of Claudél's most celebrated work,

L'Âge mûr – one that never came to fruition.⁴³ A handwriting analysis by the editors strongly indicates that Camille Claudel was the author, revealing the letter to be a sophisticated masquerade:

Mais, monsieur, vous devez savoir que pour faire un travail de l'importance du groupe de M^{elle} Claudel il a fallu faire beaucoup d'avances d'argent, frais de modèles, de moulages et autres. Les artistes ne sont généralement pas riches, leur faire attendre le paiement de leurs œuvres les gêne beaucoup. C'est pour cette raison que je viens vous prier, monsieur, de vouloir bien vous occuper de cette affaire et prendre en considération la situation particulière de M^{elle} Claudel qui comme femme artiste a beaucoup plus de peine que d'autres à réussir dans une carrière si difficile. [...]
[signed] Claudel. (130, 1898, pp. 147-148).

The letter's content suggests that the artist is able to step outside of herself, and her assumed male identity, to present a different persona that conforms to society's expectations of women artists. For example, the letter uses the title 'M^{lle} Claudel', which contrasts with her habitually neutral style of signing off. Nowhere else in her correspondence does she refer to herself explicitly as a *femme artiste*; here, she seems to say, 'other people call me a *femme artiste*'. This does not appear to be an authentic expression of identification with an existing group, but it does illustrate the breadth of the idea of the *femme artiste* in contrast to the more limiting *art féminin*. In this letter Claudel has effaced herself, and her only means of speaking is through simulation, and through silence.

The signature used here is identical to Claudel's usual moniker, but it is also her father's: a sign of a collapsed identity with her principal male role model and a statement that separates the writer from the *femme artiste* category she describes. Claudel uses multiple signatures, which stand in ironic contrast to her preference not to sign her sculptures: in a letter to one patron, the army Captain Tissier, she asserts: 'Je ne signe presque jamais mes œuvres.' (145, 1899, p. 157). The lack of signature clearly leaves its own trace, this absence indicating, perhaps, the refusal to be limited to a particular piece of work or to be classified.⁴⁴

This structural aspect of the letters is most revelatory, and the choice of etiquette used also tells us much about the recipient.⁴⁵ The signature 'M^{lle} Camille Claudel' is used consistently and exclusively in letters to the Inspecteur des Beaux-Arts in relation to this state commission: again, this appears to be a strategic alignment with the concept of *femme artiste*. The assumption of a position of inferiority reveals the vulnerability of artists in relation to those who commissioned state works. Claudel exploits the cultural expectation that women are in need of male protection, in order to achieve a strategic result: 'Je compte pour cela sur votre bienveillante protection et vous envoie l'assurance de ma haute considération. M^{elle} Camille Claudel, sculpteur.' (182, 1905,

p. 191). The appeal to the reader's 'bienveillance' stands out in particular here, suggesting the writer views her interlocutor as doing her a favour rather than fulfilling his obligations.

For the most part, Claudel's signatures resemble those of her male counterparts in the art world who tend towards impersonal signatures, such as 'Durand-Ruel', 'Rodin', 'R.', or 'A.R.'. Claudel signs off with 'Claudel', 'C. Claudel', 'C.C.', reserving 'Camille' for more intimate exchanges with friends and close family members. Two letters to cousins hint at her subversive tendency to self-invention/reinvention through the use of playful signatures, such as 'K. Momille' and 'K. Mille'. These particular signatures were used in Claudel's last letters before her forced incarceration. (237 and 240, 1913, pp. 247-50). The pun on 'K. Momille' has the ring of an affectionate childhood nickname, and the double meaning suggests a sense of duality in the author's view of herself.

Despite these strategies and Claudel's capacity for self-invention, ultimately the movement towards honorary male status results in a worsening of Claudel's tense relationships with other women. Internalized misogyny is particularly pointed when experienced in relation to feminists, including those who considered themselves allies. The most salient examples are found in two letters to Rodin, in which Claudel expresses dissatisfaction about an article due to appear in Marguerite Durand's feminist daily, *La Fronde*:

Vous m'avez envoyé une dame de la Fronde, qui désire faire un article sur moi qui doit paraître samedi prochain: je préférerais que cet article ne parut que plus tard et que vous ayez le temps de le lire avant; il doit y avoir encore des choses ennuyeuses. Écrivez, je vous prie, de suite pour demander à le lire, si vous pouvez retarder la publication. (124, 1898, p. 141).

