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**Classification, Containment, Contamination, and the Courtesan:
The Grisette, Lorette, and Demi-Mondaine
in Nineteenth-Century French Fiction**

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in Nineteenth-Century French Fiction**

by

Courtney Ann Sullivan, B.A., M.A.,

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Roger Ricondo and to my parents; I am eternally grateful to them for their love, support, and encouragement.

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This dissertation presents an analysis of the *demi-mondaine*'s evolution, using feminist and Bourdieusian theory to interpret the social, political, and cultural factors that permitted her ascent and attendant demonization. I situate the *demi-mondaine* in relation to her predecessors -- the courtesan and the *lorette* -- and document the prostitute's response to her own social alienation in the autobiographical writings of the Second Empire attributed to *demi-mondaines* like Lola Montès, Céleste de Chabrillan, and Marguerite Bellanger in a way that has not previously been described in critical works on French literature. Each period examined in the work -- the July Monarchy, the Second Republic, and the Second Empire -- spawned a new incarnation of the prostitute to match the new social transformations. In the case of the *lorette* and the *demi-mondaine*, new words were coined, whereas in the case of the courtesan, a line was drawn separating the idealized ancient courtesan from the demonized contemporary one to solidify and correspond to male fantasies about significant changes of the period. My purpose

is to trace the way writers such as Hugo, Dumas, Balzac, Sue, the Goncourt brothers, Flaubert, Dumas *filis*, and Zola employed the figure of the prostitute to work through their ambivalence to changes brought about by capitalism, modernity, revolution, as well as evolving gender roles. Specifically, these writers played out their distress through the figure of the *lorette*, *courtisane*, and *demi-mondaine* in an effort to assuage their anxieties through the containment of these unruly figures. Hence, these authors generated a complex system of social classification ranking prostitute to give the illusion of both controlling her and mastering these overwhelming forces of change. This illusion of control takes the form of scapegoating the prostitute, for if her lawlessness is eradicated through her destruction, containment or punishment in the narratives, then the actions of the marginalized prostitute are kept in check, thereby reestablishing a sense of order. Textual analyses of the memoirs written by *demi-mondaines*, the plays, the *physiologies*, the *caricatures*, and the political pamphlets I found in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand complement the canonical works I examine.

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Introduction

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the myth in French fiction of the *demi-mondaine* as the embodiment of depraved sexuality and political corruption had replaced the romantic notion of the harlot with the heart of gold. Her dramatic transformation from the sentimental prostitute who regrets her tainted past in Hugo's *Marion de Lorme* (1831) into the power-hungry, man-eating spendthrift in Zola's *Nana* (1880), reflects fundamental changes in myths of illicit femininity. These myths, I argue, emerged in response to uncertainties and attendant anxieties about the new political systems and social orders in post-revolutionary France.

Through a reading of representative novels, short stories, plays, caricatures, and *physiologies* from 1830-1880, I will map out the complex system of social classification and myths generated by writers in nineteenth-century France to control – albeit in an illusory manner -- the *demi-mondaine* (as well as her predecessors-the courtesan and the *lorette*). The myths they created are “representative of certain fundamental concerns such as life and death, fear of the unknown, and the supernatural.”¹ Thus, the myths elaborated and perpetuated by authors, artists and playwrights expressed their anxieties about the uncertainty their society was facing in light of class instability, political uprisings, and cultural legitimacy. As the century progressed, the economy, revolutionized by the surge in industrialization, shifted from an agrarian system to an industrial one.

¹ Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi, “Myth,” *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1995) 196-197.

By the early 1850s, many of the bourgeois were extremely rich, making their fortunes from factories, the railroad industry, and stock market speculation. The shift in wealth also triggered a shift in power. In the works I examine, writers associated tensions over class mobility, transfers of wealth and political power, and qualms about cultural legitimacy with the figure of the prostitute, fantasizing that these problems could be eradicated through her destruction, containment or punishment. Only in keeping the actions of the marginalized prostitute in check could some sense of order be restored.

This dissertation will document the emergence of the *demi-mondaine*, locating the literary traditions out of which she evolved and plotting her rise in terms of political and economic transformations. Although there are several excellent critical works written on representations of prostitutes in nineteenth-century French literature, none has focused exclusively on the emergence of the *demi-mondaine*, nor has any addressed in detail the numerous terms used to describe the prostitute. Armed with Bourdieusian theory, I identify the position the *demi-mondaine* holds on the complicated social ladder that classifies prostitutes in a way that has not previously been described in critical works on French literature. My purpose is to compare the myths revolving around her to the realities of the highly contested struggles over class, economics, politics, gender, and sexuality during the July Monarchy, the Second Republic and the Second Empire. My dissertation provides an analysis of the *demi-mondaine*'s evolution, using feminist and cultural theory to interpret the social, political, and cultural factors that permitted her ascent and attendant demonization.

