Camille Claudel

The movie Camille Claudel is based on the life story of Camille Claudel lover and muse of Auguste Rodin the famous French artist.

Camille Claudel was an outstanding artist in her own right in a time when it was socially unacceptable for women to become artists. Camille was supported by her father against the wishes of her mother. Her brother Paul Claudel was a famous poet. Claudel spent the last thirty years of her life in a mental hospital where she was sent to by her mother and brother after her father’s death. After her death in 1943, she is forgotten and only in the 1980s when her niece Reine Marie Paris publishes a biography about her aunt is she remembered. The movie Camille Claudel was made in 1988.

Camille Claudel is played by Isabelle Adjani and Auguste Rodin by Gerard Depardieu. Both actors successfully capture the fascination, attraction and ultimately the conflict between Rodin and Claudel. In the beginning of their relationship, Rodin brings Claudel home in a carriage, and they speak about neutral matters but you can sense the building attraction between them. The regular street sounds that provide the acoustic background for this scene do not distract but heighten the tension. Eventually, Rodin and Claudel become lovers. Rodin however, cannot decide between Camille and his older lover Rose Beuret.

Isabelle Adjani skillfully acts out the passion for art and the single-mindedness and obsession that drove Camille Claudel, and not only the single mindedness with her
art but also the determination to overcome the obstacles that society and the people around her put up.

Gerard Depardieu is equally successful in showing Rodin’s genius, deceit, ability to manipulate and what drove him artistically.

The movie is rather lengthy and even if you are interested in the art of sculpturing less than halfway through the movie your mind tends to wander away. Camille Claudel is only a minor and less well known sculpture artist no matter how undeserved this fact is. The movie touches on but never really deals with the prejudice that Camille Claudel had to deal with as a female artist and the obstacles she had to face and never was able to overcome, she always stood in Rodin’s shadow. Considering that this was the time when women first started to be in the spotlight, e.g., in 1903, Marie Curie was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize (in Chemistry) and probably also had to struggle to overcome prejudice and form new ways of thinking. Instead of addressing and highlighting this aspect of Camille Claudel’s life the movie is too narrowly focused on her tumultuous relationship with Auguste Rodin and is wasting a valuable chance to focus on the feminist aspect at this point in history and how Claudel dealt with it.