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THE REMEDIATION OF DUMAS FILS' *LA DAME AUX CAMÉLIAS*

by

BRANDI L. GUINED

Under the Direction of Emily Bloom

ABSTRACT

Alexandre Dumas fils' *La Dame aux Camélias* has existed in various media for more than 150 years, originating from life events that were mediated through the novel and remediated via theater, opera, and film. I examine in my thesis how this particular narrative has survived the centuries and how each depiction relates the social expectations, desires, and fears of the time period in which the revised story is generated. The relationship between Dumas and the famous courtesan Marie Duplessis and its fictional recreations in Dumas' novel *La Dame aux Camélias*, his play *Camille*, Giuseppe Verdi's opera *La Traviata*, and Baz Luhrmann's film *Moulin Rouge!* reflects a human compulsion to create narratives in order to grasp daily events and to potentially escape those events or comment upon those which do not fit concisely into their socially expected codes of understanding.

INDEX WORDS: *La Dame aux Camélias*, *La Traviata*, *Moulin Rouge*, Genre studies, Narrative adaptation, Remediation

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by

BRANDI L. GUINED

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2014

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DEDICATION

To my Grandmother, Matilda

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INTRODUCTION

According to Jill Ker Conway, narratives are "inner scripts by which humans live their lives," providing structure by which we can "understand human development and patterns for investing in others— from emotional discourse, familial relations, and measures of social success" (6). If we follow her argument through, narrative "texts" across different media and time periods can provide windows through which we can estimate systems of value—social structures, social pressures, what forms of relationships are more important than others (i.e. monetary, physical, emotional)—of the author, readership, and societal group in which these interactive parties belong. Yet negotiating the historical past, much less the intentions of the author, is a double-edged sword, for any conclusions drawn may not be necessarily "true," and to limit any text to "author's intent" is to ignore other potential values found within the narrative.

Alexandre Dumas fils' *La Dame aux Camélias* highlights how the complexity of human desires rarely affords a single interpretation for the author or the "reader." As Mary Jo Maynes demonstrates in *Telling Stories*, "individual life-stories are very much embedded in social relationships and structures...which can provide unique insights into connections between individual life trajectories and collective forces" (3). Stories do not arise *ex nihilo* without reference points, and we as readers and scholars can only attempt to negotiate these reference points to try to pull meaning out of a text. Yet "every form of telling a life story draws on rules and expectations about writing and storytelling, literary conventions, rhetorical strategies, and ideas of what is interesting or important to readers and listeners;" therefore each narrative creation is as much of what the author *wanted* to convey as what the author *could* convey to the reading public (Maynes 70).

Published in June of 1847, Dumas' *La Dame aux Camélias* provides a prime example of how a single text can negotiate the boundaries between life and fiction, artfully catering to the desires of the reading public while not "offending" those desires to the point of censorship. Ensnared in the social constraints of the 1840s, *La Dame* renewed the sensationalism surrounding the death of Marie Duplessis—a famous Parisian courtesan—, a sensationalism created by the convergence of the success of Dumas' father, the fame surrounding Marie Duplessis, and the rising fascination with the courtesan figure-type. The success of Dumas' narrative did not fade with time; rather, the narrative has maintained public appeal over the course of more than 150 years, to include adaptations in plays, operas, ballets, filmic versions in the form of opera and musical, as well as television productions.

In the following essay, I explore how different "versions" of Dumas and Marie Duplessis's relationship are generated and manipulated over time—via the original novel, stage-play, Giuseppe Verdi's operatic form, and concluding with the modern filmed musical *Moulin Rouge!*—and how these versions reflect societal expectations and desires in their corresponding periods and move to alter those expectations. I cover highlights and key points in a few of the variations Dumas' "original" narrative spans, while heeding Maynes's warning, for my analysis of these narratives is as much guided by my own cultural space and social training as any who have come before me.

Chapter one negotiates the transition of life into fiction, here represented by Dumas' actual relationship with Marie Duplessis and the reflection of that relationship in *La Dame*. Dumas' relationship was far from secret in the social network of Parisian society in the 1840s. And though having a mistress was relatively acceptable at the time, the depiction of such relationships in fiction was precarious. Such women were not to be categorized as empathetic or

natural, for they threatened the stability as well as the sanctity of the family. Courtesans and mistresses were as much created by society as condemned by it, for they were desired as a distraction from life and condemned as such a distraction, in a similar fashion to fiction itself. As Dumas points out, women of “high society” were as jealous as they were curious about courtesans and the wealth these women amassed, finding the auction sale of Marie Duplessis's belongings after her death a “safe” way to explore the impure lodgings of such an infamous woman.

The negotiation of life and fiction is demonstrated in the development of Dumas' text, as he alters certain elements of the life-story to cater to society's expectations as well as his own. Dumas' fiction was in many ways as scandalous as it was acceptable, for he was one of the few writers who dared to display the courtesan figure not only in an empathetic light but also in contemporary times, having not removed the plot to a past monarchy as Abbé Prevost opted for *Manon Lescaut* or even Verdi for *La Traviata*. Though the details of his relationship were well known to his social circle, he chose to alter the ending of his novel to follow a more Romantic structure, having love conquer all only to be in turn conquered by death. Dumas remained relatively faithful to certain “key” events, claiming he accurately reproduced conversations and letters to add legitimacy to the narrative, while moving dates of events ahead by thirteen days. I argue that Dumas' narrative constantly “dances” with life—social expectations, personal hopes and disappointments, art mimicking life just as life in turn mimics art—to create a “remediation” of real life.

Chapter two evaluates the transition of the textual version of *La Dame* to the staged version of the same title—or *Camille* in America—and Verdi's operatic form entitled *La Traviata*, an opera still widely performed today, while the staged *Camille* has lost popularity

since the turn of the century. My focus here is on the power of the physical performance upon the stage to “give life to fiction” in a manner the novel form cannot deliver the story in a more “realistic” fashion by using language more representative of conversation as well as physical action and interaction to convey meaning. Audiences of the mid-nineteenth century were particularly keen to this effect of staged drama, hence why Dumas faced years of struggle against censorship to have his play performed. Dumas himself felt his staged play kept the memory of Marie Duplessis alive via the actresses who performed her upon the stage. To see a human being act, speak, and effectively “live” the part of the character, especially a character based upon a life model, created a sense of reality the novel could not quite achieve and thus permitted a stronger sense of empathy for audiences.

Verdi took this interaction one step further by transforming Dumas’ text into operatic form, thus enhancing the emotional component of the narrative by emphasizing the narrative through music. Now audiences would not only be able to see and hear the suffering of the fallen woman and her conflicted lover but also feel their emotions through orchestration. By engaging tactile responses through sound waves and heightening emotive components through particular musical delivery, audience members could be further “involved” in the staged performance, thus strengthening the realistic feel of the narrative despite the unrealistic depiction of verbal communication being sung rather than spoken.

Chapter three examines Baz Luhrmann’s *Moulin Rouge!* as a modern adaptation of the opera to film musical. Though there are certainly many other adaptations of Dumas’ story, Luhrmann’s version takes a step away from earlier adaptations by playing with the genres of movie, musical, and opera in one package. Many earlier productions like George Cukor’s *Camille* (1936) or Franco Zeffirelli’s *La Traviata* (1982) are film adaptations of the stage-play or

opera which use filmic technique to heighten effects, having flashbacks, dream sequences, close-ups, and splicing effects which are difficult or impossible to portray in other media.

Luhmann's film musical displays the transition of the original narrative to modern desires and expectations. Released in 2001, more than a century and a half after its base narrative, *Moulin Rouge!* is far enough removed from the original that the details of Dumas' relationship are no longer pertinent to modern audiences. The historical background of the film has become "trivia" for curious individuals and film enthusiasts. Yet what is important to note is that the Romantic trope created by Dumas maintains popular interest over the course of nearly two centuries.

CHAPTER 1: FROM LIFE TO FICTION

Rather than create a world of complete fantasy, Alexandre Dumas opted to create a world which was based strongly in the realm of fact, imitating real experiences with particular embellishments to sooth a "sensitive" reading public, to manipulate certain circumstances for dramatic effect, and to write a world which he may have wished had existed but was far from the truth as he lived it.

Alexandre Dumas' artistic development in his younger years into his early twenties was rooted in the Romantic notions of truth in nature and love, based strongly in the tradition of Goethe. Romanticism, for Dumas père and his son via his influence, sought a "revolutionary denial of the essence and long experience of civilization," where "self-expression instead of serenity and self-control" directed life (Saunders 18). In the 1830s, Dumas began to feel the influence of the budding Realists who took at the time a more Classicist stance. Structure and the divine right of kings was what provided guidance and should be replicated as much in art as it

was in life (Saunders 22). Though Romantic fictions like Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in 1847 were still published being published at the time, fiction was exploring with increasing momentum the development of the individual consciousness, how a person was shaped and what motivated his or her actions, in an effort to counterbalance the “distemper of the human soul”—another referent for Romanticism (Saunders 18). In England, as the century progressed and Realist ideals took root, writers like George Eliot and Charles Dickens would become dominant, their texts exploring the human psyche as well as social ills that plagued their culture. For young Dumas, the period was one of transition, during which writings that drew off of Romantic ideals were still lingering as new attitudes towards morality and realism in fiction were emerging.

The conflict between his parents represented this paradigm shift, for Dumas' mother acted according to the ideals of Realism while his father acted according to Romanticism. Alexandre Dumas père traveled to Paris in 1823 with the hope of becoming a famous writer, meeting Catherine Lebay in the Place des Italiens where they both lodged. The pair quickly became an intimate couple, which resulted in the birth of Alexandre Dumas fils in 1824. Since his father was still struggling as a writer, working through much of the day and night writing dramas for the stage in Paris, Lebay acted as the prominent parent and caretaker, working as a seamstress often through the night to earn enough money to buy Dumas fils food and toys (Saunders 14, 15). After finding moderate financial success with *Henri III et sa Cour* in 1829 and having increasing personal difficulties with Catherine Lebay, Dumas père moved out of the Place des Italiens and into Fauberg Saint-Denis, leaving his son predominately in the care of his mother.