In Chapter one, I argue that the figure of the *demi-mondaine* evolves out of earlier French prototypes of the prostitute: the *lorette* and the courtesan. Using Pierre Bourdieu's theories of social space and its transformations, I analyze and define the overdetermined terms used to classify the prostitute in all her incarnations in order to uncover how they embody fears of social instability. I employ Bourdieu's theories of social hierarchies to determine why French writers and sociologists go to such lengths to rank the prostitutes.

Bourdieu argues in *Distinction* that the structure of the social world is based on a system of "classificatory schemes" whose divisions are determined and reinforced according to the interests of the individuals who dominate.² For Bourdieu, the perceptions of these social classifications "function below the level of consciousness and discourse," and thus "these principles of division are common to all agents of the society and make possible the production of a common, meaningful world, a common-sense world" (468). Consequently, hierarchies exist because they give a sense of meaning, a sense of order to the world. In respect to this scheme, I argue that the efforts to classify the prostitute stem from insecurity about social stability in post-revolutionary France. The dominant class of patriarchs, anxious about its unstable hegemony given the tumultuous scheme of social order, unconsciously projected its fears onto the figure of the prostitute, the "collective screen" that Rita Felski claims concretized their worries.³ (The patriarchy, according to Heidi Hartmann, is "a set of social

² Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984) 471.

³ Rita Felski, "Modernity and Feminism," *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995) 1.

relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women.”⁴ If the prostitute represented the disorderly social pariah who defied all categorization and who refused to play by the rules of social convention, then she must be located, and then subjugated to the will of the dominant group if any sense of order is to be restored. In other words, if one can master at least one unruly member of society, then a sense of dominance can be restored. A direct correlation then exists between the dominant group’s need to dominate and its ability to prove its superiority. According to Bourdieu, the dominant group defines itself in terms of its preeminence over the lower, hostile "outsider" group (479). In this dissertation, I define the superior group in the literary works analyzed as the bourgeois who are rich and who vie for an increase in social prestige and the "outsider" group as the outlawed prostitutes who are often destitute and ostracized.

In the pages to follow, I examine sociologist A. J. B. Parent-Duchâtelet’s influential *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris* (1837) and Alexandre Dumas’s *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes* (1843), which collectively sought to expose the threat the prostitute posed to public health and moral order in pseudo-scientific discourses that equate the female body with pollution, corruption, and disease. Parent’s ambitious study, which explores how prostitution affects public hygiene,

⁴ Hartmann explains: “Though patriarchy is hierarchal and men of different classes, races, or ethnic groups have different places in the patriarchy, they are also united in their shared relationship of dominance over women; they are dependent on each other to maintain that domination.” Heidi Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union,” *Women and Revolution* ed. Lydia Sargent (Boston: South End Press, 1981) 14-15.

morality, and the administration that seeks to control it, was used by the Prefecture to justify the century-long system of regulation. Administrators cited repeatedly Parent's theory that the prostitute's unbridled sexuality could escalate the spread of syphilis and destroy moral order as reasons for implementing a harsh, often arbitrary system of surveillance. Though Parent claims to categorize the prostitute according to scientific analyses, when read in conjunction with Bourdieu, his work functions as a confirmation of the class system as conceived by the dominant group to which he belongs. Indeed, Parent's study may have appealed so much to writers of novels and plays for the rest of the century because his "scientific" theories added credibility to their fictions about prostitutes, which were in turn closely tied to the invisible ideologies of the dominant discourse.

My sociological reading of the way nineteenth-century French writers represent the prostitutes in terms of hierarchies and struggles for dominance complements the psychoanalytical research already conducted by Charles Bernheimer on the nineteenth-century French male artist's fascination with the harlot and his desire to contain her contaminating sexuality. Though he mentions several different names for prostitutes, in *Figures of Ill Repute*, Bernheimer collapses them in two broad categories -- the "prostitute" and the "courtesan."⁵ Bernheimer acknowledges the many terms employed to classify the prostitutes, but does not delve into what the individual categories mean. He maintains: "The fact that categorization persisted throughout the century as a tool of administrative

⁵ Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997) 6.

science is significant, but the categories themselves are of little value for interpretation" (6). I will argue that the categories of *lorette*, *courtisane*, and *demi-mondaine* are indeed important in our understanding of the social construction of the prostitute in nineteenth-century France.

