

THE OVIDIAN *METAMORPHOSES* OF CAMILLE CLAUDEL

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ABSTRACT

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has had a profound influence on artists, not only because of its subject matter but also because of its frequent allusions to artistic creativity, in particular to sculpture. Camille Claudel's life story would not be out of place as one the myths in the *Metamorphoses*. Student, muse and lover of Auguste Rodin, she was notorious in late nineteenth-century France for their infamous love affair and her audacious pursuit of a career in sculpture.

Claudé's work demonstrates a sophisticated and intellectual engagement with the *Metamorphoses*, as highlighted by *Vertume et Pomone*, *Persée* and *Niobide blessée*. Following a close reading of the *Metamorphoses* I examine these three works together with *l'Age mûr* and show how Ovid's poem influenced Claudé's response to the events in her own life.

It is not surprising that Claudé should have fallen in love with Rodin, a modern Ovid, whose works and artistic practices reflect many of the themes of the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid's most famous sculptor was Pygmalion and I examine how the relationship between Rodin and Claudé reflects elements of this myth, with Rodin in the role of sculptor, teacher and lover. However, as illustrated by the photograph of Claudé in her atelier, I show how Claudé claims the role of Pygmalion for herself underlining just how audacious she was in the pursuit of her art.

Following the demise of Claudé's relationship with Rodin and the continuing disapproval of her family, she became increasingly isolated and paranoid. Her family had her committed to an asylum where she would remain until her death in 1943. Despite being laid to rest in an unmarked communal grave Claudé's artistic legacy endures, reflecting the final verses of the *Metamorphoses* in which Ovid proclaims his own immortality through his work.