

Kavaler-Adler, S. (2016). Camille Claudel/Auguste Rodin vs. Suzanne Farrell/George Balanchine: Two centuries of patriarchy and the internal psychological worlds of two brilliant women artists. *MindConsiliums*, 16(3), 1-7.

Camille Claudel/Auguste Rodin vs. Suzanne Farrell/George Balanchine:
Two Centuries of Patriarchy and the Internal Psychological Worlds
of Two Brilliant Women Artists

*One Demonized Her Male Muse and Destroyed Herself and Her Work;
the Other Preserved Her Male Muse and Fostered Survival and Developmental Growth*

(A Psychohistorical Essay)

By Susan Kavaler-Adler

Abstract:

This psychohistorical essay compares the fates of two brilliant women artists – sculptor Camille Claudel in nineteenth-century France and ballerina Suzanne Farrell in twentieth-century America – each of whom served as muse to, and was mentored by, a powerful patriarchal male artist (Auguste Rodin and George Balanchine, respectively). While both women faced patriarchal constraints and painful ruptures with their mentors, their outcomes diverged dramatically. Claudel, lacking an internalized “good enough mother,” demonized Rodin as a bad object, rejected his continuing support, destroyed her own sculptures, and died after thirty years in an asylum. Farrell, sustained by adequate early mothering, preserved a positive internal image of Balanchine despite his vindictive blacklisting of her, mourned her loss, separated psychologically, and ultimately achieved reparation and reunion with him. The essay argues that internal psychological factors – object relations, the capacity to mourn, and self-integration – can trump external societal patriarchy in shaping a woman artist's destiny.

Keywords: *demon lover, internalized good object, mourning and reparation, muse–mentor relationship, object relations, patriarchy, self-sabotage, women artists*

It was in the 19th century world of patriarchal male artist mentors that Camille Claudel became a young and nubile female apprentice of Auguste Rodin (Kavaler-Adler, 1996; Nuytten, 1988; Paris, 1984/1988). After gathering clay before dawn to create her own sculpture throughout her childhood, she began to mold the hands and feet of Rodin's sculptures. Then Rodin would sign Camille's work, if he approved. This was to be followed by a passionate love affair between Camille and Auguste Rodin. Camille became Rodin's inspiring muse, and she shaped his work in turn – she was not merely a Galatea to his Pygmalion, but a creator in her own right. Still Rodin was her muse god-figure as well, replacing her own father, who was the only one who had loved her and supported her in her work. She had been born to a mother described by biographers as frigidly cold, suspicious, and primitively narcissistic (Paris, 1984/1988), who then allied herself against Camille with her younger daughter, Camille's sister, Louise. Camille's brother, Paul Claudel, moved abroad, and would later betray her. Camille was truly an orphan, other than being her father's daughter while he was alive; and we will never know if he loved her creative talent more than he loved her.

Camille breathed new artistic life into Rodin but later had contempt for him because of it. He, on the other hand, not only adored her as a young woman who he could seek inspiration from, while

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also making passionate love to her, but he grew in his admiration of her as an artist, to the point of declaring her the true “maestro” who had surpassed him in her abilities. She had moved from her specialty in hands and feet, and then heads, to full sculpture forms, while cohabitating with Rodin, in what would become their shared artist studio up in the mountains of France.

On the other hand, Camille suffered the deep agonizing mortifications of a patriarchal culture. When she became pregnant “out of wedlock,” she was forced to end or surrender her pregnancies. The torments she endured would appear in some of her most radical sculptures, where the woman’s pain could be seen to undulate mercilessly through her whole body and being (Paris, 1984/1988). The primal cries – perhaps from her own infancy, where the breast mother was an icicle – can be seen in Camille’s alter ego who writhes and screams, while in a prone position. From that tortured position, Camille Claudel views, but cannot touch, the infants that have emerged out of her body.

This sculpture was one of the few that survived after Camille’s death, while all the prolific works of Rodin have survived through the generations – those done by Camille’s hand, as well as those Rodin mostly devised and molded, often with feet, or more, designed by Camille. And Rodin even signed some of Camille Claudel’s works, so that Camille’s authorship was negated. Camille had been all but unknown until feminist scholars revived her legacy in the 1980s, while Auguste Rodin has become an icon of artistic accomplishment, renowned through the historical ages. Can we attribute this contrasting fate to the character of a patriarchal society of the 19th century or are there other factors at play of a more intimate psychological nature that actually trump these obvious societal factors?