The implicit rejection of her own femininity leads Claudel to the assumption that comments about her, made by a woman, will be 'ennuyeuses' – somehow bothersome or destructive. As late as 1898, despite their relationship having ended, Claudel is still heavily invested in the figure of Rodin; the request that he read the article reveals deference to his male opinions in contrast to suspicion of those of a feminist.

This animosity is confirmed in another letter, in which Claudel clearly presents herself in combat, rather than sisterhood, with other women:

Vous savez bien d'ailleurs quelle haine noire me vouent toutes les femmes aussitôt qu'elles me voient paraître, jusqu'à ce que je sois rentrée dans ma coquille, on se sert de toutes armes, et de plus aussitôt qu'un homme généreux s'occupe de me faire sortir d'embarras la femme est là pour lui tenir le bras et l'empêcher d'agir. (120, 1897, p. 136).

Again, Claudel evokes an image of herself as held back by women, with the physical imagery of 'le bras' and the potently obstructive verb 'empêcher' set in opposition to the active 'agir'. This seems a further example of projective identification – a self-deception where her mistrust of women is experienced as sabotage.⁴⁶ A draft of the unpublished *La Fronde* article, written by Mary Léopold Lacour, is conserved at the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand in Paris. It is a curious piece of writing which suggests that the journalist sensed Claudel's fear of being tainted by feminism, and indeed femininity: 'Au moment de parler dans ce journal féministe de cette artiste exceptionnelle, une femme se sent inquiète de se voir peut-être attribuer quelque particularité, ou un "emballement bien féminin", sans contrôle.' Léopold Lacour goes on to say that she believed Claudel would be better served by mainstream male critics, which reinforces the idea that the sculptor did not fit the mould of *art féminin* and shows an intuitive appreciation of Claudel's deeply conflicted feelings *vis-à-vis* female colleagues, as well as her exceptional artistic status.

The fragility of the artistic persona (c. 1890-1913)

Claudel's insistence on the importance of her status, at this stage in her career, might be read as an affirmative statement. However, grandiosity also functions as her greatest internal obstacle. It emerges as a defence against self-doubt and creeping feelings of insubstantiality, but results in crushing self-sabotage. In line with theories of internalized oppression, Germaine Greer suggests that psychological rather than practical obstacles have historically been an impediment to women artists.⁴⁷ Nantet has also argued that Claudel's self-destructive urges became pronounced as she grew increasingly frustrated at her inability to produce the masterpieces she imagined: 'c'est l'œuvre en elle qui fait obstacle plus que, hors d'elle, la situation sociale et sentimentale où elle s'encadre.'⁴⁸ Claudel did face real obstacles, from censorship to physical health problems, but she was also burdened with privilege.⁴⁹ She moved in the rarefied intellectual world of *fin-de-siècle* Paris, and counted among her circle of friends and correspondents Léon Daudet, Claude Debussy, Puvis de Chavannes, Geneviève Mallarmé, Marcel Schwob, and many leading critics. It was Rodin, not Claudel, who laboured as a simple *ouvrier d'art* in poverty and obscurity for twenty years before gaining recognition.⁵⁰ Claudel demonstrated remarkable resilience in overcoming the external obstacles that she did face: for example, the injunction against women attending the École des Beaux-Arts prior to 1897 did not prevent her from training with the best avant-garde artists of her day.⁵¹ Rodin, after all, was famously never admitted to the Beaux-Arts. The true obstacle she struggled to overcome was the conflict at the heart of her sense of self. Others resolved the female artist's double bind by accepting its exclusions: they either eschewed their femininity, or they were excluded from serious consideration by embracing *art féminin*. Rather than accepting its limitations, Claudel seems to have internalised its tensions. The impasse created spawned aggression towards those she held responsible for her difficulties, in a series of violent projections.