This drive to codify the prostitute figures in Dumas's work, *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes*, which was penned just six years after Parent's study and which is the first example of how Parent's research helped shape the portrayals of prostitutes in the ensuing decades. A curious hybrid of sociology and storytelling, Dumas's work borrows heavily from Parent's work in order to achieve credibility, for he indicates at the beginning of the work that a significant part of his work was borrowed from "le précieux ouvrage de Parent-Duchatelet."⁶ Faithful to the Cartesian esprit, Dumas employs a tripartite plan, dividing his work into three distinct categories, and ranking prostitutes in terms of classes that correspond to the French social order in the mid-1800s. The *fille* represents the lower classes, the *lorette* the bourgeoisie, and the *courtisane* the aristocracy. In all three chapters, he tries to categorize and explain the Other in order to defuse her threat. But as menacing as this "Other" is, the stranger is necessary in defining social roles, for Bourdieu explains: "Social identity lies in difference, and difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the greatest threat" (479). If Dumas can identify and define who and what the outsider is (in this case the prostitute), then he can in turn construct his vision of social reality according to his own superiority and dominance (479).

⁶ Alexandre Dumas, *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes* (1843; Paris: Flammarion, 2000) 14.

The classifying scheme used by Parent and Dumas to give the illusion of containing the prostitute outlined in the first half of the chapter is expanded in the second half of the chapter by a discussion of the role vision plays in the project of containment. In *De la prostitution de Paris*, Parent attempts to track the prostitute by assigning her a number/card when she registers with the police.⁷ Making her submit to monthly exams and encouraging her to remain within hermetically sealed brothels is a way to make her submit to social order and prevent the "exposure" and "corruption" bourgeois women would suffer if they encountered these so-called "pariahs"⁸ in public. In *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes*, Dumas deliberately continues Parent's project by classifying prostitutes in terms of a hierarchy and exposing their "ruses" in order to keep them in line, for he states that "les lois et la morale ont mis la fille publique au band de la société" (21). Moreover, he states: "Peut-être parviendrons-nous même, après Parent-Duchâtelet, à en dire quelque chose de nouveau et d'inconnu" (21). The recurrence of words like "lumière" and "oeil" throughout the chapter on the *filles* demonstrates the essential role played by vision in defining and containing the prostitute. The word "lumière" first appears in his footnote to the chapter on "*Filles*."⁹ Dumas calls upon the "lumières" of some of his more "experienced" friends whom he does not expose ("en mettant tout à coup leur science en lumière") for "fear" of wounding their modesty (14). "Lumière" in the first

⁷ Alexandre-Jean Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris*, 2 vols, (Paris: J. B. Ballière, 1837).

⁸ Dumas refers to prostitutes as social pariahs and lepers who need to be isolated from the honest women they could potentially corrupt (21).

⁹ Dumas 14.

instance refers to wisdom, a revelation, while "lumière" in the second half of the sentence implies a certain type of exposure. The word "oeil" first appears in Dumas's discussion of the mysterious expulsion of *filles* from the Palais-Royal. He describes the event as "Un de ces profonds mystères de police, invisible à l'oeil du profane et sur lequel on a beaucoup discuté, sans que la discussion ait fait jaillir aucune lumière" (20). Once again, Dumas implies that there is a hidden aspect of prostitution, a secret that he can bring to light in this exposé of the prostitute's world. The word "oeil" and its plural "yeux" highlight the need to "see," because the power to see ultimately enables one to locate the hidden threat of the unruly prostitute.

The ability to see not only enables men to pursue (or avoid) prostitutes, it also plays an important role in masculine subjecthood, for it endows men with the ability to control, which is central to the sense of mastery. According to Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," man takes the active subject position through vision by subjugating the woman with his look.¹⁰ The woman, as the passive object of his gaze, lacks subjecthood, Mulvey contends, and thereby functions merely as an object onto which "the determining male gaze projects its fantasy" (19). Although Mulvey's groundbreaking essay refers to the male gaze in cinema, her use of psychoanalytical theory, when applied to Dumas's work, reveals the extent to which his obsession with "seeing" the prostitute involves locating her so he can project his fantasies of patriarchal domination onto her. The

¹⁰Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989) 14-15.

fact that the prostitute's acts are largely uncontrolled disturbs Dumas, who states: "Ce métier une fois adopté, voyons l'emploi de sa journée, ses joies, ses plaisirs, ses douleurs, pendant tout le temps qu'elle disparaît à nos yeux" (22). The prostitute escapes into the darkness -- and though Dumas intends to locate why and how she does disappear, he never quite accomplishes this task. For Dumas, the hidden aspect of prostitution (the illicit activity the prostitute undertakes in dark alleys and stairwells) troubles him, for one needs the ability to recognize the prostitute in order to put an end to her efforts to disguise herself as a "femme honnête" (21). The capacity to observe not only facilitates the pursuit or avoidance of prostitutes, but it is also essential to masculine subjecthood as it symbolizes the ability to control. Dumas says: "À un jour venu, à une époque dite, à un âge presque uniforme, la fine publique disparaît dans les profondeurs de la société, comme les démons qui s'abîment dans le second dessous d'un théâtre" (22). Though it may be difficult to track her down, the prostitute must be located, otherwise there will be no screen onto which Dumas may project his fantasies of exposure and control. More important, however, is the fact that agency and subject position are implicitly possible when the female is away from the dominating force of the male gaze. Thus when she escapes the male field of vision, she deliberately defies patriarchal domination because she is free to act as she wishes. Dumas claims that when the prostitute is left to her own devices that she will act as an agent of contamination who will eventually erode society by committing lewd, dishonest acts -- such as showing her legs in public or duping provincial males newly arrived in Paris -- that undermine male control.