Why did Camille’s work disappear? Was it just her fate to be obliterated in a much more evident patriarchal society in the 19th century, which contrasts with the 20th century in which Suzanne Farrell and George Balanchine lived? The answer is no: Camille Claudel actively left Rodin in a rage, when Rodin failed to marry her. Rodin would be honored as the middle-aged patriarch with his young female mistress on his arm – he, being 43 when they met, and she 18. Camille Claudel, however, would be increasingly reviled. Isn’t it always the woman who wears the scarlet letter?

Rodin had promised marriage but couldn’t leave his sickly common law wife behind – especially when this woman developed hysterical conversion symptoms, as Rodin pulled away into his affair with Camille. However, from biographical descriptions, and from the film on Camille Claudel, it seems that Rodin was also terrified and intimidated by Claudel’s rage. Camille vented streams of accusations that could certainly have taken on a paranoid nature, despite just any reason for her accusations, such as in the promise of marriage by Rodin being betrayed. Perhaps it was not guilt alone that kept Rodin tied to his common law wife. Perhaps he never wanted to leave Camille but could not marry her when she erupted with such violence. Nevertheless, Camille acted on her anger, and left Rodin, when he would not marry her. Camille left him, and left behind all the protection of Rodin’s power, including the mantle of legitimacy that Rodin could provide for her. She left the established male mentor artist, who had offered her chances to make it on her own, even as a woman, in the 19th century world. And then when she left him, she instantly began to demonize Rodin, both in her mind, and in her articulate vituperations to others, especially to those who might come to any of her own exhibitions, or to those who might interview her for the press. She self-sabotaged in this way, and we see that it was not only sabotage of her artistic self, but beyond that, the sabotage extended to her very being. As Camille began to rave openly against Rodin, claiming him to be the vilest of beings, she simultaneously refused all his efforts to help

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her, to give her opportunities to be part of major European art exhibitions. She refused Rodin's invitations, his applications for her to be an accepted participant in major art fairs and exhibits. She refused his offers of clothes to wear to these events as well. She refused, on a continuing basis, all his offers of support, both financial and artistic.

Camille seems to have acted out a primal split in consciousness, from her earliest years, due to failed mothering. It had manifested by turning against a formerly idealized or loved figure and despising the former hero. The mental image of her former hero became a mammoth monster.

While Camille proceeded in this direction, her father was aging and moving towards death. Her brother lost all faith in his sister when he saw that she had descended into severe alcoholism and was failing in life, while he prospered abroad as a celebrated poet and diplomat. In addition, Camille had only animosity and plots of evil doing from the real monsters, her mother and sister. She was increasingly alone. She began the ultimate self-sabotage: to ritualistically smash her own sculptures each year. Her first suicidal impulses were unleashed against her work. Then she resorted to literal actual suicide attempts. Since she had never separated from her sculptures, her murder of her sculptures was a murder of herself. She could not separate from her sculptures, just as she could never separate from her mother (see Kavaler-Adler, 1991). There had been no "good enough mother" to internalize, that would have given her a benign symbolic mother within her internal world psyche. So she was without a warm maternal self core, and ever in a rage without Rodin, who had become the father-life extension of herself that once her father had been. She turned her rage dramatically against herself, when she wasn't raging at Rodin in public, or when she wasn't accusing him of having his workers come into her studio in the middle of the night and steal her work. She smashed her symbolic self that was not perceived as symbolic, but was experienced as a narcissistic extension of herself, and she sabotaged her life's work. She destroyed it all, with very few pieces of her original sculpture remaining for the world to acknowledge. She ended up going from smashing her sculptures ritualistically each year to smashing herself with actual suicide gestures, such as when she sealed herself inside of a space, where all doors and avenues of departure were blocked by her own hand. This then became the excuse for her mother to enlist her brother to commit her to an insane asylum, the moment that her father died. Without her father's patriarchal power, Camille was at the mercy of her matriarchal mother who ruled over her male son as well (Klein, 1957). What's more, the patriarchy of the day had formulated a law that would not allow anyone to leave the Paris asylum without the permission of the head of the family, which in this case had become her mother, the matriarch. The mother was both too full of hate for Camille, and too full of fear of her, to allow her to return home. The formerly arrogant and rebellious young girl became an aging Camille, who pleaded in a pathetic manner that she would be good if she were only allowed to return home.

Now Camille was submitting to her mother's authority, begging her to release her from the asylum. Camille's mother refused her pleas, as well as keeping hidden from Camille all the offers of financial aid and support of all kinds, which Auguste Rodin continued to offer Camille in her confinement. The mother never revealed Rodin's ceaseless concern and charity. Instead, Camille's mother, Louise, sent boxes of food, while Camille continued to emotionally starve. Camille gradually withered away in the asylum for 30 years, until her death.