Dumas' early memories of childhood in regard to his mother were often pleasant, while his father appeared to represent a more strained and imbalanced relationship. When Dumas was

only seven years old, his father decided to remove him from his mother's house and place him in the Pension Saint-Victor. Up to this point in Dumas' life, he had never experienced shame for his situation as an illegitimate child, finding comfort and pride in his mother without question. Faced with daily taunting from other boys, he learned to become sensitive to his position and to become less social and forthcoming about his thoughts and feelings, finding safety in silence (Saunders 41). This strategy for protection was one which Dumas maintained through most of his life; as Edith Saunders notes in *The Prodigal Father*, Dumas was wary of biographers and their "versions" of lives, which prompted him to destroy a great deal of his personal correspondence, to burn his mother's diary after her death in 1868, and to rarely speak or write openly about his life (x). Yet Saunders also mentions that Dumas once remarked, "if it were known how much of myself I have put into my work, how much of my life I have utilized and what personal undercurrents there are in my plays!" (xii). Though he was never fond of biography or certainly of autobiography, Dumas openly admitted to transcribing life events and feelings to his fictional characters.

While Dumas' experience with life molded him in the tradition of the Realists, his father was in many ways the opposite—transcribing his fictional works to his life as his popularity as a writer reached astronomical heights with the publications of *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo* in 1844. Saunders mentions how Dumas père began to dress and act the part of Edmond Dantes in real-life, eventually building a mansion named Chateau Monte Cristo with a writing study coined Chateau D'If. Dumas père spent copious amounts of money on everything and everyone, giving parties, entertaining, traveling, and enjoying the company of mistresses, one of whom—Ida Ferrier—he married in 1839. Though Dumas never seemed to completely approve of the life his father led, he ultimately followed in his footsteps, taking a

mistress of his own when he was 18, gambling, and acting the part of a rakish youth. But Dumas never forgot his mother, visiting her as regularly as was possible and always keeping in touch with her until his own writing success allowed for him to finally provide for her in turn.

Romanticism decidedly won the battle in Dumas' early works, though I argue that certain elements of Realism maintain their ground nonetheless. He chose to follow the ideals of truth in love and nature, rather than adhere to a purely faithful depiction of life and his relationship with Marie Duplessis. Dumas saw Marie Duplessis for the first time in the spring of 1842, but they did not begin a formal relationship until autumn 1844, which lasted until approximately August 1845 (Saunders 122). When Duplessis died on February 3, 1847, Dumas had returned to France with his father from their trip to Spain and Algeria, but he had not made it back to Paris. He did, however, make it to the auction of her estates two weeks later, and it is rumored that at this point he began to entertain the idea of writing about his and Marie Duplessis's relationship. Visiting her rooms and tables again under such a different context, now the amusement of the upper classes who would not have previously dared to set foot near her house, gave Dumas a feeling of sadness and some regret, which fueled his desire to preserve Marie Duplessis's life in fiction.

The romantic sense of nostalgia for their relationship, noticed so poignantly when Dumas walked the halls of Marie Duplessis's house during the auction, potentially aided in "setting the wheels in motion" for publication. Dumas' life up until that point, as well as that of Duplessis and most of their social circle in France, moved in between the world of legend and the world of fact, swinging from the ideals of the Romantics to the ideals of the emerging Realists. Dumas' early novel operated in both of these areas much as his own life did, never quite reconciling completely to either camp, much as he could not himself entirely reconcile his opinions of the manner in which his own father lived life in contrast to Dumas fils' code of ethics (Saunders 22).

La Dame ultimately serves as a sharp example of the events of real life clashing with those of the imagined or hoped for. Though in his later works he often condemned the actions of the courtesans and their romantic intrigues, generating numerous dramas and pamphlets on the immoralities of loose living, he could not let go of his connection to Marie Duplessis and his acceptance of her. His experience with his mother taught him that not all out-of-wedlock relationships were improper, especially as his mother worked tirelessly to support her family. Women like Marie Duplessis and Ida Ferrier were often viewed by Dumas as traps in which men lost their financial security and familial respect, just as Dumas père had left Catherine Lebay for fortune, fame, and other women. Yet Dumas kept letters from Marie Duplessis and maintained certain “vulgar” characteristics which he described of Duplessis in his characterization of her as Marguerite Gautier.

Marie Duplessis, and Dumas’ affection for her, in many ways was a singular representation of Dumas’ conflict between Romanticism and Realism. For Dumas to completely condemn an out-of-wedlock relationship would be to deny validity to the arrangement Dumas’ father had with Catherine Lebay, one which seemingly functioned until Dumas père gained enough fame to direct his life on an alternate course. Dumas fils adored his mother, and he appeared to have found no fault with her decision to live with Dumas père and have his child. His mother represented for him the harder-working, grounded persona who struggled via hard labor and long hours of work to support her family and who never resorted to selling her body for money.

Yet Dumas’ suffering in the wake of his father’s dalliances with courtesans and actresses, who were themselves often associated with a willingness to trade their body for fame and financial advancement, in no manner prevented him from seeking Duplessis as his own mistress.

Under the tyranny of Ida Ferrier, Dumas was not permitted to be in her presence at any time, and it was only after her removal to Italy that Dumas fetched his sickly son from boarding school. Dumas transcribed fiction as a possibility for reality, neglecting the fact that Duplessis “worked” for her living and did not live off of Romantic ideas. Saunders describes Dumas' first encounter with Duplessis: "he was in the frame of mind to fall in love...he looked at her, and it seemed as though he had never noticed anyone before" (95, 96). Dumas is described as "a poet, and conformed to the pattern set by Berloiz, Liszt, and other Romantics—having fallen in love, he retired to weep" (Saunders 96). The description laid out by Armand in *La Dame* is similar in its idealism:

A murmur of admiration had greeted her as she entered the shop. For my part, I stood rooted to the spot from the time she went in until the moment she came out. She was elegantly dressed; she wore a muslin dress with full panels, a square Indian shawl embroidered at the corners with gold thread and silk flowers...The memory of this vision— for truly vision it was— did not fade from my mind like many other visions (42,43).

In spite of the negative experiences Dumas had with his father’s mistresses, he was so enamored with Duplessis that he opted to take the chance, arguing to himself he understood the situation he was getting himself into and how he would not become a "victim" like other young men before him. After all, he was well accustomed to the behaviors and tricks of the courtesan type and was better prepared to avoid them altogether. But life is not fiction—there is typically not a distanced period of reflection, but rather a flood of sensations, impulses, and emotions which complicate actions. Armand serves as Dumas' warning that idealization tends to lead into folly, which was true for himself and his fictional counterpart.

Marguerite's entire background is altered for the text, removing a great deal of her agency in becoming a courtesan and with it some of the risqué and controversial elements Dumas' contemporary audience would admonish. Alphonsine Plessis, the real Lady of the Camellias, was

born in 1824, the second daughter to Marie Deshayé and Marin Plessis. Emerging from an extremely difficult childhood at the hands of her abusive father, who it is rumored attempted to set his wife on fire and prostituted the thirteen year old Alphonsine to a seventy year old neighbor, she chose to travel to Paris to work in the factories as a grisette—a girl who worked as a seamstress or on other tasks but was also known for her loose sexual proclivities (Kavanagh 37). Her goal was to journey to the streets of Paris to seek out fame and fortune, which the young Alphonsine quickly found, having by 1841 educated herself to read, write, and speak eloquently of popular drawing room subjects (Saunders 95).

By the age of eighteen, she had established herself as a courtesan of great renown, changing her name to Marie Duplessis to reflect her official change in status. Though she could never be admitted to the "respectable" part of society and be in the company of "respectable" women, Duplessis was given immense wealth and courted by many men of great social standing. Marguerite's past is softened, and though her mother is said to have died of the same consumptive disease—a disease often associated in the nineteenth-century with women living dissolute lifestyles—her mother is never openly designated as having a "job". Marie Duplessis's mother, on the other hand, worked as maid and struggled to survive for the majority of her life. Delphine-Adèle, Duplessis's sister, eventually establishes her own way in life rather than as a prostitute, removing the "necessary" chain of events from abandonment by mother and abusive father to becoming a "fallen woman."

Alphonsine Plessis demonstrated a great deal of resilience in her efforts to achieve wealth and power, proving her skills at learning and manipulation in her interactions with others, teaching herself to read and to write while she was afforded no formal education. By more modern standards, Marie Duplessis can be seen as a self-made woman, one who knew what she

needed and desired in life, what she was capable of achieving, and acting accordingly to make her goals a reality. What we as readers can only speculate is whether or not the alterations to Marguerite's past reflect changes Dumas wished for his idealized lover or rather changes which were required to have the novel sell in the 1840s.

If Dumas had wished to portray Duplessis as a worthy individual who should be accepted on her own terms or as a product of the society she inhabited, he would have kept many of the gritty details about Marie Duplessis's past as evidence of her corruption at the hands of society rather than morph her character into the ultimate exception to the rule of courtesans. Yet perhaps society was not prepared for such a heavy dose of Realism, and thus Dumas had to include the right elements of "truth" and blend them with pure fiction to make a "sellable" package.