The most important recurrent symbolic objects of violence in Claudel's letters are the craftsmen accused of destroying her work (her 'ouvriers'). The sculptor also sabotaged efforts to raise her public profile, in contrast to her earlier attempts to achieve recognition. Throughout the correspondence, Claudel exhibits an attitude of superiority towards workers; there are repeated emphatic references to troublesome 'ouvriers', maids and concierges. In the confession album sent to Jeans in 1888, Claudel identifies these aversions:

Your pet aversion. *Les bonnes, les cochers et les modèles*

What characters in history do you most dislike? *Ils sont tous désagréables*

For what fault do you have most toleration? *Je tolère tous mes défauts mais pas du tout ceux des autres* (43, 1888, p. 62)

Here, people who serve Claudel are experienced as depleting forces, and this sentiment is extended to a generalized misanthropy. The author admits to applying a double standard to the world whereby she is intolerant of other's faults but blithely indifferent to her own. The actions of Claudel's workers are experienced as violations:

Venez donc le jour qu'il vous plaira mais ne vous adressez pas à ma concierge qui ne doit plus se mêler de mes affaires. (119, 1897, to Morhardt, p. 134).

Il est vrai que je suis très exploitée par les ouvriers sans cela je ne serais pas dans la position où je suis. (167, 1902, to Tissier, pp. 173-4)

Je suis très touchée de l'admiration que vous témoignez pour mon art d'autant plus qu'elle me vient d'un officier qui je le sais dit toujours franchement sa pensée. [...] je voudrais pouvoir vous faire un prix très doux malheureusement ma sculpture me coûte à moi fort cher et ce sont presque toujours mes ouvriers qui en ont le bénéfice. (139, 1899, to Tissier, pp. 153-4).

References to women intruding into her private space ('se mêler de mes affaires') and deliberate exploitation through the passive construction 'je suis très exploitée' are repeated elements in the correspondence that create a sense of anxious separation from a hostile world. Claudel's fear of exploitation by employees reveals a tension between the preservation of bourgeois, hierarchical values and her status as the bohemian 'rebelle de la famille'. The incompleteness of this rebellion means the self is split between the draw of the unconventional and a residual loathing of her social inferiors. This suspicious, conservative position is reflected in Claudel's instinctively anti-Dreyfusard position, which led to the breakdown of her friendship with Morhardt.⁵²

Claudé's misanthropy resulted in an unfortunate series of choices that ultimately sabotaged her career. As Mattiussi and Rosambert-Tissier conclude, for a person susceptible to mental fragility, 'sa désinscription sociale lui sera fatale.'⁵³ Yet, the author habitually ascribes this self-imposed isolation to external factors: 'Je suis très désolée d'avoir perdu votre visite et celle de M. Pottecher, c'est la première fois que je sors depuis longtemps parce que j'ai des difficultés avec un de mes mentors.' (65, 1893, p. 88). Here, Claudé suggests that Rodin, her 'mentor', has a problem with her, but the choice to lock herself away indicates the opposite preoccupation. The eventual animosity between the former lovers follows Giraud's model of imitation, rivalry and violence at the heart of mimetic desire and its double-binded structure: 'Même s'il a encouragé l'imitation, le modèle est surpris de la concurrence dont il est l'objet. Le disciple, pense-t-il, l'a trahi ; [...] Le disciple, lui, se croit condamné et humilié. Il pense que son modèle le juge indigne de participer à l'existence supérieure dont il jouit lui-même.'⁵⁴ Rodin is unable to see that his attempts to assist Claudé in her career leave her feeling censured, embarrassed and enraged.

A vivid illustration of Claudé struggling with the long shadow of her precursor comes in an exchange with the Symbolist author Marcel Schwob, who in 1894 had sent her a copy of *Le Livre de Monelle*, which Claudé greatly appreciated: 'J'ai reçu votre "livre de Monelle" qui m'a fait bien plaisir. [...] Je comprends le royaume blanc.' (76, 1894, p. 102). For Schwob, the 'royaume blanc' is reached by destroying memories in order to generate an authentically creative space: 'Il faut détruire pour obtenir le royaume blanc. Confesse-toi et tu seras délivré; remets entre mes mains ta violence et ton souvenir, et je les détruirai.'⁵⁵ This destruction of the past for Claudé has already come to be self-directed, and arguably self-annihilating. Claudé obstructs others' attempts to reach out to her, and rejects invitations to cement her exalted position:

Je suis très flattée de l'offre que vous me faites ainsi que m. Charpentier de faire partie d'un cercle d'artistes dont vous êtes membre. Malheureusement, j'aurai le regret de me priver de ce plaisir n'ayant pas le moyen de payer une aussi forte cotisation. (150, 1899, to Mourey, p. 159).