We cannot blame a patriarchal society for Camille's total resistance to creating sculpture within the asylum, when she had been encouraged to do so. Camille's psychological origins must be

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looked at here. Camille was her own worst self-sabotaging enemy until her death. She also continued, until her death, to blame Rodin and claim that her fate was all his fault.

What feminist accounts of Claudel have tended to overlook is that Camille Claudel had a male muse and mentor who continued to support her throughout her tragic life, and that it was Camille's total paranoid-tinged rejection of Rodin that sealed her fate (Kernberg, 1975). She may have lived in a patriarchal society, but it was her own psychological act of turning Rodin into a demon in her own mind that caused her to be alone in the world, and to be totally abandoned. She might have spiritually and psychologically survived, if she had kept her link and bond with the man who kept trying to support her and her talents until her death, despite her continuing public slanders against him. In psychoanalytic terms, Camille turned her unconscious negative mother transference against Rodin, ever since the day she chose to leave him. She made Rodin her bad object. I imagine that this unconscious psychological and characterological hostility trumped any patriarchal factors that were against her within society, even in the very patriarchal Victorian times of the 19th century.

Suzanne Farrell and George Balanchine in the Twentieth Century

So how does this compare with the interaction of psychological and patriarchal societal factors in the fate of a woman artist in the twentieth century, who also had played the part of a muse for her patriarchal male mentor? When we look at the life of Suzanne Farrell (Farrell & Bentley, 1990; Kavaler-Adler, 1996/2014), we see totally different psychological factors interacting with the patriarchal elements in a particular society within a society – that is the society of the artistic community of the New York City Ballet. Suzanne Farrell's muse/protégé relationship with George Balanchine, began in the 20th century, which overall had less patriarchal control in the society at large than existed in the nineteenth century in France, during Camille Claudel's life. Nevertheless, within the highly refined and exclusive atmosphere of the New York City Ballet, George Balanchine, the director of the company, and its brilliant choreographer, ruled supreme, and with absolute patriarchal power.

Similar to the theme of the red shoes that I use throughout *The Creative Mystique* book (Kavaler-Adler, 1996/2014), which details the cases of both Camille Claudel and Suzanne Farrell, Suzanne Farrell becomes the prized prima ballerina of a major ballet company through the favors of the director and choreographer of the company, who selects her as his muse and star, while he himself serves as her muse and mentor. And also similar to the mythic red shoes story and the film *The Red Shoes*, after Suzanne Farrell becomes a living expression of her patriarchal male muse's creative impulse, and through this becomes a scintillating star who can play the lead in the ballet of the red shoes, as well as playing the star role in all of Balanchine's brilliant and original ballets, the male patriarch demands that she marry him. In fact, Balanchine becomes insanely retaliatory and vindictive, when his much younger female protégé (the Galatea to his Pygmalion) has the nerve to marry a younger man, who is an employee of his ballet company. This mirrors the film *The Red Shoes* and the myth behind it. However, Balanchine is even more radical than the director in the film *The Red Shoes* (Powell & Pressburger, 1948). George Balanchine does not just seduce Suzanne Farrell back to his company, after she leaves because he fires her new husband. He retaliates in the most overt form against her position in the world. George Balanchine blacklists Suzanne Farrell all over America. He blacklists her as soon as she leaves his premier ballet company, after marrying a young male dancer in his company. When Suzanne has the "nerve" to not only marry a younger man, but to join with her new husband when Balanchine forces him to

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leave his company, Balanchine shows a retaliatory wrath that would make him a prime candidate for the role of the demon lover in relationship to Suzanne Farrell. But what is so dramatically evident is that unlike Camille Claudel with Rodin, Suzanne Farrell does not ever demonize Balanchine. The psychological trumps the societal here again as Suzanne Farrell overcomes all the hostile and sadistic behavior of her wounded male muse mentor, and is able to psychologically, as well as literally, to separate from him, while always continuing to retain her initial admiration for him. Although nearly forced by the circumstances of his retaliation to give up ballet performance altogether, and to turn quite early to the exclusive role of a ballet teacher, Suzanne Farrell never says a bad word about Balanchine. Further, it seems that she never allowed herself to think negatively about him. Unlike Camille Claudel, who suffered from the lack of any primal good mothering that would give her a core sense of self, and whose accusations had taken on an increasingly paranoid character, Suzanne Farrell seems to have internalized what she needed from her warmer and more supportive mother in early infancy and toddlerhood (Mahler et al., 1975).