Through his fiction, Dumas could also explore his and society's ideals and their realistic counterparts in relation to the father figure. He was able to mold his father into the ideal he perhaps wished for himself—or the one expected by society—in order to simplify his paternal affections. Armand's father is less complicated and "more respectable" according to social standards of the 1840s. Monsieur Duval, like Dumas père, has two children, the elder Armand and an "angelic" daughter, whom he loves without question and supports with financial ease. Dumas also had a younger sister, and it was her public recognition—being allowed to take her father's name—which prompted Dumas to officially claim Dumas fils. Often Dumas' father struggled with money because of his extravagant spending habits as well as his well-known penchant for blind generosity. M. Duval keeps watchful eye over the affairs of his children and takes keen notice in his son's aberrant behavior once Armand dedicates much of his time and his financial resources to Marguerite. Rather than going along with his son's actions and

encouraging his "debauchery," M. Duval admonishes Armand and commands him to responsible action, something Dumas noted his father never did for him.

In the novel, M. Duval is rigid in his judgment but forthcoming in his love for his children, which has led him on the course of action to split up the pair of lovers in order to save his family's reputation, his daughter's future marriage, and his son's financial situation. Though he ultimately comes to realize Marguerite is a person worthy of his son's love and admiration, it is because she is shown as the exception to the rule, as the angel cast down amidst the rabble. His opinion of her alters because she is revealed to be not the type he expected not because his opinion in and of itself alters. M. Duval is a flat character who operates like a machine to further the narrative, for it is his interference which separates the pair rather than a true conflict between the lovers. Dumas' novel acts as a "space between fiction and experience which is both one and removed from the original" (Maynes 79). Dumas' situation is unique in that it dances precariously on the verge of fact and fiction, teasing audiences in much the same way as historical fiction acts in the modern sense to separate the elements.

Via the characters of Armand and the unnamed narrator of the text, Dumas could separate the disparate portions of his own personality and reconcile them by acknowledging two separate "people" or thoughts contained within the whole entity. Armand is permitted the role of the hopeless romantic, emotional and doomed to see ideals and to strive for them no matter what the cost or how unlikely they are to be achieved. The narrator serves as the more "realistic" base character, the one who can step back from the situation, evaluate it calmly with less emotional involvement, and comment upon it from his removed space. Ultimately Armand acts as the Romantic figure while the narrator acts as the Realist.

In the novel, the relationship between the narrator and Armand is equally as important as that between Armand and Marguerite, for the narrator frames the tale and translates Armand's story from oral story to "published" novel. *La Dame* begins with the narrator's personal commentary, having ventured into Marguerite's home the day prior to the auction of her belongings, giving his presence as "an opportunity, if not actually of buying, then at least of looking, at curios" (Dumas 1). He knows very little of the woman who lived within the home, having only heard of her name and never actually meeting her face to face. The narrator's opinions change only in the course of exposure to different courses of life; he is always open to new ideas and new possibilities, never seriously admonishing anything and acting as the non-emotional cushion for the narrative. He is nameless and almost without personality—the absorber of the people around him and the confidant that others need.

The narrator is ideal in the dramatic world in which he is placed, for he takes in the bustling world around him and repackages it into something filtered, clear, and cohesive for the reading audience. "Here is what he told me," the narrator expounds, "and I have scarcely changed a word of his moving history," though we as readers are never told what he does decide to alter in Armand's story (Dumas 42). He opens and closes the novel with his apologies and assurances that the story is unique and that he does not condone prostitution, providing the service of transferring the safe tale of "a noble heart in adversity wherever [he] hears its voice raised in prayer" (Dumas 202). It is important to note that though the story is supposed to be about the Lady of the Camellias and her lover, the narrator is given the first and last words as well as the power of "translation" of Armand's tale.

The narrator and Armand are brought together after a freakish impulse causes the narrator to bid 100 louis for Marguerite's copy of *Manon Lescaut*, a text which was as familiar to the real

Marie Duplessis as it was to her fictional counterpart. Armand comes to the narrator to retrieve the copy of *Manon*, the one item at the auction he desired the most to have in memory of Marguerite. Already there is a complicated layering of fact and fiction, adding to the mystique of the novel, for Prevost's *Manon Lescaut* (1731) served as a real-life comparison for Marie Duplessis and serves a similar function for the fictional Marguerite. In Prevost's text, Des Grieux attempts to win and maintain the love of Manon, a courtesan, and in the process manages to earn the disapproval of his father as well as spend all of his money. The lovers are finally forced to move from Paris to New Orleans, where des Grieux attempts to wed Manon, only to find himself caught in another battle for her affections with the Governor's nephew. Des Grieux kills the nephew in a duel and he flees with Manon into the wilderness where she dies of exposure and he in turn seeks returns to Paris to seek refuge as a cleric. Ultimately no one triumphs in Prevost's tale, though Manon is allowed to die in the arms of her lover.

"Real" people and fictional characters are reading the same fictional work and responding to it, creating a shared space of material. Fiction has often mimicked life and commented upon it, taking a step back from the immediate and offering a period of reflection to better "understand our position in the universe" (Conway 176). Should art have no connection to "real" life it would cease to be understood, for we as human beings comprehend the events around us based upon our own experiences, ultimately desiring confirmation of our own constructed inner narratives. (Conway 176).

The text of *Manon Lescaut* highlights the precarious shared space held by the readers of the early nineteenth century, the fictional players in *La Dame*, as well as by the characters in *Manon Lescaut*. Manon and her lover des Grieux are twice over fictionalized, serving as a common base by which we the readers of Dumas' text can identify with or chastise the characters

of Armand and Marguerite. We share a space of commonly read texts with Dumas' characters and can evaluate their experience and interpretation based upon our own, thus blending our world with theirs. Yet the warning Prevost's text provides, that Manon will fail to achieve a life of humility which her lover desires of her and that their relationship is ultimately a doomed love—arguably because of internal personal traits or societal ones—, is ignored by both sets of lovers, for Armand and Marguerite fall into the trap as do Dumas and Duplessis.

Manon Lescaut can here serve two functions within the text: first as a fictional warning that blind idealization leads to disaster and second that not taking fiction's reflective connection to life seriously enough can also *lead to disaster*. Armand is guilty in the text of *La Dame* of idealizing Marguerite into a person whom she is not and attempting to make her fit into a mold that does not exist. He does not and cannot love her on her own terms initially because he is constantly attempting to shape her into the form of a loving, faithful wife and cannot accept her conditions to make their idyllic country life a reality by the only means she has on hand to do so—mainly taking the money given her by other men. To expect to be able to erase her past is impractical in a social world where everyone knows precisely who Marguerite is and what she has done. Armand seeks to turn her into a picturesque wife—which carries with it the connotation of adoring mother—when Marguerite's physical condition already has her slated for death at an early age. But for Armand, who appears to love her blindly, to sustain his fictional love he must create a social fiction as well and block out any and all obstacles that press to annihilate that world. He begins to bend his "real" life to mimic his internal fiction in order to maintain mental stability.

But on the opposite side of the *Manon* fiction is the fact that it was a warning, plain and simple, against courtesans and the path of life they choose. Had Armand taken the warning

seriously or had Dumas seen the warning as true-to-life, each could have avoided personal embarrassment and debt. The concept that the text was purely fiction "and in no manner reflective of life" moves into another realm of messy possibilities: that "life could and would be different" and that the fiction was in no way applicable to "real" life.

Ignoring the social process which directed women into a life of prostitution and the social constraints which kept them there is a blindness of which Armand and Dumas are guilty. By entertaining the idea that "this time would be different" and not being somewhat prepared for a more unpleasant, potentially painful alternative left both men in turmoil, though Dumas makes his romantic counterpart suffer a great deal more than he did according to Saunders and Kavanagh's accounts. Perhaps Dumas wished to play up the Romantic use of death, loss, and suffering and catered more towards a depiction of unchecked emotions as potentially disastrous for the individual.

Dumas blends fact and fiction almost seamlessly in his depiction of the relationship between Armand and Marguerite and his own with Marie Duplessis, including in his text "exact" transcriptions of conversations as well as copies of letters he wrote to Marie. This blending of life and fiction creates another complicated layering much like the one the text of *Manon Lescaut* created, placing the writer, reader, and characters in a peculiar shared space of experience. One of the primary examples of replicated conversation is the initial dinner party meeting between Armand and Marguerite. Dumas claims the conversation at dinner as well as the conversation between him and Marie are transcribed exactly from real life. The obvious complication is the fact that even if he wrote down the conversation once he returned home the night after the dinner party, it is unlikely the words described are exactly the same as those spoken.

Memory is a tricky element in human consciousness and one's perception of what was said or occurred can be far from the actual events as they happened. Though a person's capacity for memorization was potentially greater in the preceding centuries before the advent of so many recording technologies which make memorization less a required ability, recalling an exact conversation word for word is a specialized ability which few without an eidetic memory are apt to be capable of performing. Dumas' ability to remember the conversation word for word, hindered by anxiety at meeting his idealized courtesan amidst celebration and alcohol consumption is improbable. As Mark Freeman discusses, "memory is often bound up with what we are supposed to remember, what the social order tells us is significant" rather than specifically that which we wish to remember ourselves (51). Another issue with memory as fact is that it is "a re-reading of experience...which renews and reconstructs...and is constantly evolving" despite human efforts to preserve "truthful" memories (Olney 344). With the addition of elapsed time from the initial meeting and his composition of the novel, from autumn in 1844 to June 1847, the conversation is far more likely to be an idealized recreation of the one the pair had previously, perhaps containing overarching similarities but certainly not exact phrases.

