

Spring in Strasbourg

Adriana Teles

UNESP - Universidade de São Paulo (USP)

adriana_c_teles@hotmail.com

Paris, 9:23 a.m. on an autumn Saturday

He opened the newspaper. He liked reading the printed news. It was almost an aesthetic issue. The black letters on the thin, slightly yellowed paper. He also liked the sound of the pages trying to fit into the space, half stretched between his hands, slightly raised. But this act lasted only a few moments. Because something caught his attention. It was in the crime section. Where he saw the photo of a famous neurologist. And whom he had had the opportunity to meet at the conference last spring, in Strasbourg. He even remembered that they had exchanged business cards at the time. He folded the page, which seemed, for a moment, too noisy. He looked closer at the news. Yes. The 50-year-old doctor *“killed his wife F. P. M. with a shot to the chest early last night. An argument was heard by the neighbors who, then, noticed a loud noise and called the police.”* It couldn't be! It was truly unbelievable. He thought about that serious man. A successful professional. A reference in the field. Father of a boy who had already entered medical school. It wasn't possible! He quickly scanned the news, as if he wanted to devour it, while his mind selected relevant passages. *“Around 7:30 p.m. the woman arrived home... the doctor arrived soon after... the son was traveling... the neighbors heard raised voices... they had never heard the couple fight before... and then a gunshot... a nice and apparently happy couple....”* The doctor was on the run. The witnesses saw him leaving the house

immediately after hearing the sound of the gun. He was perplexed! What could have led that serious man, so lucid in his profession, to destroy his family and his life like that? Certainly a moment of rage. When nothing else matters. Even so... He found it truly unbelievable. He abandoned the newspaper with its chaotic noise on the corner table. He got up to get another coffee. On the way to the kitchen he changed his mind. He decided to go out. Take a walk. The news had somehow affected him. Maybe it was the violence of the act committed by a colleague. These things always seem to happen far from us and not with an acquaintance, a colleague. He grabbed his coat and put it on, sharing the task of locking the door. He quickly went downstairs and, on the street, was greeted by the cold October air. It would soon be snowing. His steps were long and firm. The wind against his face. The air freezing his lips. His breath like smoke in the cold wind. He preferred spring to autumn. And summer to winter. It was true that the all-white city was very beautiful. But life seemed calmer to him on the sunny days of spring and summer. Then he felt like talking to Francisca. But he knew it wasn't right. She was the one who preferred to call. Always. And it was rare that he did so. He respected the hurried pace of her life. Even though they were both quite busy, Francisca came and went all the time, constantly moving through the art world, dealing with galleries and artists. Always in contact with important names in the field. Unlike him, who was in the hospital almost all the time. And he liked this contrast in daily life. It gave something enigmatic to his days. He thought about the afternoon of the previous day. When Francisca seemed even more alive to him. Full of her subtle nobility. Elegant. Her very dark eyes, almost always oblique in expression. Fleeting. And that made him tremble with excitement. In those moments, he realized that he could do anything for her. And Francisca seemed proud of her own art. My God, how he loved that woman. Sometimes he thought he could no longer live without her. He, who was not exactly an inexperienced young man. Francisca

had been a surprise that had appeared in his life a few months before, when he was still trying to adapt to the routine of being divorced and to Beatrice's absence. Besides...

He stopped suddenly. But...

“What is this!?” He asked, full of fright.

Paris, 11:30 a.m. on a day last summer

He entered the museum. He asked the young man about the exhibition. He showed him the invitation. He followed his directions. It had been a long time since he had visited that place. He remembered having been there with his ex-wife, when their relationship was still early on. Maybe he hadn't gone back since then. And it had been several years. He liked museums, but he didn't always have time to visit them. Since the separation, he had intensified his work pace even more and it was not uncommon for him to be quite tired and not at all in the mood to go out. Life was less lonely when you had a busy routine and long hours of work ahead of you. There was also something unusual. He didn't remember having received an invitation to an exhibition before. He thought the situation was special, almost unique, and decided that he would visit it. He didn't know the artist, but that wasn't what attracted him to the place. It was, rather, the unusualness of the situation. In addition to the opportunity to see Rodin's work again, which always impressed him. This one, yes, interested him. He appreciated the way the French artist represented bodies, always full of expression and movement, sculpted in hard material that was not very malleable to human hands. As a doctor, he thought the mind was a true miracle and Rodin showed him the miracle in action. Neurons guiding the imagination and the strength of the hands in the creation of a work that was rough in its handling of

stone. And, at the same time, extremely delicate in the construction of meaning and expressiveness. He was thinking about this when he entered the indicated room, where he remained for a little over twenty minutes. Having accomplished his mission, he went to the wing reserved for the French sculptor. It was exactly 12:50 when he saw Le Baiser, aware that he would have to be back at the hospital in a little over an hour. He walked towards it slowly. He stopped. It was truly beautiful!