Claudé's refusal, attributed to financial problems despite the continued support she received secretly from Rodin and openly from her father, emerges as a self-deceptive pretext; it is a rationalisation of her self-imposed isolation.⁵⁶ Her unwillingness to join groups, and her repeated refusal of Rodin's efforts to raise her profile, seem disingenuous:

Je ne puis aller où vous me dites car je n'ai pas de chapeau ni de souliers mes bottines sont tout usées. (106, 1896, p. 126)

Je vous remercie de votre aimable intention de me présenter au président de la République. Malheureusement n'étant pas sortie de mon atelier depuis deux mois je n'ai aucune toilette convenable pour la circonstance. [...] Excusez-moi donc et ne croyez pas à ma mauvaise volonté. (107, 1896, p. 127).

The deliberate frustration of Rodin's efforts functions, on the one hand, as a muted but angry commentary on the impossible double bind in which she has been placed. However, its only practical effect is the destruction of a great artistic career.

In a series of letters between Claudel and her patron Léon Gauchez, the real name of art critic Paul Leroi, discovered and added to the most recent edition of her correspondence in 2014, the emotional force of these epistolary exchanges is particularly evident. Claudel's isolation and her attempts to break away from Rodin's influence consume her entirely in a self-destructive vortex. She frequently begs Gauchez to purchase her works, and is unusually frank and confessional in her letters. In 1898, she wrote explicitly of the extent to which she was consumed by this bitterness:

Je commençais à échapper à l'influence de Rodin (Dans ce but j'ai fait pourtant bien des efforts). [...] Mais combien il faut d'énergie pour échapper à une influence première et néfaste ! [...] Il voudrait absolument que, aux yeux du monde, j'ai l'air très bien avec lui, et me traîner partout aplatie devant son adorable personne ! Et comme je n'ai rien répondu il est d'une fureur bleue. [...] Pardonnez-moi de vous parler encore sur ce sujet mais c'est plus fort que moi malgré la résolution que j'ai prise en moi-même de ne jamais me plaindre. (153, 1898, p. 159)

The image of the artist being dragged, via the use of the verb 'traîner', and required to bow down before her master recalls the humiliation produced in the situation of mimetic desire. Here, Claudel again uses silence as a form of resistance to Rodin's control. His indifference or benevolent distance evokes Claudel's fury; the intolerable nature of this rage means it can only be experienced via projective identification as persecution. This grandiose device is a means, in effect, of retaining a sense of her own importance in a world that has left her behind.

The detailed analysis of this body of correspondence suggests several possible conclusions. First, the artist's self-presentation in her letters supports recent re-assessments of her life and work that suggest that the victim narrative surrounding the historical person of Claudel is simplistic and distorted. We can also assert that the construction of an artistic persona was, for Claudel, a particularly complex process involving a number of conflicting injunctions: to be silent but to assert herself; to be a feminine lover but to accept unquestioningly the status of honorary male; to be accepted as a genius, but to be rejected as a woman. These letters lay bare in fascinating detail the functioning of this double bind, an impossible-to-resolve structural

constraint which produced both positive and negative responses from the artist: on the one hand, an uncompromising desire not to give up on artistic activity, and an absolute refusal to accept an inferior status; on the other, it forced Claudel into a position of isolation that gradually morphed into one of unwarranted violence towards fellow women artists, and towards herself. The end of Claudel's story is, of course, psychosis: a complete rejection of reality, but also a possible resolution of the type of double bind that constrained nineteenth-century women artists. The persona that emerges from these letters is not a tragic 'artiste maudite', but an artist fundamentally undefined and indefinable, in intense conflict with herself and others as a direct result of the failure of the broader cultural imagination.

¹ See Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work* (London: Tauris Parke, 2003); Alison Finch, *Women's Writing in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

² See Isabelle von Buelzingsloewen, 'Les "aliénés" morts de faim dans les hôpitaux psychiatriques français sous l'occupation', *Vingtième Siècle*, 76 (2002), 99-115 (p. 101).