The recreated letter he wrote to Duplessis is also a point of temporal contention in its placement during the course of the lovers' relationship, for he includes his letter early in Armand and Marguerite's courtship while it was in fact the "break-up" letter he wrote Duplessis in August 1845, announcing the permanent split between the two. For Armand, the letter serves as an early example of his incapability to act according to his promise to Marguerite—"to promise to do everything [she] says without arguing, without finding fault or asking questions," to "be everything [she] desires," and ultimately to accept her on her own terms (Dumas 72). Perhaps Dumas uses his personal letter as a representation of the inevitable future which is projected

early into the relationship of Armand and Marguerite, that despite what either partner proclaims to be the truth, it is a truth based upon fantasy and not upon "reality". Because neither can recognize the actualities of their circumstances, their relationship is doomed to failure—an ideal is created, and the facts are ignored. A relationship between Armand and Marguerite or Dumas and Duplessis is not by default a certain failure, but by not accepting certain facts, by essentially pretending certain elements do not exist, those elements cannot be adjusted in the physical and emotional make-up of the pair. By not acknowledging the ambiguity between the facts and the fictions, the two lovers cannot reconcile their expectations and demands and furthermore cannot adjust their expectations to the consequences dictated by the culture in which they live.

Romantic ideals were not the only impetus for Dumas to publish a story about Marie Duplessis, for he was desperate for money to pay off the debts he had accrued during and after his relationship with Duplessis, money which could not be lent by his father, for Alexandre Dumas père was embroiled in lawsuits regarding the authorship of his texts as well as for commissioned works he had yet delivered. Duplessis's death at the age of twenty-three ultimately generated a great amount of spectacle and rumor, which Dickens noted during his tour in France when he remarked "everyone whom the capital of France counts as illustrious was there...waiting, curious, moved, full of sympathy...for the tender girl" (qtd in Kavanagh 224). Her dazzling story, despite its immoral quality, was one of infamy and legend. There arose a great amount of interest in the life she led and the items she acquired, and with it a certain quality of mystique and legend to her name, aided by the rising interest in the courtesan type in general (Saunders 196).

Struggling to generate success for himself as a writer of fiction, Alexandre Dumas fils decided to capitalize on the fame surrounding the Duplessis name and write the story he had

been contemplating, providing a certain essence of the "intensity of the love he had himself felt," which according to Saunders gave the novel "its merit and interest" (204). Within three weeks of furious composition, *La Dame aux Camélias* was written and by June 1847, with little time for editing. Banking on a "behind the scenes" vantage point into his affair with the famous Parisian courtesan as well as a look into the life she led, it was rumored that a copy of the novel was in practically every hand in Paris. Though this in itself is an embellishment of the truth, the novel did bring Dumas more fame and sounder footing to pay back the debts he had recently accrued.

Dumas capitalized on such a spectacle by including "real conversations and letters" to validate his relationship with Duplessis as well as to appeal to the "truth" of her life. His making her into a suffering woman who only wished to be saved could have been as much an act of preventing too much exposure for the reader as it was an act of saving an idealization of Duplessis. Dumas' depiction of Duplessis as the exception to the stereotype made for a more idyllic version which ensured his text would not be censured but perhaps also served to give her the life and respect she might have wished for but could not achieve. Saunders makes mention of how Dumas and Duplessis shared many intimate conversations regarding their "unhappy, neglected childhoods, not knowing what it was to have a real home," the two partners having a "spiritual" background which strengthen their connection (131).

Just as Manon had to find penance before the end for Prevost's story to be published, Dumas safely packaged his spectacle by removing Duplessis's troubled past and by making his heroine sacrifice everything for what she believed was the sake of her lover. Marguerite's purified spirit is in many ways a reflection of the softened spectacle of the deceased courtesan's house, having the threatening element—the prostitute—removed by death. The public was fascinated with the amount of wealth the twenty-three year old prostitute had accrued, wealth

that trumped that of some of the social elites. Exploring her rooms after her death was a way for the "clean and pure" to see into the "dirty closets" of the race of courtesans, to gaze at the spectacle from safety without the risk of contamination. Dumas pronounces "this one is dead, so even the most virtuous among them could enter her bedroom. And if more excuses were needed, they could say they did not know whose sale it was" (qtd in Kavanagh 225).

Dumas' novelistic creation demonstrates an initial step backward from the lived action to re-evaluate and re-create the experiences and feelings of his relationship with Marie Duplessis, offering first-hand accounts of private events blended with mythologizing elements. His novel serves as a step towards reconciling or at least exposing the varied responses he had to Duplessis, his father, and society, while likewise playing with society's duplicitous desires. There is no absolute clear delineation between fact and fiction, as the two indelibly bleed into one another. Because of such variance, there exists a constant negotiation between texts just as there is a constant negotiation between the different parts which constitute the whole self.

CHAPTER 2: FROM THE NOVEL TO THE STAGE

2.1 *LA DAME AUX CAMÉLIAS*

Just as life events and social circumstances dictated the prime moment of delivery for a novel romanticizing the courtesan, so too did these same elements shape the production of *La Dame*'s transition to the stage. Though the writing and performance of the stage play is both a step towards and a step away from mediating the action to make it "more real to life," the sheer physical presence of an audience to witness the action achieves a realistic quality reading a book does not. We as audience members are part of a collective of witnesses seeing the drama play out upon the stage much as we might see it play out amidst ourselves in the crowd or in the outer

social world. The audience members are going to the theater to participate in and witness a social performance put on by themselves, just as these individuals are watching a play involving characters who are mimicking the social performance of the outer world, especially in the case of *La Dame*.

Dumas' hope for financial gain was realized with the publication of his first novel, but the novel did not earn enough money to settle all of his accrued debts. Shortly after publication, he decided the work would be more profitable as a stage-play and set to write a play consisting of five acts, which he accomplished within a span of eight days. Ultimately it would be the success of the play that would bring him substantial monetary gain as well as "literary" success, but the play would not make it to the stage until 1852 due to political upheaval in France as well as the ban placed upon Dumas' play by Léon Faucher, the Minister of the Interior.

The Revolution of 1848 began when the d'Orleans family—which had maintained political control in France—was removed from its position of power and was no longer the automatic choice to assume the French throne. As a result, Alexandre Dumas père's Theatre-Historique was closed in 1850, thus cutting off Dumas fils' easiest setting for staging his play (Kavanagh 6). Kavanagh notes how plays or texts "romanticizing the legend of the courtesan" were by no means new to the public of the mid-nineteenth century (6). Dumas was blazing a new trail by "transporting the audience directly into the contemporary demimonde, using actual dialogue and the spicy expressions of Left Bank cafés and dance halls" (Kavanagh 6, 7). The play was deemed "immoral as acted," meaning its depiction of a "prostitute—a woman who habitually lies and sells herself—who appears loveable, indeed angelic" to an audience places that audience under an "immoral influence" (Saunders 232).

By 1851, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte was named President of the Second Republic of France, and with this new appointment the Duke de Morny, his half-brother, also rose in political power. De Morny was disposed to side with the younger Dumas after having seen a staging of *La Dame* and lifted the ban placed upon the play by Faucher, aided by de Morny's previous friendship with Dumas père. On the second of February, 1852 *La Dame aux Camélias* hit the stage at the Vaudeville and began a long, successful run leading to over one-hundred performances.

The scandal Dumas' play initially created, which led to its being banned from production while the novel faced no such opposition, is a testament to the potential power of live performance to have a stronger impact upon audiences. While arguably the act of staging a play is no more realistic to actual life than the construction of a novel, the action of a live performance engages more with the sensory perceptions of the audience members, inviting them to see and hear the physical performance before them. The audience member does not have to be told in so many words where the character is standing in relation to another, how the actor or actress is positioned, and how he or she is acting—we as audience members see the details as quickly as our eyes catch them. The characters on the stage have a "mimetic relation to the individual human beings and recognizable types of human behavior they are modeled on," meaning because the characters are familiar in action to "real-life" types, the audience views them as more reliable representatives than those provided by texts (Richardson 143).

Brian Richardson comments on how "human bodies performing on a physical stage seem to require an expanded conceptualization of space and closure" adding a "fourth dimension" to the performance (154). "Live performance also shows how audience members can enter the story-world and participate (more or less briefly)," which is heightened by the level of spectacle

the theater-goers themselves inhabited in the playhouses (Richardson 154). People went to see each other as much as they went to see the staged performance, curious to see who was wearing the newest fashions, and who was seen with whom. Alphonsine Plessis made her debut by catching the attention of society while occupying one of the "proscenium boxes which themselves seemed to be between the fictional world of the stage and the real world of the audience" (Sala 103).

Just as the sensationalism of Marie Duplessis's funeral and auction fueled interest into the novel, the mystique of the living world stimulated interest into the fictional world upon the stage. Besides *La Dame*'s enormous initial success, the play continued to run for decades after its initial release, aided by the influential power and star-status of Sarah Bernhardt in the 1880's. Though she initially rejected the role, Bernhardt became famous for her interpretation of Marguerite Gautier (Saunders 4). Actresses previously performed the death scene of Marguerite in a prone position, as was displayed in the textual version, but Bernhardt decided to act out Marguerite's death from a standing position, making a full and dramatic fall to the floor at the close (Glenn 24).

Part of Bernhardt's stage attraction was arguably the off-stage antics in which she engaged, attempting to keep her in the public view via the New Journalism movement (Glenn 34). Susan Glenn notes that New Journalism—a term here referring to the cheap papers which were increasingly becoming big business on their own"—not only reported on the women who were making themselves spectacles, but it likewise manufactured such behavior by giving these women a space to be more broadly noted and seen (34). But Sarah Bernhardt also accrued a certain amount of negative gossip which attracted audiences to witness not only her performance on stage but how she acted or "performed" off-stage as well. In January 1884 Bernhardt was

embroiled in a scandal with Marie Colombier, who wrote a popular satirical piece on the famed actress, which led to Bernhardt supposedly brandishing a whip and a dagger in Colombier's flat (Saunders 2).

