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dance

F5

CULTURE

Sculpting ballet from betrayal



VICTOR SWOBODA

Romantic betrayal has served as the dramatic focus of some of the most enduring classical ballets – La Bayadère, La Sylphide, Giselle, Swan Lake. A fascinating true story of both betrayal and romance – this time as separate episodes – inspired the two-act neoclassical ballet *Rodin/Claudel*, which one of Canada's foremost young choreographers, Peter Quanz, has created to open Les Grands Ballets Canadiens' fall season later in October.

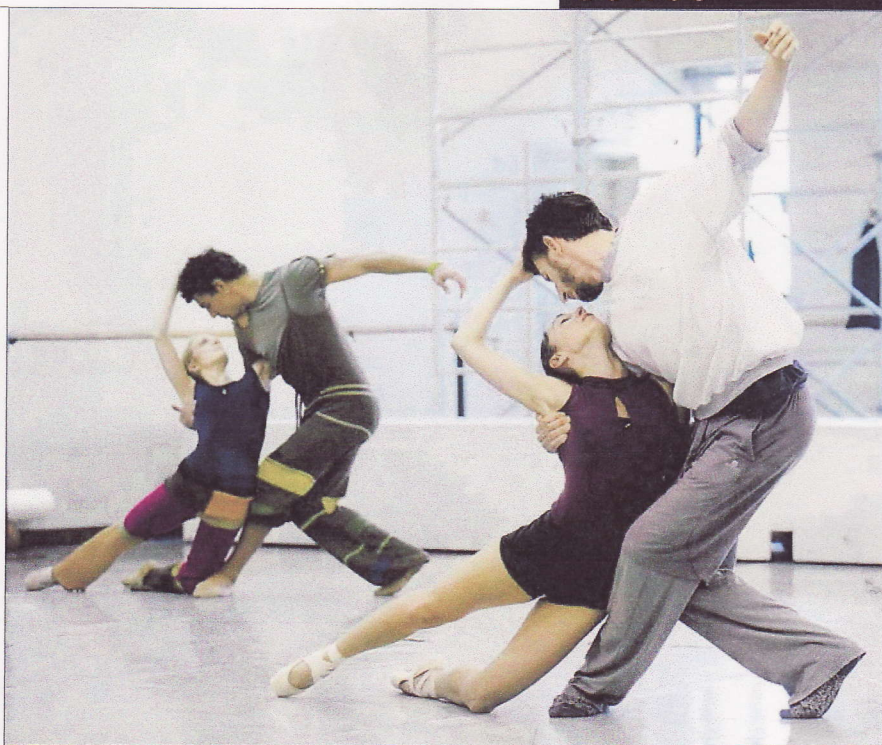
The story is full of psychological implications.

At the centre is Camille Claudel, the French sculptress who as a young woman found first a mentor and then a lover in her older, celebrated compatriot, Auguste Rodin. Rodin helped the talented woman make her way in a 19th-century man's world. During the 12 years of their association, both drew creative inspiration from the other. But as far as their romance was concerned, it was never an equal relationship. Despite her passion for Rodin, Claudel forced herself to tolerate his other lovers, most notably Rose Beuret, a favourite model.

It wasn't Rodin who betrayed her, then, but her brother, Paul, a much-travelled diplomat who became one of the 20th century's most famous playwright-poets. Camille was a sensitive, nervous personality and in 1913, Paul succeeded in getting her confined to a mental institution, where she died 30 years later. Several times, the family ignored the institution's plea to release her.

"I feel it's her family who caused her the greater injury, not Rodin," said Quanz, 31, who admitted in an interview that he read several biographies of the two sculptors as well as psychological analyses of their relationship. "Of course, Rodin was having affairs – Camille would have known. But that her family would become increasingly less supportive of her might have been one of the biggest factors of her condition."

Quanz's interest in the story was sparked by The Mature Age, Claudel's sculpture of a prone young woman plead-



Martin Kaczorowski and Emilie Durville (right, playing Auguste Rodin and Camille Claudel) rehearse Peter Quanz's choreography.

DARIO AYALA THE GAZETTE

ing with a man holding another woman. It's widely thought to represent Claudel's break with Rodin.

"I wondered about the emotional turmoil that went with that. How did that (break) relate to her story, and how tangible the pain could be."

So far, the most notable dramatization of the story has been the 1988 French film *Camille Claudel*. But a tale about classical sculptors would seem to be a natural for dance. After all, choreographers, like sculptors, take pains to find positions for human bodies.

During the course of three short excerpts from the new work that were presented to the media this week, the dancers took forms suggestive of Claudel and Rodin sculptures. A trio that curled round itself delicately on the floor could easily have inspired either artist. For one instant, Rodin (soloist Martin Kaczorowski) even sat Thinker-like with his head in his hand.

One shouldn't think of *Rodin/Claudel* in terms of Quanz's *Kaleidoscope*, a work highly beholden to the classical ballet vocabulary, which Les Grands performed in 2008. Some ballet jumps and positions in attitude did appear in one ensemble excerpt, modified with modern twists and strung together unpredictably.

But Quanz has broadened his movement vocabulary with curves, bent limbs, off-centre poses and frequent falling to the

floor. Searching for gestures that suggest emotional states, he has sought to emulate the model of the late John Cranko, whose story ballets for Stuttgart Ballet like *Onegin* (another betrayal ballet) and *Romeo and Juliet* inspired Quanz while he was a company member there.

"I think dance is an excellent medium for showing psychological relationships in a visceral way," Quanz said.

So Quanz has given Les Grands – a company of strong actor dancers – some dramatic meat to digest. In one scene, Rodin, blindfolded, slowly explored Claudel (first soloist Emilie Durville) with his fingers, an effective symbol for a man who both liked to mould material in his hands and to examine lasciviously a new conquest.

Fingers played out differently in a contrasting scene in which Rose (demi-soloist Marie-Eve Lapointe) manipulated Rodin's anguished head – a picture of his torn loyalties.

Rodin/Claudel benefits from music by French composers Debussy, Ravel and Rousset played live, with additional recorded music including French chansons.

Rodin/Claudel, Oct. 13-15, 20, 22, 27-29 at 8 p.m. at Théâtre Maisonneuve of Place des Arts. Tickets \$77.06-\$120.35. Call 514-842-2112.

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