The idea of an all-encompassing vision calls to mind Michel Foucault's discussion of Jeremy Bentham's plans for the Panopticon in *Surveiller et punir*. As the ultimate tool in disciplinary technology, this prison device would give the inmates the impression that they were constantly being watched. The inmate, never exactly certain whether the warden in the tower was observing his behavior in his cell or not, would act as his own prison guard, assuming that surveillance was constant. Foucault explains:

'Discipline' may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a 'physics' or an 'anatomy' of power, a technology. And it may be taken over either by 'specialized' institutions (the penitentiaries or 'houses of correction' of the nineteenth century), or by institutions that use it as an essential instrument for a particular end (schools, hospitals), [...] or finally by state apparatuses whose major, if not exclusive, function is to assure that discipline reigns over society as a whole (the police).¹¹

Dumas' project embraces the same principle of surveillance. Though he may not see or "know" everything about the world of the prostitute, he writes as though he does as if to impress a sense of mastery over the uncontrollable on the reader. For Dumas, the *lorette* represents modernity and all its instability. Therefore it follows that if the uncontrollable is the modern, and the prostitute represents modernity, then the illusion of controlling the prostitute enables one to control the forces of modernity.

The second chapter examines how the *lorette* (whose namesake is taken from the newly-erected church, Notre-Dame de Lorette in her Parisian

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 215-216.

neighborhood) prefigures the *demi-mondaine*. Chapter Two consists of two parts. In Part I, I use Bourdieu's theory to demonstrate how and why the *lorette* corresponds to the rank of bourgeois in the social ladder. I establish her ties to the bourgeoisie based on my reading of her in Dumas, Gavarni and Alhoy. After demonstrating how the myths about the *lorette* reflect the fears about the bourgeois parvenus, I then analyze how these social fears tie in with anxieties about the *lorette's* sexuality and uncover the narrative strategies the Goncourt brothers and Sue employ in order to curb her threat.

One way of subduing the anxieties and fantasies woven around the problematized figure of the *lorette* is to contrast her with the *grisette*, a figure Romantic writers idealized during the 1830s. Understanding what they admired and glorified about the *grisette* sheds light on what they considered revolting about the *lorette* and *demi-mondaine*. Whereas the *grisette* represents docility and stability for the writers explored in chapter two, the *lorette* evokes aggressiveness and change. Indeed, Lucette Cyzba's claim that the *lorette's* emergence corresponds with the rise of the bourgeoisie in the July Monarchy and the Second Empire supports the argument that part of her menace stems from the social upheaval of the mid-nineteenth century.¹²

The *Grande Encyclopédie* defines the *grisette* as a "Jeune fine de petite condition, d'ordinaire coquette et galante. On la nommait ainsi au XVIIIe siècle parce que les jeunes ouvrières portaient généralement de la grisette, étoffe grise

¹² Lucette Cyzba, "Paris et la Lorette," *Paris au XIXe siècle. Aspects d'un mythe littéraire* (Lyon: PUF de Lyon, 1984).

de peu de valeur."¹³ Initially, then, "grisette" referred to the rough cloth used to make women's dresses. But as the *Dictionnaire Historique de la langue française* explains: "Par métonymie pour ("fine vêtue de grisette") le mot a le sens (1665), aujourd'hui vieilli, de fine de condition modeste, de mœurs faciles. Cet emploi évoque surtout l'époque romantique et la *grisette* est un type social reconnu et littérairement très exploité (autour de bohème, artiste, etc)."¹⁴ The hard-working *grisette*, who barely earns enough to survive, forgets her misery by pairing up with a poet/student living on the modest income his family provides him. Her self-sacrifice and suffering make her a romantic feminine ideal in Jules Janin's 1840 "La Grisette,"¹⁵ a *physiologie* which appeared in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*.¹⁶ Janin paints the *grisette* as a charming little creature who accepts her underprivileged and lowly place in society. He idealizes her as the type of woman who remains who she is (a poor seamstress or garment worker) and where she is (a member of the lower class) without trying to climb the social ladder or

¹³ "grisette," *La Grande Encyclopédie*, Vol. 19.

¹⁴ "grisette," *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, 1994 edition.