He knew that there were several versions of the sculpture, all made by Rodin or under his supervision, in different sizes and materials. He did not know exactly how many there were. The one in front of him was made of white marble and was large in size. And it impressed him with its imposing lightness, something that seemed contradictory and surprising to him. At that moment, he was sharing the space with a small group that had gathered in front of that kiss to listen to the explanations of a guide, who spoke slowly and used a lot of gestures. His hands moved slowly as if helping him explain the details of the work they had there. He didn't want to get too close. He moved away slowly. With some of the guide's words echoing in his ears.

“... two Italian families... from Polenta... Malatesta... marriage... fell in love... lovers... Dante... the gates of hell...”

He knew that Rodin was short-sighted and that this had influenced the way he worked, always paying close attention to the smallest details, close to view, so that his works of art were an invitation to slow and careful appreciation, from different angles and perspectives. He would wait until the group had left. For now, he appreciated the silhouette of the figure more. The lyricism that the sculptor managed to unite with the forms of the body. Rodin imprinted feelings and sensations on them. At that moment, he looked at the muscles in the man's back, tense from the embrace. His arms gently wrapped around the woman's body. His hands... His left hand was holding a book. What book could

it be? Surely that guide would know. He looked at the group that was starting to move away. His eyes returned to the very white sculpture. The passionate embrace. He saw that the finger on the man's right hand had been sculpted slightly raised, giving the sensation of an unfinished act, as if he had been embraced by the woman at that very moment and had not even relaxed his hands...

"Beautiful, isn't it?"

He turned around in surprise. And saw in front of him a woman with an attentive and somewhat curious look. Her brown hair tied at the nape of her neck in a loose hairstyle. A few strands escaping in a carefully thought-out manner. She had a badge, which identified her as a museum employee.

"Yes... Incredibly expressive." He responded, surprised by the unique approach.

"I like the base where the lovers sit. Did you notice?"

"No." He said sincerely. "I hadn't paid attention. I was focusing on the man's hands. The book in his left hand. His right hand was not yet completely relaxed... See? His thumb raised, his hand lightly touching the woman's body, as if caught by surprise..."

"He's carrying the book with the story of Guinevere and Lancelot..."

"I didn't know."

"Yes. It makes a lot of sense, actually. The sculpture depicts an adulterous love. And it's impossible to avoid. In fact, Rodin captures the exact moment when the couple fall in love..."

"Of course. The suspended finger and the surprise at being caught in a trap..."

Their eyes met then. And time (just a few moments) was, at that moment, infinite.

"But what were you saying about the base where the lovers are sitting...?"

"It's rough... Uncomfortable."

“It doesn’t seem like a problem.” He said amusedly. She nodded with the most passionate smile he had ever seen. And if there was any trace of feeling for Beatrice, he abandoned it at that very moment. Never to return.

“There are other sculptures like this, aren’t there?”

“Yes. Rodin made several. It was part of his practice. The thinker, who we also have here, has many copies. More than twenty. I really like the one in Strasbourg, which I saw recently. It’s especially interesting. At least that’s what it seems to me. And impressions are like that, always very personal, reflecting our history and the history of our feelings and anxieties... The attitude of meditation, as if fighting against a powerful internal force, was designed for Dante’s Gates of Hell. Just like this one...”

“Really? Tell me about it...”

And since then, she had been telling him the details of all those works. In increasingly passionate encounters. And that gradually made them wiser in this art. And filled them with life.

Paris, 9:53 a.m. that same autumn Saturday

“What does that mean?!” He still had time to repeat in a confused commotion.

“It’s you I’m looking for!” Giovanni M. pointed the gun at his chest. “Find Francisca in hell!”

And the killer’s eyes barely glimpsed Dr. Paolo’s astonishment.