³ The scholarship on Claudel is extensive, and it would be impossible to review it all here. For the most comprehensive overviews, see Louise R. Witherall, 'Camille Claudel Rediscovered', *Women's Art Journal*, 6 (1985), 1-7; Matteo Gianceselli, 'Historiographie des années 80 à nos jours', in *Sur les traces de Camille et Paul Claudel: archives et presse*, ed. by Sophie Gauthier (Besançon: Poussière d'Or, 2009), pp. 95-108, and Véronique Mattiussi and Mireille Rosambert-Tissier, *Camille Claudel: Itinéraire d'une insoumise. Idées recues sur la femme et l'artiste* (Paris: Le Cavalier Bleu, 2014).

⁴ See the films *Camille Claudel*, dir. by Bruno Nuytten (Prosperine, 1989), which emphasises the artist's abandonment by Rodin; and *Camille Claudel 1915*, dir. by Bruno Dumont (3B Productions/Arte France, 2013), which focuses on the 'ensorious patriarchy' of Paul Claudel (see Graham Fuller's review in *Sight and Sound*, July 2014, 72-73). Kristen Frederickson has shown that the first wave of critical interest in Claudel bore the marks of 'mythic resurrection rather than aesthetic or historical reconsideration', in 'Carving out a place: gendered critical descriptions of Camille Claudel and her sculptures', *Word and Image*, 12 (1996), 161-174 (p. 169).

⁵ The most important of these are Gianceselli, and Mattiussi and Rosambert-Tissier.

⁶ Marie-Victoire Nantet had already challenged the simplistic perception of Claudel as victim in 'Camille Claudel: un désastre "fin-de-siècle"', *Commentaire*, 2 (1988), 534-543. Claudine Mitchell (in 'Intellectuality and sexuality: Camille Claudel, the fin-de-siècle sculptress', *Art History*, 12

(1989), 419-447 (p. 419)) also criticized ‘the trivialising elision between art and biography which so often operates in accounts of women’s art’. Anne Pingeot offered important counter-readings of Claudel’s sculpture in terms of universal rather than personal themes, in *L’Âge mûr’ de Camille Claudel* (Paris: Éditions de la réunion des musées nationaux, 1988). A wave of somewhat speculative psychoanalytic/biographical readings of Claudel’s sculpture has also emerged in France since 2000, perpetuating the view of the artist as a victim: see for example Silke Schauder, ‘Paradoxes de l’espace sculpté chez Camille Claudel’, *La Clinique lacanienne*, 14 (2008), 99-112 and Valérie Bocci-Crechou, ‘Les figures du traumatisme dans l’œuvre de Camille Claudel’, *Cahiers de psychologie clinique*, 2: 23 (2004), 131-146.

⁷ Camille Claudel, *Correspondance*, ed. by Anne Rivière and Bruno Gaudichon (Paris: Gallimard, 2003). Claudel’s editors reproduce her writing exactly as it appears in the original letters, without correcting any of the numerous errors and infelicities. I have reproduced them here uncorrected. References to the correspondence are included in the main text in the following format (letter number, date, page number).

⁸ The Royal College was then called the National Art Training School.

⁹ For further examples of progressive art schools in the UK and elsewhere in Western Europe, see Siân Reynolds, ‘Running away to Paris: expatriate women artists of the 1900 generation, from Scotland and points south’, *Women’s History Review*, 9 (2000), 327-344 (on p. 328).

¹⁰ Nevinson, C. R. W. 1937. *Paint and Prejudice* (London: Methuen), pp. 45-6.

¹¹ Elisa Bloch, ‘Quelques considérations sur différents rôles de la Femme dans la société’, in *Congrès français et international du droit des femmes* (Paris: Dentu, 1889), pp. 24-31 (on p. 28).

¹² The publication of Anne Delbée’s novel, *Une femme* (Paris: Poche, 1985), about Claudel, followed by two further important biographical works, Jacques Cassar, *Dossier Camille Claudel* (Paris: Séguier, 1987) and Reine-Marie Paris, *Camille Claudel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), all brought the artist’s story to public attention in France. The first *Catalogue raisonné* was published in 1990 (Paris: A. Biro).