¹⁵ It should be noted that Janin adopted the same romantic stance in his preface to Alexandre Dumas fils's *La Dame aux camélias*, glorifying the misery, abnegation and tragic end of Marie Duplessis, the real-life Marguerite.

¹⁶*Les Français peints par eux-mêmes; encyclopédie morale du dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: L. Curmer, 1840-1842). This 8-volume compilation of illustrated *physiologies* by writers such as Balzac, Gautier, and de Beauvoir, continues in the tradition of la Bruyère's *Les caractères*. The introduction to the 1861 version labels the work as "l'étude de mœurs contemporaines" which identifies the key characters in this "comédie" being acted out in chaotic contemporary society (4). According to the introduction, society naturally organized itself around life at the court and life in the city during the Ancien Régime. However in post-revolutionary France, rapid urbanization blurred societal boundaries: "Mais aujourd'hui rien n'existe plus dans ses limites naturelles, aujourd'hui que tous ces rare éléments d'une grande société sont confondus au hasard, arrivez tous à cette curée de comédies qu'il faut curée sur le fait, vous les malicieux observateurs de ce temps-là!" (4). This work then served as an encyclopedic guide to the citizen perplexed by the novel "personnages" featured in the modern comedy of daily French life.

strike out on her own. Rather, she is "sensible," and "peu intéressée," according to the *Grande Encyclopédie* (which succinctly sums up Janin's *physiologie*), and her "condition est toujours misérable." Janin praises her dedication and humility, claiming she is as hard-working as an ant, very pretty, yet humble enough to know that she should not try to outshine her upper-class customers in spite of her superior beauty. Janin claims that she lives on love and rejoices on Sundays, the day her student lover takes her out to the countryside.

The little happiness she does experience with him, however, ends when he grows too ambitious and pursues a legitimate career and marriage. However much she encourages and supports his endeavors, he still abandons her. As a result, the heartbroken *grisette* commits suicide or becomes a courtesan, or marries a brute who beats her. According to Janin, not all *grisettes* met such tragic ends - some even end up with happy lives. The lucky few like Jenny, the "bouquetière," settle into in wealthy marriages. He praises "*la bouquetière*," because in her youth she willfully posed nude for artists, encouraged them to pursue their art and became their lover. Even after acquiring legitimate status when she becomes a duchess, she still inspires praise from artists and writers because she places art and self-sacrifice above her own self interest in order to foster happiness and fortune in them by continuing to pose for artists long after she is married. In short, Janin idealizes the *grisette* because she provides the artist with financial and moral support as well as sexual gratification without ever demanding anything in return. She is non-threatening because she is, in the words of Janin, "soumise à l'artiste, aveuglément soumise tant qu'il s'agissait de l'art" (314).

The character of the *lorette*, on the other hand, is the antithesis of the *grisette* because she is constructed in post-Romantic discourse as self-interested, ambitious, greedy, and calculating. In order to define her, Alhoy compares his subject to the *grisette*. In his chapter on "Classement des spécialtiés" in the *Physiologie de la lorette*, Alhoy contrasts the *lorette* with the *grisette* to show what she is not, which again evokes Bourdieu's notion of "différence."¹⁷ The *lorette* uses "love" (sex with men) to secure for herself relative independence and financial security. Unlike Janin's romantic *grisette* who remains complacently in her place at the bottom of the social ladder despite all the temptations she faces when dealing with wealthy female customers, the *lorette* demands riches and luxury. While the *grisette* associates herself with a lover with lowly financial status (the aspiring artist/poet or student), the *lorette* aligns herself with the upwardly mobile bourgeois. The *grisette* lives in a small apartment in the Latin Quarter, once an inexpensive neighborhood populated by students. The *lorette*, however, lives in la Nouvelle-Athènes, a new bourgeois neighborhood constructed near Notre-Dame de Lorette, the church for which she is named.

In his series of caricatures entitled *Les Lorettes* (1840-1842), Gavarni depicts the *lorette* as a woman preoccupied with money. She treats her lovers as clients, presenting them with bills for her services or asking them (post-coitum) to settle their accounts. As Lucette Cyzba explains, the *lorette* represents the mercantile spirit of the times: "Sous la forme de calmebours typiques de l'humour

¹⁷ Maurice Alhoy, *Physiologie de la lorette* (Paris: Aubert, n.d. [1841])11-14.

contemporain, ces inscriptions raillent le mercantilisme et signifient la loi prepondérante de l'argent sous la Monarchie de Juillet" (107). Cyzba also claims that Gavarni's caricatures were the first influential works about the *lorette* to inspire other writers.