Yet despite all of the drama and flare, Dumas was enamored with her portrayal of Marie Duplessis, aided likely by Bernhardt's ability to keep his play and his idealized heroine in the mind of the populace. Saunders notes that after a performance of the play in 1884, Dumas was so moved by Bernhardt's performance, despite not staying for the final act, that he went home and composed a letter of gratitude to her, remarking how "it is you who have just given renewed life and youth to this dead past" (6, 9). Dumas also included the original letter he wrote to Marie Duplessis ending their relationship in 1845, a letter he bought back at a sale, as a "souvenir of your fine performance last Saturday and as a very inadequate expression of my immense admiration and my very warm gratitude" (Saunders 9).

This gift attests to the emotive power of the stage—the ability of an actor or actress to portray a fictional part well enough to capture "the hearts" of the audience members. Dumas' reaction also demonstrates the influential power of the stage which censors like Faucher feared would become prevalent. In regard to the success of *La Dame aux Camélias*, Faucher was in many ways correct in his assertion that the play would sway audiences to accept the Marguerite courtesan type. Audiences continued to "enjoy and admire his works because he was a brilliant playwright but could not heed his warnings against successful prostitution" as the success of *La Dame* "gave the courtesan absolution" (Saunders 249). No matter in what light he portrayed other prostitutes, reminiscent of the "Prudence" type, audiences viewed Marguerite as the "patron saint" and in some ways "reconciled loose women to their way of life" (Saunders 248, 249).

Despite a few name changes and condensation of characters—Marguerite becomes Camille, Varville becomes the representative of all of Camille’s other suitors—Dumas’ play holds true to the novel version in most ways, albeit greatly verbally condensed to fall into the time constraints of a live production. Varville is given the opening line alongside Nanine, Camille’s faithful servant, as the action opens at Camille’s home. Dumas has removed much of the opening structure provided through textual flashbacks, beginning the play in medias res before Camille’s dinner party where she meets Armand for the first time. While the novel can explore the background situation of Armand in more detail, the play’s time restrictions require that certain points of dialogue must contextualize the narrative, for example the audience comes to learn of Armand’s father, the “gruff, crusty, old gentleman, who was sometime Receiver-General” through Gaston’s inquisition (Dumas 11).

Varying character portrayals in the play production serve to redirect the focus of the audience onto key points Dumas wishes to convey. There is no narrator to function as the compliment to Armand, rather the removal of the “bonded brothers” allows for an emphasis on the relationship between Armand and Camille. Armand and Camille are the center for the dramatic movements, their ups and downs in direct correlation to those of the novel: the first acts contains the confession and pledge of devotion; the second act, obsession and jealousy of Armand followed by an apology over Camille’s still seeing Varville; the third act, the idyllic country life disturbed by the commands of Armand’s father; the fourth act, the party to end all parties, where Camille attempts to lose herself to forget Armand just as Armand tracks her down to deliver the cruelest slight; the fifth act, the reconciliation of Camille and Armand followed closely by her death. And while Varville may get the first word, Nichette, Camille’s loyal friend gets the last word in the play, shifting the power slightly away from the male voice.

One distinct difference between the novel version and the stage-play is the accusation placed upon society by Camille for her entrapment in life as a courtesan. Marie Duplessis was known to be the mistress of the wealthy, older Count de Stackelberg, but Dumas altered this relationship slightly for his novel. “The old foreign Duke”, according to the narrator, is Marguerite’s benefactor, adopting her as a substitute daughter after his own daughter passes away; all the while Marguerite is supposed to give up the life of prostitution she leads in order to keep receiving his financial backing. Whether or not the relationship is truly innocent is left to some question, but the play decidedly makes their connection paternal in order to use it as an example of how a fallen woman is allowed little option but to proceed down the path laid out before her. Camille exclaims:

Two years ago I last heard reproach. A poor, friendless, sickly girl, disgusted with that world where she sold her smiles for gold, had dared to enter the abode of peace—the charmed circle of society. Whatever her history had been, long-suffering had purified her thoughts—her heart was pure—*she sinned no more*. But society was outraged. With iron hand it flung her from its shore, and left her, beaconless, upon the sea where she is wrecked! (Dumas 31)

Perhaps in order to soften the portrayal of the woman trapped by society, Dumas provides the “ideal” pairing of Nichette and Gustave, who were not players in the original text nor in Dumas’ life, to represent the hard-working pair of lovers who establish themselves carefully in life and are married by the end of the play. Though we do not actually see the wedding ceremony between this pair, Camille remarks on her happiness to know that Nichette is a bride, thus returning to the safety of a condoned relationship between a man and a woman (Dumas 64).

Later composers, writers, and directors keep the key moments of dialogue or action that within a short space of time heighten the effect of the storyline. While characters like the retired prostitute Prudence are dropped in later versions as the focus of the narrative continues to turn

more towards the pair of lovers rather than on the whole social circle, the dramatic depictions of the parties at the beginning and the end of the play, the cruelty of a desperate Armand to throw money at the feet of the woman he loves, and the physical depiction of the failing health of Camille are maintained in one form or another in later formats.

2.2 *LA TRAVIATA*

While Dumas' drama complicated the physical boundaries between the fictional world and the world of the audience, Giuseppe Verdi saw potential for music to enhance this mimetic quality and immediately set to work with his librettist Francesco Maria Piave to create *La Traviata* in 1852. Though opera can be interpreted as a step away from real-life experience, as presumably the greater majority of people do not experience their world to complete musical score and their declarations are spoken rather than sung, the music created for the story is meant to generate a stronger emotional connection.

For many nineteenth century philosophers, music was believed to carry an innate connection to human thought and feeling. Writers and composers like Nietzsche, Beethoven, Wagner, and Verdi all had varying ideas of how music could connect human beings to one another or to "the real" or spiritual elements of their social world, but all of these men agreed in one fashion or another that such a connection could be achieved. These ideas were widespread among nineteenth-century audiences and are therefore essential to understanding reception history.

Beginning with Rossini in 1810, Italian composers sought to revolutionize the delivery of music in opera, opting for "persistent rhythmic motifs which were repeated to create crystal clear harmonic implications" (Grout, Williams loc 9098). As the century unfolded, operatic composers

attempted to “give melody to both the voice and instruments together,” and pursued the idea that “music should prevail over drama” at all times (Grout, Williams loc 9290, 9318). According to Žižek and Dolar—hailing back to the myth that Orpheus was able to sway the gods through the power of music to release Eurydice from the underworld—opera serves as the demonstration of “the power of music itself, and the music must form the inner principle and motive of its revelation” (Halliwell 4). By creating orchestrations which both played toward and against what audiences expected, opera composers could create more powerful feelings amidst the listening crowd.

Music in opera formed the base from which the libretto could create “far-reaching modifications” alongside “inevitable character transformations” (Halliwell 39). Dynamic markings, vocal pitch and inflection, melody, harmony, tempi, and rhythm are just a few of the ways a composer can individualize a character as well as dramatize a situation” (Halliwell 39). By “giving the orchestra more to do in harmony with the melody,” operatic performance functions as a highly adaptive and collaborative medium by combining these musical cues to coincide with and heighten the story and increase audience engagement (Grout, Williams 9318, Lindenberger 133). Music engages more than one human sense at a time; it is heard and the wave vibrations are also felt, and thus music is both an external and internal force. Particular sounds within a performance can resemble experienced, recognizable sounds within the listener’s own world, just as pacing of the musical notes can heighten tension within a listener.

The most notable element the stage and operatic version of *La Dame* highlight is the power of the human voice to convey meaning—not necessarily the same meaning for every audience member over the course of the decades—but as social animals, human beings need to be able to respond to the voices of other human beings, to recognize and understand pain,

anguish, compassion, anxiety, anger and so forth and to react accordingly, though social training plays into this response action a great deal. The singing human voice only elaborates this social element of interaction, thus strains of music will have slight alterations in emotional response based upon the social elements of the societal group at that point in history. One example of the social connection to human voice is the response to the sound of human suffering and pain; a mother—or a socially accepted mother—is supposed to respond to the sound of her crying child, a sound which the child is not taught to make but instead produces automatically to display its need of something.

Events surrounding Verdi's life in the 1840s and 1850s influenced his decision to recreate *La Traviata* just as events surrounding Dumas' life guided his actions. Verdi met Giuseppina Strepponi, a retired soprano, a few months after he moved into the Chaussée d'Antin—near Marie Duplessis—and eventually made her his live-in mistress. Verdi himself lived with Strepponi out of wedlock after his wife passed, which may have made him more understanding towards "fallen women," as well as women of the "working world" (Kavanagh 8, Sala 62).

Just as the stage-craft and fame of Sarah Bernhardt maintained the success of *La Dame*, audience perception and expectations regarding the fictive events of the narrative in turn affected the real release and success of the opera. Already deeply entrenched in the production of opera, Giuseppe Verdi first staged *La Traviata*, in 1853, but he would not find renowned success until 1856 when Marietta Piccolomini was cast in the part of Marguerite/Violetta (Kavanagh 9). Previous sopranos cast in the lead role were deemed by audience members to be unrealistic to audience conceptualizations of the consumptive Violetta, and the physically heavy singers or those who delivered the melodies full-force throughout the performance were "unrealistic" to

how a consumptive patient would look and sound in an advanced stage of the disease (Kavanagh 10).

La Traviata reproduces many of the alterations Dumas made for the stage-play—changes required for the greatly reduced amount of time to develop and deliver background information and character explication. Verdi had to skim off even more dialogue because singing the words takes significantly longer than merely speaking the words, and thus requires “extreme condensation” on the part of the librettist (Grout, Williams loc 9395). The “primitive directness” Verdi produced that often resulted in seemingly “trivial melodies” in fact represented “patently sincere and invariably appropriate” pieces that “obtained by means of voices” a carefully constructed and artfully delivered drama (Grout, Williams 9395). Donald Grout writes, Verdi’s “interest in the expression of human passions, to which all else is subordinated, creates a musical structure of sensuous beauty and emotional power” that is “basically simple and uncomplicated” (loc 9411).

