



Lady Chatterley's Lover stars Éline Malègue and Raphaël Bouchard, pictured at Château Ramezay. SASHA ONYSCHENKO

## Dance: Sex, death and gamekeepers as Lady Chatterley and Giselle ignite the stage

Choreographer Cathy Marston brings D.H. Lawrence's erotic novel to Les Grands, while South Africa's Dada Masilo creates an angry Giselle for our times.

JIM BURKE, SPECIAL TO MONTREAL GAZETTE Updated: September 21, 2018

There's an old joke about religious puritans forbidding sex standing up because it might lead to dancing. English choreographer Cathy Marston is unlikely to endear herself to such people with her newly commissioned ballet *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the world première of which opens Les Grands Ballets' 2018/19 season in October. It is, of course, based on one of the most celebrated erotic novels in world literature and, previously, one of the most maligned.

It wasn't until 1960 that D.H. Lawrence's 1928 classic was officially cleared by the English courts of being an unlawful obscenity that might deprave, as one prosecutor notoriously put it, one's wives and servants. (Canada had to wait until 1962, when it was successfully defended in the Supreme Court by McGill University professor and poet F.R. Scott.)

Speaking of the novel's sexual content, as well as its barrage of F-bombs, the one-time director of Switzerland's Bern Ballett says: "To be honest, that's not the main point of interest for me. Those words are only shocking when you think of them as having been written 100 years ago. These days you'd have to go to territory that isn't, in my opinion, appropriate for this story to get the same kind of feeling of shock about sexuality. Especially here in Montreal. I don't think there's much that would shock people here."

Instead, Marston, whose forte has been to create ballets based on literary classics as varied as *Jan Eyre*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Lolita* and Ibsen's *Ghosts*, has been attracted to other words in the book

"There are so many lovely words in *Lawrence*," she says. "There are some beautiful ones about the people in the mining village being like elementals from the earth. So I started thinking: What is coal? Well, it's living stuff that's been pressed down and down, which is kind of like the working class of the period."

Despite suffering from a heavy cold, Marston is soon up on her feet demonstrating some of the movement she has devised for the corps of 30-odd dancers supporting the main characters.

"I thought: What if I think of the group as coal and follow the industrial process of coal?" says Marston, grabbing at imaginary chunks of the black stuff. "First it's violently hacked out of the earth. Then it gets transported, so I thought of the image of the women loading these heavy sacks onto the little trolleys. I wanted to open with the context that the men are coming back from the trenches and the women are picking up the pieces. And then you think of the next stage of coal, when it starts to burn, and that's obviously an image of passion and sexual desire."

So, yes, we're back to sex, which is inescapable in any consideration of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* — though, as Marston says, definitions of what is sexy are likely to vary from person to person.

"Someone said to me during rehearsal: 'Are you asking her (Constance) to be sexy?' I thought: Well, what is 'sexy'? 'Sexy' is subjective. To be perfectly honest, there's one scene where Mrs. Bolton (the Chatterleys' live-in nurse) is taking care of Clifford. It gets very sexy between them as well, in a strange maternal way, and there's this scene where she's undressing him and putting his pyjamas on and washing him. Actually, that's as sexy as anything else, if we're going to use that word."

One of the things that makes the novel so groundbreaking — and, for many years, so unacceptable — is how it largely tells its story by the various ways Constance and Mellors have sex.

"It's sort of a shame not to be able to make it a two- or three-part evening," says Marston. "There are five duets in the piece, but there are many more encounters in the book, and *Lawrence* so carefully charts the emotional and physical journey of this couple. I love the book for that."

#### *ATA GLANCE*

***Lady Chatterley's Lover*** plays from Oct. 4 to 13 at Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier of Place des Arts. Tickets: \$59 to \$139; 17 and under \$39 to \$84. Call [514-849-0269](tel:514-849-0269) or visit [grandsballets.com](http://grandsballets.com).