My work extends Cyzba's claim about Gavarni's influence by using several examples of specific Gavarni caricatures paired with Gustave Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* to prove that the stereotypes about *lorettes* propagated by the popular *physiologies* and *caricatures* also made their way into literature. Rosanette, later christened la Maréchale in Flaubert's 1869 work, figures as the most prominent *lorette* in canonical French literature. In chapter 5 of the *première partie* of Flaubert's novel, Frédéric first encounters *lorettes* at the Alhambra, a *bal public* that Flaubert fashions after "la Chaumière."¹⁸ The similarities between Flaubert's description of the dancing *lorettes* and those in the *physiologies* and *caricatures* are unmistakable and show how the literary and pictorial intertextuality helped shape the myth of the *lorette*. Rosanette, Flaubert's *lorette*, conforms completely to the stereotype created by Gavarni, Dumas and Alhoy: she has a rich bourgeois lover (Arnoux), whom she cheats on from time to time in order to make money, she lives in the Bréda neighborhood, near the Notre-Dame de Lorette and even takes on Frédéric as her *amant de coeur*. She first charms Frédéric at a *bal masqué* she has at her apartment which is furnished by the art dealer, Arnoux. The way she plays her lovers off each other for her own profit

¹⁸ Gustave Flaubert, *L'Éducation sentimentale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1985). See note 55 on page 517.

and amusement not only resembles her antics in the Gavarni caricatures, but also calls to mind the ruses Dumas uncovers in his 1843 chapter on *lorettes*.

Thus the habits, trials, and tribulations of the *lorette* that Gavarni sketches in his series "Traduction en langue vulgaire," "Les Lorettes," "Le Carnaval à Paris," and "Les Débardeurs," also recur in Flaubert's text. In addition to the caricatures featuring rival lovers vying for her affection, Gavarni depicts the aggressive, competitive side of the *lorette* who confronts the rival prostitute trying to steal her lover and who likewise plots to steal rich lovers from her more prosperous colleagues.¹⁹ Flaubert applies these stereotypes of sparring *lorettes* to his characterizations of Rosanette and her friend/rival La Vatnaz. For example, Rosanette schemes to steal the rich Père Oudry and succeeds; later in the novel, La Vatnaz reveals Rosanette's infidelities concerning Oudry and Arnoux to Frederic in the same manner as several *lorettes* warning their rival's lover about the mistress's character flaws.

Though both Gavarni and Flaubert associate prostitutes with violence, socialism, and revolution in their works, they approach the movements in different ways because they are working in two different periods. For example, two Gavarni caricatures allude to violent acts perpetrated by other males on the *lorettes* and another features a *lorette* flirting with socialism by joking about becoming a partisan of Saint-Simon's philosophy of free love. Flaubert's work however demonstrates directly how the prostitutes are associated with revolution

¹⁹ Paul Gavarni, *Oeuvres choisies édition spéciale*, (Paris: Aux bureaux du Figaro et de L'Autographe, 1864).

and its destructive forces. For example, he portrays a violent prostitute participating in the 1848 revolution by posing as the "statue de liberté" in the ransacked Tuileries palace. In regard to the purported feminist militarism of the period, Rosanette christens herself La Maréchale and La Vatnaz embraces a socialist agenda and preaches liberty for women. In short, I compare and contrast the two portrayals of the *lorette* to demonstrate her transformation from the charming, unpredictable creature in Gavarni's caricatures who emulates modernity, fashionable beauty, and entrepreneurial skill, into the cunning prostitute in Flaubert's novel who represents all that is wrong with the bourgeoisie: her crass obsession with money that drives her to sell her body and her uncanny ability to climb the social ladder in marrying the Père Oudry. Indeed, this transformation illustrates the way in which the myths of illicit femininity changed in response to the anxieties about the new social order brought about by the political instability that followed the 1848 revolution.

The Goncourt brothers and Eugène Sue also address the phenomenon of the *lorette* and employ the same stereotypes found in Dumas (1843) and Gavarni. However, the tone the Goncourt's *La Lorette* (1853) and Sue's short story, "La Lorette," which figures as one episode in the *Diable médecin* series, is more insidious than the light-hearted portraits by Dumas, Alhoy and Gavarni. In fact, these depictions of the *lorette* as a menace to society are the first manifestations of the backlash that culminates with the denunciation of the *demi-mondaine*. Indeed, the Goncourts claim in an epigraph preceding the title page of *La Lorette* that they are among the first to protest her glorification. They declare: "Les dates sont

quelque chose dans un livre, si petit que soit ce livre. Nous prions donc le lecteur de vouloir bien faire attention aux dates de publication de ces six articles. Il verra ainsi qui, le premier, a protesté contre l'assomption de la Lorette."²⁰ While their 50-page work resembles a *physiologie* in its anecdotal form, its acidic tone lays bare the *lorette's* menace. In reference to the work's brutal language, they claim: "il est des plaies qu'on ne peut toucher qu'au fer chaud."²¹ Sue's work also seeks to seal off the social wound of the *lorette*. He writes: "Essayons, dans ce récit, de cautériser la plaie."²² These images of wounds and the desire to seal them off call to mind Bernheimer's psychoanalytical critique of Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly's efforts to close off the female sex organ in "La vengeance d'une femme" and "À un dîner d'athées," in *Les diaboliques*. Bernheimer's theory will serve as a springboard from which I will analyze the Goncourts' and Sue's efforts to contain the prostitute.