Although Suzanne's mother encouraged her to marry Balanchine, despite his being three times her age, she seems to have been a "good enough" mother during Suzanne's early development (Farrell & Bentley, 1990). Also, she had the strength to bring her daughters to New York and to a scholarship program at the New York City Ballet, which was run by Balanchine. This was after she divorced her husband, and Suzanne and her sister were left without a father. The mother seems to have had some awareness that her former husband had been a detached father in the first place. Suzanne's mother seems to have been sufficiently psychologically attuned and related to Suzanne's needs throughout her early development. Also, the mother had the strength to seek a divorce in the days when divorce was not accepted for women. Such strength and maternal capacity in Suzanne's mother seem to have played a profound role in Suzanne's amazing fortitude at the time of her adult crisis, when abandoned by Balanchine, and then retaliated against by Balanchine.

Thanks to Suzanne's own fortitude, the end of her crisis took a fortunate turn. Suzanne preserved her career as a ballet performer, and even further as a prima ballerina. Despite Balanchine having this omnipotent patriarchal power to blacklist Suzanne Farrell all over America, so that no ballet company in the U.S. would hire her, a magnificent invitation came from abroad: Maurice Béjart invited her to join his Ballet of the 20th Century in Brussels (Farrell & Bentley, 1990). She immediately went abroad. She began to play prima ballet dance roles. Also significant, in relation to her own benign, rather than retaliatory, state towards Balanchine, Suzanne began to ask to perform some of Balanchine's work when performing abroad. Balanchine had given her the gift of the ballet "Meditation," which she had played the lead in during her early work with him. The ballet was hers. She owned the rights to perform it as she wished. So, she performed it in Europe, and began to mourn, as she had mourned for Balanchine on stage earlier, when she couldn't allow the sexual relationship with him that he had wanted through marriage, and that she emotionally yearned for, but would not succumb to. She had the capacity to mourn her loss as Camille Claudel could not when she left Rodin. Rather than becoming paranoid, retaliatory, and psychotic due to rage at her male patriarch, Suzanne Farrell was able to retain a positive view of Balanchine. Thus, she was able to mourn him, because the psychological truth is that it takes more love than hate to mourn. She mourned the loss of Balanchine, but she also preserved him as a good other in her internal world by continuing to perform his work – and to perform to the music of Tchaikovsky that had always been the musical accompaniment to his work. She performed "Meditation" in Europe, and she yearned for more of a return to Balanchine's work. She never devalued

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Balanchine's work, just as she never turned Balanchine into a demon in her mind. Balanchine had never been a god for Suzanne, and therefore he never was turned into a demon. Suzanne retained the value in her mind of both Balanchine himself, and of his creative work and creative ideas. In the end, this could lead to a reparation between her and Balanchine that could never have been possible if she had demonized him.

Balanchine's retaliatory rage shows evidence of his own demonizing tendency, when he turned Suzanne Farrell into a goddess, and then treated her like a toxic witch (Kavaler-Adler, 1993/2013; Kernberg, 1975; Klein, 1957). But his wrath expired when he learned that Suzanne was still performing and admiring his work. Then, Balanchine gave some signals that the coast was clear for Suzanne to return to America, and even to him and his company. Suzanne felt the barometer of the weather that surrounded Balanchine. Consequently, she responded to the signals and returned to America. She had been able to leave Balanchine with a sustained sense of self, rather than with a mental breakdown. Consequently, she was able to return to Mr. B. as a separate person, and as a compassionate individual. By the time she returned and met with Balanchine, she felt so forgiving that she didn't even want him to apologize, even when he showed that he was finally capable of such an apology and expressed it clearly to her. Suzanne apparently didn't want "the man" to humble himself, because she still retained a view of him as a father figure. After all, she had never had a father growing up. But seeing him as a father was a far cry from seeing him as a psychologically omnipotent god-figure who could topple off his pedestal at any time of disappointment.

Summary

Unlike Camille Claudel, Suzanne Farrell could retain a positive image of her male muse, and never had to demonize, devalue, or spoil Balanchine's image in her mind. As she retained this positive view of Balanchine, this allowed Suzanne to – psychologically and literally – separate from him. She created her own life apart from him but also allowed herself to return to him as a centered, separated and individuated being. With her more integrated level of psychological development, Suzanne Farrell trumped the societal factor of patriarchy, even when such patriarchy survived in an extreme form in the 20th century, due to the authoritarian rule of George Balanchine within his own company, the New York City Ballet.

Clinically, this contrast suggests that when patients are caught in a demon-lover dynamic with a muse, mentor, or love object, the essential therapeutic task is not to battle the external patriarch, but to help the patient develop the internal good object and the capacity for mourning that allow separation to occur through grief rather than through demonization. It is the capacity to mourn — which takes more love than hate — that permitted Suzanne Farrell to separate, survive, and ultimately repair, and its absence that condemned Camille Claudel to destroy her work, and herself.

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How to Cite This:

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