The alterations made by Verdi were never trivial and served in one manner or another to enhance the delivery of the action and music and thus the emotive performance of the opera as a whole. Certain changes had to be made to transfer the French text into the Italian language while preserving the musical flow of the score. Armand Duval, Marguerite Gautier and Monsieur Duval are renamed Alfredo Germont, Violetta Valery and Giorgio Germont respectively in order to create better rhythm in Italian. Verdi alters the structure of the play to tighten the action and subordinate the action of the other characters to the central pair of lovers. Rather than take Violetta and Armand's story through five acts as Dumas had with the staged play, Verdi reduces the acts to four, following a general schema of "love, sacrifice, and death," with Act 2 and Act 3 as equal parts of the sacrifice motif (Kavanagh 8).

Dumas' character structure is maintained in Verdi's version of the narrative—Violetta is the infamous and highly prized courtesan, Alfredo the son of a gentleman, the Baron is the representative of Stackelberg and Perrégaux combined—Count de Stackelberg was Duplessis's septuagenarian financial supporter, while Viscount de Perrégaux was the English soldier who courted and eventually married her. Giorgio Germont is portrayed as a wealthy gentleman of position and good public standing, keeping with the role of moral guide as was set up by the novel. Flora is equivalent to Prudence in her social position and as the established referent for the "typical" prostitute in contrast to Violetta. Nanine becomes Annina but also remains the faithful housemaid to her mistress, caring for her with compassion through all of her illnesses.

The first act takes place at Violetta's, opening with a grand dinner party and full ensemble accompaniment, and through interjected dialogue—much the same as in the play—the audience is given the principle information to set up the storyline. We are told by Gastone that Alfredo has "hurried here daily to ask for you," and it is through the light banter we are led to understand Violetta has just recovered from an illness and is seeking pleasure to distract herself (MacMurray 1166). Verdi maintains the crux of Alfredo's concern for Violetta, a component that even Dumas remarked was unique to himself in regard for the courtesan—a component of compassion that won him her affection initially.

In keeping with the drama of the operatic tradition, this opening scene at Violetta's is complete with a large group of singers all imbibing copious amounts of wine and reveling in their social lives. Alfredo is seemingly the odd man out, coming only to see the beautiful courtesan in better health—his concern unique in its faithfulness without expectation of payment, having in fact never before met her in person. Verdi's musical score to this introductory piece is as lively as the group of people it displays, "Libiamo, libiamo ne'/ lieti calici/ Che la bellezza

infiora "—'In goblets wreathed/ with flowers/Come drink on this festive night'—act as the theme song for the culture represented here, though the situation takes a darker turn as Violetta must retire early, complaining of fatigue (MacMurray 1166). In a similar fashion to Dumas' account in his novel and play, he alone expresses concern for the ailing woman and he alone follows her to see what can be done to alleviate her suffering, an act of compassion and warmth which singles him out amidst the other suitors. Here we are shown Violetta's private sitting room—made so by the removal of the other singers and the slight alteration of the furniture—though we are never given the intimate bedroom scenes briefly—and tactfully—mentioned by Armand in the original text.

In the final musical numbers of the first act, Alfredo pleads his case with Violetta as to why he ought to be her sole lover, how his love varies from the love of others in its more human quality, seeing her as an equal and not as a commodity, and Violetta responds accordingly. Her initial dismissal of the possibility of "true love," and championing of a life lived to the fullest mimic in many ways the novel's description of Armand's pleadings and Marguerite's forewarnings. The scenario appears impossible, too idyllic to be managed in real life, but both participants wish to give it a valiant effort. The problem that arises for Alfredo and Violetta is much the same as the one displayed in the textual version of Dumas' story, where the primary participants cannot live up to and stay true to their declarations, exacerbated by the pressures of the social networks the two inhabit. Though it is in many ways a cliché statement, the idea that there is a price for everything reflects the experience of Alfredo and Violetta as it does Armand and Marguerite.

The second act of the opera depicts Alfredo and Violetta's idyllic lifestyle in the country, one that in many ways reflects the Romantic ideal of the pastoral, as if the rest of the world truly

cannot reach the lovers within their reclusive home. As in the novel, Giorgio Germont and the unsteady financial situation of the pair of lovers act as the disruptive forces to the otherwise "perfect" life Alfredo and Violetta are enjoying. Though Dumas' own financial situation was in many ways similar to that of Armand/Alfredo, he is careful to maintain the idealized, angelic form of Marie Duplessis and to not mention any particular character flaws as reasons for the pair's demise. Marguerite is given to have absolved herself finally of the sins of her life. She decides ultimately to give up all of her former ways in an effort to maintain their relationship, and it is Armand who has the final difficulty accepting the greatly reduced living conditions—wishing to keep his beloved in the world of the "fairy-tale princess." Verdi takes this idealization of Violetta one step further, denying her the vulgarity of Marguerite as well as the initial extravagance she displays when the couple moves to Bougival.

Verdi's opera combines the several trips back and forth to the city into one meeting, a meeting where Giorgio Germont pleads for the sake of his daughter's good name in much the same way Duval does in the textual version. Yet here again Verdi adds a great deal of dramatic flair, for much of the second act is taken up by the negotiations between Violetta and Germont. He argues in a meticulous fashion all of the hindrances which have or will crop up to destroy the couple's happiness, from the fear of slipping back into former ways of life, the onset of aging which will lead to diminished beauty, the fickleness of men's love as women age, and finally the angelic quality of his daughter who has done no wrong to anyone and yet who would be denied future happiness because of the choices of her brother. Germont finally offers that Violetta would be the angel of grace to let Alfredo go, an argument which finally seals the deal between them.

The stage-play and the opera have condensed the scenes of mounting tension, creating instead shorter sequences of sharply delivered lines and precise actions to provide the emphasis that longer descriptions in the novel would have created. There is little deliberation between Alfredo and his father, Germont appears suddenly, delivers his proclamation to Violetta, and leaves her to sacrifice herself for the sake of Alfredo and his family. Germont's attempt to pacify his broken-hearted son is not enough to relieve him of the villainous quality he has displayed in his ruthless dismissal of the innocent and devoted lovers. Verdi makes an unusual, un-realistic move to recapture the audience's respect—or to protect the contemporary expectation of a father as the family's protector as a positive role—by having Germont enter the vast ballroom to reproach the actions of his son, though a man of Germont's stature would not have entered the home of a courtesan in the first place. Verdi makes one final gesture to absolve Germont of the crime he has committed towards Violetta by having him send her a note of apology, which stands out in the performance as his words here are the only spoken words in the performance.

Verdi borrows heavily from Dumas' staged version in order to administer the right amount of jealousy and insult to the heroine, while keeping the pace of his operatic score. As Sala notes in his text, because of the popularity and long run of the *La Dame* stage-play, one would be hard pressed to believe Verdi did not attend a live performance, especially since he maintained certain key components in the narrative structure which played out better upon the live stage (59). The tension created between Varville and Armand at Olimpe's party, altered to Flora's in the opera, endures in Verdi's operatic version, keeping with Dumas' general structure for the scene. Armand comes to find Camille and seek reparation for the wrongs he has suffered, while Varville wishes to show Camille off as his property once again. Varville and Armand get wrapped up in a game of cards and words:

Armand: I would test the proverb: 'Happy at cards, unhappy in love!'...Hearts? Diamonds! Play diamonds, if you will win women! My friends, I hope to make a fortune tonight. And when I shall have made it, I will go and live in the country (Dumas 49).

Armand continues to taunt the crowd—aiming for Varville and Camille—by implying he will return to the country with the woman he had previously kept there, having now the money from cards to keep her at his side (Dumas 50). Camille begs Armand to leave Varville alone, to accept the new situation, but he continues to push her until she is forced to say she loves the Count rather than Armand.

Piave takes many of the key lines and replicates them for Verdi's libretto, right down to the crucial moment when Armand/Alfredo calls the crowd of partygoers to identify the woman before him. When they name her as Camille/Violetta, Alfredo unleashes the fury of his jealousy and pain upon her for all to see:

Alfredo: All that she owned this/ woman spent/ Upon her lover./ I, blind, infatuate fool./ Allowed it, well content/ It's not too late to clear me/ Of my dishonoring blame./ Stand witness. Thus I pay/ My earlier debt of shame. (MacMurray 1174).

At the conclusion of this speech, Alfredo throws money at Violetta's feet, finally causing her to faint from anxiety and fatigue and bringing upon himself the fury of the party crowd for his insolent treatment of such an "innocent" woman. The crowd is aghast much in the same way the audience was aghast at the slight shown by Germont in not removing his hat, and the audience is invited to be as shocked and judging of Alfredo's actions as the stage players.

Verdi's final act opens with the repetition of the music from the Prelude of the opera, a slow musical number, with minimal orchestration, which is designed to signal Violetta's despair and demise. The curtain opens upon Violetta's bedroom, the only time the audience is shown the ultimate private space of the courtesan's home, now turned into a sickroom for the dying woman.

The only festive music in this final scene comes from without Violetta's window as the carnival participants pass down the streets of Paris—a reflection of what Violetta's life was and will never be again. Verdi carefully constructs the musical score and stage direction to allow for minimal accompaniment and few characters, with only the final musical number "Prendi, quest'é l'immagine"—'Take it—this is my image'— inclusive of the majority of the principle players all returned to seek absolution from and attend to Violetta. Violetta's sacrifice and death are the focus in the final act, though a certain quality of absolution is provided by her dying in the arms of her returned lover.