Sue's *Diable médecin* series represented the great *feuilletoniste's* challenge to Balzac's all-encompassing portrayal of Paris. The *Diable médecin* is a German doctor who looks like the devil and is able to infiltrate all the social classes, much like Balzac's Vautrin. As a doctor, he has a privileged point of view because his profession allows him to enter the homes and hence the lives of patients from every walk of life. The *Diable médecin* condemns the vice and greed of the *lorette*

²⁰ Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *La Lorette* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1853). Please see epigraph in the first edition of the work.

²¹ Please see preface dedicated to Gavarni.

²² Eugène Sue, "Adèle Verneuil, La Lorette," *Le Diable médecin* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1886) 243.

he treats in Sue's story, but he ultimately fails to save the life of the bourgeois (who recently made his fortune in the stock market) from her clutches. As a result, the devious *lorette's* exorbitant lifestyle destroys the lives of the honest wife and daughters forced to endure their bourgeois father's neglect. Like Rodolphe in Sue's *Mystères de Paris*, the doctor is a sort of Robin Hood who avenges the honorable (he ensures that the bourgeois's wife and daughters will not starve) and punishes the wicked (he makes the *lorette* pay him 100,000 francs, which he immediately turns over to the wife and daughters).

In the third chapter, I illustrate how the courtesan -- a well-educated and beautiful *femme entretenue* kept exclusively by one rich lover -- functions as a symbol of elite but problematical status in Dumas's *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes*, Hugo's *Marion de Lorme* (1829-30), Taxile Delord's "La femme sans nom" (*Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, 1840), as well as Balzac's *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (1838-47). This chapter examines why the male writer romanticizes the ancient courtesan, celebrating her intelligence and beauty, yet refuses to examine her contemporary counterpart through the same idealizing filter. Beginning with Hugo's *Marion de Lorme*, I trace the courtesan's development from the earliest romantic representations of her in 1830, to realist depictions that mock her vulgarity, and her lack of refinement and education. All the modern courtesans in the aforementioned texts elicit comparisons to the Ancient Greek and Roman courtesans on the part of the writers who declare that the modern courtesans are always inferior to their ancient sisters. This inability to move beyond the past while talking about the present is symptomatic of

individuals in post-revolutionary France nostalgic for the social order they believe existed (if only in their fantasies) during the Ancien Régime. Indeed, Freud's theory as outlined in *Civilization and Its Discontents* sheds light on this tendency. According to Freud, people who are dissatisfied with the present often glorify the past. In Freud's text, those who blame their present misery on contemporary civilization tend to believe that life in simpler times could offer a happiness that modernity does not afford. Unhappy with the societal woes of post-revolutionary France, the writers project their anxieties about social, political and economic instability onto the figure of the courtesan.

In contrast with the modern courtesan whom these writers associate with social upheaval in modern France, the ancient courtesan and *grisette* represent an idealized period of stability. Nostalgia for the stability and clearly marked social class divisions of the Ancien Régime mars the writer's attempts to depict the chaos of social upheaval in modern France. I argue in this chapter that the romantic idealization of ancient courtesans and *grisettes* depicted in the early 1830s stems from a fear the modern changes and social instability the *lorette* and contemporary courtesan represent. On the one hand, writers glorify the *grisettes* and ancient courtesans (as well as the noble seventeenth-century courtesans Ninon de l'Enclos and Marion de Lorme) because they represent the golden days when aristocrats held the sole privileges over their courtesan lovers and *grisettes*.²³ The

²³ The *Grande Encyclopédie* explains the grisette's origins: "On prétend que les seigneurs de la cour de Louis XV, qui trouvaient de bon ton d'avoir à la fois une liaison affichée avec une actrice, un attachement pour une dame à la cour, et les relations peu suivies avec quelques jeunes filles du peuple, ne voulant pas trop déclarer ces derniers: ils leur envoyaient des laquis sans livree, vêtus de gris tout uni, auxquels on donnait le nom de grisons comme on le voit par les comédies du temps.