¹³ The archive is held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, but it is no longer available for public consultation.

¹⁴ See Gregory Bateson (with Haley and Weakland), 'Toward a theory of schizophrenia', *Behavioural Science*, 1 (1956), 251-264 and R.D. Laing and Aaron Esterson, *Sanity, Madness and the Family* (London: Penguin, 1964).

¹⁵ Ann Jefferson, *Genius in France: An Idea and Its Uses* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 2-4.

¹⁶ Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), p. 3.

¹⁷ Patricia Mathews, *Passionate Discontent: Creativity, Gender and French Symbolist Art* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1999). On Claudel, see chapters 4 and 6.

¹⁸ On the ideology of the 'new woman' and the perceived threat they posed, see Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2002); Deborah Silverman, 'The "New Woman," Feminism, and the Decorative Arts in Fin-de-Siècle France' in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. by Lynn Hunt (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), pp. 144-163.

¹⁹ René Giraud, 'Du désir mimétique au double monstrueux', in *La Violence et le sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1972), pp. 201-234 (on pp. 206-207).

²⁰ Giraud, p. 206.

²¹ It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss Claudel's asylum letters, which I analyse in the final chapter of my book, *Voices from the Asylum: Four French Women Writers, 1850-1920* (Oxford: OUP, 2010). For recent psychiatric perspectives, see Michel Delveaux, *Camille Claudel à Montdevergues: Histoire d'un internement* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012) and B. Cooper, 'Camille Claudel: Trajectory of a Psychosis', *Medical Humanities*, 34 (2008), 25-29. Most commentators now agree that the duration (30 years) of Claudel's incarceration was medically unwarranted, even by contemporary standards.

²² Tamar Garb, "'L'art féminin": the formation of a critical category in late nineteenth-century France', *Art History*, 12 (March 1989), 39-65 (p. 52 and p. 51).

²³ According to Roberts, Durand's preferred model of the feminine 'éclaireuse' was 'a distinctly French version of emancipated womanhood.' (p. 42).

²⁴ The *Journal des femmes artistes* and its membership lists are conserved at the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand. Angela Ryan notes: '[Claudé] insisted on working in the mainstream rather than being confined to the category of "woman artist"'. See 'Visions of reciprocity in the work of Camille Claudé', in *A Belle Époque? Women in French Society and Culture, 1840-1914*, ed. by Diana Holmes and Carrie Tarr (Oxford: Berghahn, 2006), pp. 167-179 (p. 168).

²⁵ Roberts writes: 'As a French stereotype, she [the New Woman] also drew on the old discourse of the *bas-bleu* or "bluestocking," famously ridiculed by Molière in *Les Femmes savantes*.' (p. 25).

²⁶ Anne Higonnet, 'Writing the Gender of the Image: Art Criticism in Late Nineteenth-Century France', *Genders*, 6 (Fall 1989), 60-73 (p. 61).

²⁷ Tamar Garb argues that 'critics [...] found in the paintings and drawings of Berthe Morisot a fulfillment of their fantasy of femininity.' See *Sisters of the Brush: Women's Artistic Culture in late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 126.

²⁸ See Gretchen van Slyke's introduction to her translation of Anna Klumpke, *Rosa Bonheur: The Artist's (Auto)biography* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. xxx.

²⁹ See Siân Reynolds, 'Comment peut-on être femme sculpteur en 1900? Autour de quelques élèves de Rodin', *Mil neuf cent*, 16 (1998), 9-25.

³⁰ The gradual disengagement of these other women from the career that Claudé continued to pursue is traced in the later letters between Claudé, Lipscomb and Jeans dated 1888-1893.

³¹ Robert Snell, *Uncertainties, Mysteries, Doubts: Romanticism and the Analytic Attitude* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 127. Snell is making reference to Baudelaire's provocative call in his work to 'épater le bourgeois'.

³² Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), p. 19.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 231.

³⁴ See Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976 [1949]). The second section, 'Histoire', unequivocally equates the childbearing role with the oppression of women: '[S]i

robustes que fussent alors les femmes, dans la lutte contre le monde hostile les servitudes de la reproduction représentaient pour elles un terrible handicap.’ (p. 110).