La Traviata as an opera can be viewed as spectacle at its finest, containing several ensemble musical pieces, elaborate stage scenery, detailed costumes, toreadors, gypsies, and dance music. The exotic element of the gypsies and toreadors is infused into his third act as entertainment for Flora's party. The "fatted ox, festival, and toreador spectacle" bring out effectively what was seen by the nineteenth-century upper class as the "uncivilized" in man (Sala 106, 107). Verdi utilizes the popularity of the carnival—both in France and Italy—, dance, and the growing culture of Orientalism—seen in his future operas as with Puccini's—to heighten the spectacle of *La Traviata* and to appeal to a mass audience. Emilio Sala notes how Verdi exploited the "erotic essence" associated with waltz music in the nineteenth century by creating a score that includes a great number of dance rhythms throughout the work (68).

Verdi's tuneful creations here may serve as a distraction—after all Violetta has come to this event to seek refuge from her sadness—but the pieces act as signals of emotion. The party at Violetta's is certainly flamboyant and quickly-paced, yet the music maintains a fairly steady rhythm in comparison to the frequent, and sometimes frantic, ups and downs of Flora's ball. Repetitions in the musical score function in much the same way as repetitions in a text by

providing emphasis upon a particular character, a state of emotion, or in turn breaking that connection by deviating from the audience's expectations.

Adorno asserts in *The Culture Industry* that such "mass appealing" elements "run head on into the aesthetic barrier of reification" and only "enforce the public's desire for thoughtless entertainments and dull pleasures" (qtd in Lindenberger 68, 69). Other theorists like Marcia Citron provide contrast to this opinion by arguing that the "tuneful parts" of operas which were created for the purpose of catching in the minds of the patron "do not debase the value of opera but rather add a layer of meaning" (209). A "linkage of surface charm...gets at the reality behind the broad appeal" of the more "kitsch" opera performances, as *La Traviata* is often considered by critics (Citron 209).

Critics of opera may have conceived of *La Traviata* as "kitsch," but it has managed to remain one of the most popular operas worldwide, performed annually in many major opera houses like the Met in New York. Though now more than one-hundred years removed from the era of the courtesan in high society, Romanticism and Realism, Verdi's opera has kept the story of Dumas/Duplessis and Armand/Marguerite in popular culture while the historical narrative, novel, and stage-play have gradually vanished.

CHAPTER 3: FROM STAGE TO SCREEN

Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge!* is certainly not the first rendition of Dumas' s story regenerated through film. From 1907 to 1994 there have been at least 13 films based upon *La Dame aux Camélias* from silent films, films produced in several different languages, and finally the 14th installment in the musical form of *Moulin Rouge!* (2001)—in addition to countless filmed "live" operas as well operas in the format of regular film like Zeffirelli's *La Traviata*

(1983). In many ways, viewers perceive film to be "more realistic" than other media, though arguably in just as many ways it is less realistic than the art forms that have preceded it. The advances of the recording camera provide close-ups, sweeps of landscape, or other techniques of dramatic emphasis unavailable to an audience in an opera house, which can enhance the production by allowing for yet another re-visioning and recreation of the narrative (Citron 164).

Luhrmann does not aspire to make an exact replication of life via film; the movie attempts instead to recreate human connection through real emotion rather than real life scenarios. Though film utilizes fine-tuned editing techniques, musical overlay, and now digital reproduction to create the "essence" of being closer to reality than the media that have preceded it, film is ultimately pieced together from multiple camera shots that were recorded in a nonlinear sequence. Luhrmann's movie musical, however, situates itself at the very beginning in the realm of the romantic and artificial.

Moulin Rouge! prepares the audience for the spectacle that is to follow by shooting the introduction from the perspective of an audience member in a theater. The "theater house" is dark until the lights gradually go up to reveal a stage with a gilded frame and lush red and gold curtains. The silence is broken by the orchestra warming up, followed by the entrance of the conductor and clapping from the imaginary, unseen audience of which the viewer is a part. In a direct correlation to operatic technique, the musical introduction is a mix of the themes the audience will hear again during the production, highlights that set the tone for the narrative. Eventually the camera zooms in to the scene of Montmartre and Moulin Rouge, and the audience is brought "into" the story through this technique.

Set to modern musical numbers and inclusive of animation and playful scenic recreations, Luhrmann reinvents the narrative to make the story more "modern" in its treatment and appeal while maintaining the spirit of the nineteenth-century operatic spectacle. The film maintains strong operatic ties throughout, "employing a nexus of creative tools that resonate powerfully with those of mid-nineteenth century Verdian dramaturgy" (Hudson 261). Elizabeth Hudson demonstrates how Luhrmann reproduces the "use of comic effect to highlight unfolding tragedy, the marshalling of musical numbers to communicate the central story directly, and an emphasis on repetition to enhance and inspire emotional effects" (261-262).

Music's power to persuade—harkening back to the Orpheus myth once again—holds in the film as it did in Verdi's opera (Hudson 260). Christian, the Romantic hero, proves his worth to the Bohemians—who follow the mantra of "truth, freedom, and love" are the quintessential elements to life—and lands his first job as a writer through his spontaneous "creation" of "The Hills are Alive;" and he only wins the attention and heart of Satine when he ceases to deliver lines of poetry and begins to belt out love songs instead (Hudson 268). Whenever the relationship between the lovers becomes threatened by Satine's doubt, the commercial world demanding the performance of a job, or Christian's jealousy, the pair need only remember their "secret song" which acts as an unbreakable vow between them (Hudson 268). In the final ensemble number for the film, where Christian has finally decided to give up Satine and is walking away from her, we see this strength of music "to convey truth" once again. The magical sitar—not the sitar player—is the deliverer of truth, "played" by Toulouse who, in a moment of elation, finally remembers his lines "The greatest thing you'll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return!" (Hudson 270). Though Christian pauses for a moment at this revelation, he resumes his walk to exile, but Satine takes the message to heart and begins to sing the secret

song to bring them back together again. Unfortunately for the lovers, death conquers in the end, just as it had in the previous renditions of the narrative.

Social structure changes from the 1850s to 2000s, especially in regard to what is deemed romantic and idyllic, necessitate alterations to the story. *Moulin Rouge!* dismantles much of the original class markers maintained in the previous recreations of Dumas' narrative, perhaps because the target audience would be less understanding or accepting of these markers or simply because the changes made are in response to modern views of what is "romantic" and idyllic. The absolute infamy proscribed for the courtesan has changed, somewhat, with time. There is less of a requirement to justify the life of the courtesan and paint Violetta/Satine as an angelic person caught up in the lifestyle by twists of fate, and hence the near removal of the father figure who must save the family name from slander in order to maintain good standing within society.

Almost fifty years after the "action" of Verdi's opera takes place, Luhrmann opts to play with modern conceptions of the romantic by setting the scene in bohemian Montmartre—a nod to the final resting place of Duplessis—at the turn of the twentieth century. Satine is the highly prized courtesan amidst Harold Zidler's "Diamond Dogs," and she dreams of one day becoming a successful actress and escaping from the life in which she is trapped, fitting in accordance with Violetta's feelings regarding her lifestyle as more fatalistic rather than of her own making. Satine aspires to be like "the great Sarah Bernhardt," but this reference does not have the same connotations it would for the people of 1890s France. The immoral connotations of becoming a stage actress, which were still common in the nineteenth-century, removed by time and social changes—are replaced with the concept of actress as a more respectable and desired course of "career" change.

Christian, a penniless writer becomes the narrative's idealistic hero and holds true to the modern romantic trope of the "starving artist". Though we are told by Christian that Satine is the most prized courtesan in Zidler's troupe, we never meet any of her other suitors besides the malevolent Duke. The Duke—a nameless, odious figure who lives in the Gothic Tower—represents physical possession in opposition to idyllic love. By keeping the Duke as Christian's rival for Satine's affections, Luhrmann maintains the friction between love without money and money without love as well as focuses the drama—like Verdi before him—on the love between the single pair. Because the Duke's money is needed to support the Moulin Rouge—adding a responsibility for the support of others to Satine's decision—Christian and Satine conspire to hide their relationship behind the guise of a staged play which will earn financial gain and a better social reputation for the company, making Satine a "real star" and the Duke a "patron of the arts."

Naturally for there to be a change in the story, there must be conflict of some kind, here manifested by Satine's deteriorating physical condition brought about by her consumption as well as by rising jealousies between the Duke and Christian. There is an obvious hero and an obvious villain in Luhrmann's film, making it easier for the audience members to assign blame. Physical possession without love and the sacrifice of happiness for money are the enemies to "following your star" and "being who you really are."

The ideal of love as the only true happiness in life, the concept of the greatest importance amongst any and all others is what carries Luhrmann's film through its more stylistic design choices. A singing moon, a walk in the clouds, a spin around a much reduced Eifel Tower are all conceivable—or rather are representative of the idealistic mind of a couple in love. Because Satine and Christian are united together in love, they feel as if anything and everything is

possible—heightened by the color schema of their scenes together which are softer in lighting, have the airy impressions of country picnics, flowing gowns, and sunshine—in contrast to the “dark and gloomy” scenery which dominates places in the story where the Duke begins to triumph. Though the audience is aware that the moon does not sing, the Eifel Tower is not the height of a man, we are invited to enjoy the idealism present in the narrative, the imagined hope that things will work themselves out to balance out the harshness often experienced in life.

Modern ideas of the “working woman” have altered in their direction, shifting opinion slightly to be more accepting of a woman having to work to survive. When the modern audience is introduced to Satine the courtesan and her entourage of suitors, we are not meant to be revolted by her situation but more inclined to accept her on her own terms. Unlike earlier versions of the story, Luhrmann does not provide any explication as to how Satine came to be the star of the Moulin Rouge—there is neither generation of pity for the fallen woman nor a list of social excuses for her selling her body for money. Perhaps Luhrmann excludes the background details because modern audiences are familiar enough with the trope of “the fallen woman” to not need any details of explication. How Satine came into this position does not matter for the narrative, but how she will escape it and the trials she must endure are what carry the story.