³⁵ In 1929, Claudel wrote to Jessie Elborne (née Lipscomb): ‘J’ai reçu votre lettre avec grand plaisir, vous me donnez une grande consolation : qu’est-ce que ce sera si c’est vrai que vous vous préparez à venir me voir.’ (letter 284, 1929, p. 293).

³⁶ Rachilde, *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe* (Paris: Editions de France, 1928), pp. 9-23.

³⁷ Mattiussi and Rosambert-Tissier, *Camille Claudel*, p. 12. All the biographies of Claudel insist strongly on this life-defining event.

³⁸ For the most thorough analysis of Claudel’s rumoured pregnancies see Valérie Bocci-Crechiou, ‘Les figures du traumatisme dans l’œuvre de Camille Claudel’, *Cahiers de psychologie Clinique*, 2 (2004), 131-146 (on p. 106).

³⁹ On Louise Michel, see Kathleen Hart, *Revolution and Women’s Autobiography in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York and Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004). See note 52 of this article on Claudel’s political affiliations.

⁴⁰ Mathias Morhardt, ‘Mademoiselle Camille Claudel’, *Le Mercure de France* (March 1898), pp. 709-55.

⁴¹ Camille Mauclair, ‘L’art des femmes peintres et sculpteurs’, *La Revue*, 39/4 (1901), 511-25 (on p. 525).

⁴² Giraud, p. 205.

⁴³ On the loss of the state commission, see Claudine Mitchell, ‘Intellectuality and sexuality’ and Jeanne Fayard’s preface to Cassar’s *Dossier Camille Claudel*.

⁴⁴ See Derrida’s discussions of signatures and traces in *Signéponge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) and *Limited Inc.* (Paris: Galilée, 1990).

⁴⁵ On the ‘etiquette of deference’ see Margaretta Jolly, ‘Corresponding in the sex and gender revolution: desire, education and feminist letters, 1970-2000’ in Caroline Bland and Máire Cross

(eds), *Gender and Politics in the Age of Letter-Writing, 1750-2000* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004), 253-270 (on p. 256).

⁴⁶ Paris, Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand. MS 70, Mary Léopold Lacour, “Le Chemin de la vie: Camille Claudel”.

⁴⁷ See Greer, p. 6 and Gail Pheterson, ‘Alliances between women: overcoming internalized oppression and internalized domination’, *Signs*, 12 (1986), 146-60.

⁴⁸ Nantet, p. 536.

⁴⁹ Mitchell shows that Claudel’s sculptures were censored because of their troubling sexual content (pp. 432-438). Claudel also repeatedly refers to respiratory problems and the physical strain of working in the medium of sculpture. Nantet, however, shows that Claudel was both financially privileged and favoured by critics and art-dealers (pp. 535-536).

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 536. Camille Mauclair, in *L’Art Indépendant Français sous la Troisième République* (Paris: La Renaissance du Livre, 1919), said of Rodin: ‘Personne ne s’est davantage “fait tout seul” [...] il a atteint l’âge mûr en désespérant de ne pouvoir jamais, faute de moyens matériels, donner naissance au monde de figures qu’il portait en son cerveau.’ (p. 56).

⁵¹ See Reynolds (2000), in which it is argued that young women sculptors of Claudel’s generation benefited from working with avant-garde artists. (pp. 334-335).

⁵² Morhardt told Rodin’s biographer, Judith Cladel, in 1929: ‘L’affaire Dreyfus l’avait déterminée à nous quitter avec une amère violence’. Cited in Mattiussi and Rosambert-Tissier, p. 59 (original source only given as: Bloomington, Indiana: fonds Cladel).

⁵³ Mattiussi and Rosambert-Tissier, *Camille Claudel*, p. 130.

⁵⁴ Giraud, p. 205.

⁵⁵ Marcel Schwob, *Le livre de Monelle* (Paris: Didier Erudition, 2000 [1894]), p. 97.

⁵⁶ Rodin periodically gave financial support to Claudel, even after their estrangement. See *Correspondance* (188, 1905, p. 201n). The editors cite a letter from a banker confirming that Rodin paid Claudel’s rent for several months in 1905. Also, in a letter from Claudel’s father to her

brother Paul (231, 1909, p. 241n) it is noted that the family paid her rent, food bills and other household provisions.

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