By utilizing popular, contemporary musical numbers with which the audience is more familiar, Luhrmann makes the viewer “experience the story” by witnessing it unfold and also “participate” in the story by “singing along with it” (Hudson 269). While movies, with the director's guidance of filming, editing, and reconstructing, can be just as guilty of “appealing to the culture industry”—Adorno's phrase for the production and control of culture through media—and causing the audience to no longer be able to “separate the artificial construct from the natural phenomena,” there is a generation of “present-ness and togetherness” created in the

movie theater as in the opera house (Weiner 78, Lindenberger 37). All participants gather together to "listen to the same music, see the same performance, and presumably experience the same emotions" (Lindenberger 37).

The music from *Moulin Rouge!* takes this process one step further by combining "individual memories experienced" by the audience member in relation to the popular music and combining them with the overlay of the narrative—what the lyrics and musical pieces convey in the depicted scene (Hudson 277). With the exception of "Come What May," all of the musical pieces in Luhrmann's film are mixtures of other well-known songs, and these songs are likewise revised to alternate paces and pitches to rework the meaning. Rather than bring one single meaning to the scene with an original musical number, the meaning is layered with the original song's evocation, as well as with the experience of each individual who has previously encountered the piece (Hudson 274).

Madonna's "Like a Virgin" could have been connected to concepts of innocence, seduction, and more playful love, but the rendition given by Zidler and The Duke twists the musical piece to a darker, more animalistic physical consummation, which is for some more uncomfortable to hear in contrast to its original. "Roxanne" is given a more seductive twist to pair with Satine's visit to the Duke's—in an effort to appease him and quell his doubts of her fidelity towards him. Overlaid with sensual Spanish tango music, the music is meant to be more expressive of the emotional pain experienced by Christian, brought on by his sexual jealousy and personal feeling of helplessness to protect the woman he loves. The Beatles "All You Need is Love" acts as the mantra for Christian and his group of writers and actors—anyone who does not entirely buy into this ideal is tossed into the loathsome crowd of Phillistines alongside Christian's

cranky father seen at the start of the film, the Duke, and other various "obvious" treacherous types littered throughout the film.

Luhrmann remains in keeping with Verdi's choice to make the heroine's voice a failing one—reminding the audience of her waning health and fragile state in spite of the independent persona Violetta/Satine puts forth. There are multiple moments within the film where Satine belts out several lines of a song only to be suddenly stricken by coughing or gasping for breath. What the filmed version allows for is a more close-up observation of Satine's demise, which is not reproducible in staged versions as the audience members are much farther away from the actors. The advantage filmic versions have over the staged versions is the ability to zoom in to see the flushed face of Satine, or tears coming down her face as she tells Christian she is opting to chose the Duke, or other subtle body movements which would be missed on the stage.

Not in keeping with the hopelessly romantic ideals of "true love" at all costs, the opening and closing of the film, show a still poor Christian sitting at his typewriter in Montmartre recalling his tale of love. One could here wonder if the choice by Luhrmann is reminiscent of Dumas writing *La Dame*; by providing the greater public with the love story, Christian will find emotional peace as well as financial success. Yet we as the audience are only left to speculate. The Moulin Rouge is shown at the opening of the film as an abandoned building, Christian a poor, emotional wreck who still has not recovered in any sense from the loss of Satine—which begs the question how he has managed to survive up until this introductory point—and there is yet to be a positive assertion that "love conquers all things." Not unlike a tragic fault in a classic tale, dreaming or idealizing too much only brings failure. When the delicate balance between life and fiction is broken, only havoc and ruin remains for the characters upon the stage and audience members alike who, like the proverbial Icarus, flew too close to the sun to remain unscathed.

The audience is connected to life by the familiar imagery and concepts and then distanced from it by the hyper-mediated splicing of songs, "live performances," and computer-generated images. Even Adorno, despite his often harsh criticism of opera and film, saw the positive potential in "the very act of singing itself: 'The singer's voice seeks to catch something of the reflection of meaning for life itself'" (Halliwell 59). Opera and the "kitsch" modern musical can function to bring "empirical people who are reduced to their natural essence" to a state of "transfiguration and exaltation" through the power of music (Halliwell 59). *Moulin Rouge!* preserves the catchy, flashy elements of Verdi's original work—dazzling scenery, easily recognizable tunes, hopeless romantic plot—and re-mediate them for modern viewers.

Moulin Rouge! manipulates musical meaning by recreating a narrative that is distanced from the viewer in its having been pre-recorded and pieced together in a manner which does not mimic everyday life, and yet closer to the viewer via the musical elements and camera shots which bring the viewer back into the storyline. The film uses the trope of doomed love, a love which does manage to conquer most obstacles but in the end cannot fight off the most powerful of obstacles—death. Like the staged versions of *La Dame*—and untrue to the life events of Dumas and Duplessis—Satine is reunited with her love only to die in his arms. Such a move within the narrative is decisively more poignant, more emotionally wrenching for audience members to witness the idea of coming so close to happiness only to fall short at the end in the most tragic and inescapable of ways.

CONCLUSIONS

Ultimately all of the versions of Dumas and Marie Duplessis's relationship recreate life events in such a manner as to compliment and reflect those life events. The factual accounts of their relationship balance out the fictional and vice versa, creating a blend of life and fiction. If what Conway expresses is true, that all narratives function as a way for human beings to comprehend and make sense of their relationships with other human beings, to learn and negotiate situations within the past and present in order to reconfigure actions and responses in the future, the textual, dramatic, operatic, and filmic recreations of *La Dame* explore the multifaceted human responses to the original life events.

Dumas' narrative reflects the fact that each story is multifaceted—as much a response to the past and present as original creation—and to minimize a narrative to authorial intent or an explication of social pressures and expectations at the time of publication reduces the complexity of narrative generation. To simply dismiss the textual version of *La Dame* and its initial staged version as exploitive methods for Dumas to make quick money to settle his debts, would ignore his continued attachment to the idea of Marie Duplessis and the keeping of some of his private letters, in contrast to the majority of which he destroyed. In trying to explain the text as what Dumas might have wished had happened in life is to act in discordance with the facts that he became a staunch moralist against prostitution in his later years, that he tended to always support his father despite his father's flamboyant lifestyle, and that he desperately needed money to settle debts and saw the public excitement over the legend of Marie as prime ground for fiction.

Bolter and Grusin's *Remediation: Understanding New Media* shows how stories or objects are remade or remediated via other forms in an effort to heighten the "immediacy" and

"reality" of the subject or thing (23, 273). These authors argue that each remediation is offered as a new and "even better" version than the previous one (68-69). Bolter and Grusin explain how each new adaptation offers a more immediate and "real" example which strives to improve in some manner upon the older version, to incorporate past elements of which we are familiar and accepting and altering them to better erase the medium itself or to have the audience or "consumer" of the work lose him or herself in the storyline (68-69). Effectively the remediation Bolter and Grusin expound upon in their text, I argue, is not simply a movement forward but constantly reflexive.

The novel remediated earlier forms of travel narratives, journals, and letters, and its development revised how the earlier narrative types would be composed in the future. For Dumas and his father, fiction served as a way to mediate and explore the events of real life, though Dumas did not adapt his life to reflect his fiction as much as Dumas père. Just as Dumas could not reconcile the discrepancies within his personality and feelings, his work of fiction regarding those feelings will be as complex, if not more so when the interpretation is inclusive of the thoughts and expectations of the readership, as his life. *La Dame* functions as a sounding board of expression, a critique on societal values, and an indulgence in impossible romantic expectations.

The staged play remediates the performance elements of the novel's account into a physical public performance, a performance that is a key component of the lives of the real individuals of the nineteenth century. Because of the popularity of the theater, the play houses were perfect places to go and socialize, examine and critique other members of society, engage in gossip, as well as witness a performance of a play. Dumas' stage play adds to this effect, for Marie Duplessis earned her fame by being seen at the theater and opera, using the social settings

as tools to market her value. Ideas borrowed from life are in turn incorporated back into accepted modes of behavior and recycled through the different mediums.

Operatic tradition borrowed from the theater and the ballet, incorporating theatrical elements, dance, as well as music to convey meaning and deliver a performance which would draw audiences to the spectacle. Verdi's *La Traviata* adopted many of the changes Dumas made to his stage performance which both cut back on the amount of dialogue and time needed for the narrative to unfold and added emphasis to crucial moments within the structure of the story to attract the required attention and delineate importance. The popularity of his musical productions not only entertained audience members, but also found reflection and remediation through their reproduction outside of the opera house. Luhrmann's film exemplifies this form of individual remediation by taking existing, spliced musical numbers to create a new meaning for audiences, while at the same time maintaining parts of the original meaning and authorship in combination with the individual listener's private experiences and memories associated with the tune.

All of the various productions of Dumas' narrative function to reflect societal expectations, hopes, fears and conflicts through their presentation, especially in regards to the earlier stage productions which faced some difficulty to reach the public due to their "inappropriate" content. In later depictions of Duplessis and her fictional counterparts, we can see the need to explain her situation fall away, revealing in the filmic version a woman who is more "in charge" of her situation, though she still cannot escape the cycle of commerce and performance. Though each new performance appears less guarded in its presentation of the courtesan, all of the narratives draw upon romantic tropes altered by time and perception.

By evaluating the varied productions of Dumas' *La Dame* and taking into consideration how fictional events reflect and recreate life events, we can evaluate how each revision is connected to the original and how these recreations are also original narratives. The "individual life-stories" that are "embedded in social relationships and structures" continue to demonstrate how we negotiate "individual life trajectories and collective forces" within our social framing (Maynes 3). With each new participant—reader, viewer, listener, writer—the narratives continue to be broken down and "remediated" through the assimilation of the old and manipulation of that original material into something new.

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