aristocrats and their courtesan lovers epitomize the elite. On the other hand, *lorettes* and contemporary courtesans represent the modern problems such as social climbing, rebellion, and political and economic volatility these writers hope to escape. One of these problems entails time or the lack thereof; writers, especially the Romantic ones, perceived contemporary society as being too rushed and predicted the absence of leisure time would destroy culture and tradition. As Bourdieu explains in *Distinction*, the dominant ideology in France bestows the most value on goods and people possessing the "rarest and most thing of all ... namely time, time devoted to consumption or time devoted to cultural acquisition" (281). Unlike modern *lorettes*, *courtisanes*, and *demi-mondaines* who acquired their recent possessions, privilege, and fame "in haste or by proxy," the ancient courtesans enjoyed a literary, pictorial, musical, and philosophical culture which required "a long investment of time" to accumulate and "which therefore appears as the surest indications of the quality of the person" (281). It is easy for Hugo, Dumas, Delord and Balzac to glorify women in the past because they cannot make any demands in the present and they represent a slower paced (albeit idealized) way of life.

In *Marion de Lorme*, Hugo not only upholds a respect for the elite of the Ancien Régime, he also prefigures the writers who follow him because he avoids the contemporary courtesan by setting his play in the seventeenth century. In this way he escapes addressing the modern courtesan altogether, for talking about her in the present would have been too scandalous. Likewise, Taxile Delord, waxing nostalgic for the old social order in "La femme sans nom," expresses regret for the

time in which the courtesans serviced the aristocracy. He declares: "Autrefois le monde des courtisanes ne s'ouvrait qu'à l'élite de la société: aujourd'hui toutes les classes y sont admises; il ne faut trop s'étonner de la banalité de manières de l'insuffisance d'esprit qui caractérise les femmes galantes de notre époque."²⁴ Delord's statement illustrates the anxiety about the social order because he is no longer sure who represents the elite. In the Ancien Régime, the social classes were clearly separated and social mobility was not possible. By the 1840s, many bourgeois had penetrated the spheres once only frequented by aristocrats, one of them being, of course, the salons and apartments of the courtesans. This resentment of social mobility is cogently illustrated in the chapter "La Torpille" in Balzac's *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. At the Bal de l'Opéra, Lucien de Rumbrepré's rivals mock Rubempré's many career changes and envy his liaison with the beautiful Esther, a *courtisane* they believe should only be reserved for the most privileged members of society. Rubempré's perceived ability to circulate in several social spheres angers his critics and is linked to his association with the powerful *courtisane*.

The prostitute's perceived subjugation and repentance, like the *grisette*'s, plays a key role in the Romantic vision of writers like Hugo, Delord, and Balzac. Delord explains:

Autrefois, une courtisane, c'étaient Marion de Lorme et Ninon de L'Enclos, c'est-à-dire des femmes sages par raison, libertines par tempérament ou par faiblesse, se désolant le lendemain de la sottise de la

²⁴ Taxile Delord, "La femme sans nom," *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, vol. I (Paris: L. Curmer, 1840) 250.

veille, passant toute leur vie à aller du plaisir au remords et du remords au plaisir, sans que l'un parvint à détruire l'autre, et n'échappant qu'à leurs derniers instants à ces deux grands ennemis. Aujourd'hui la galanterie c'est pas même une spéculation, c'est presque une manière de tuer le temps, une façon de mener la vie d'artiste. (249)

Through markers such as "sages," "se désolant," and "remords," the author indicates her submission to patriarchal law and order and her child-like mentality. The *grisette*, as her lower-class counterpart, demonstrates the same fidelity and submissiveness if we reconsider Janin's *physiologie* of "La Grisette." Janin praises the way she is "soumise" to Art and the artist, putting the artist's interest above her own comfort and well-being (14-15).

While the ancient courtesans and *grisettes* represent the positive aspects of past social order, the *lorettes* and contemporary courtesans stand for what is wrong in the present. In fact, they represent the issues in contemporary France that these writers would rather avoid. As soon as Nestor Roqueplan christens her in the *Nouvelles à la main* from Jan. 20, 1841, the *lorette's* reknown spreads alarmingly fast, because she figures as a new symbol of modernity. Her recentness fascinates men, as Dumas explains in *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes*: "C'était un genre absolument nouveau, une variété de l'espèce femme, un produit de la civilisation contemporaine n'ayant aucun précédent parmi les sociétés passées, et qui devait prendre sa place dans une des cases la population parisienne sous le nom de LORETTES" (60). Though her novelty makes her the latest fad, Dumas warns that she is dangerous, declaring: "Rien ne popularise comme le mal" (60). He continues: "y a-t-il un homme, si ignorant qu'il soit, qui ne sache ce que c'est que la peste ou le choléra, que Tibère et que Néron?" As an object of

curiosity, the *lorette* captivates the "bourgeoisie et aristocratie ruinée, fils de banquiers, fils de famine, fils de prince, fils de roi, tout se jeta dans la Lorette" (60). However as soon as the wives and fiancées of bourgeois men as well as the mothers and fathers of respectable families denounce the damage the *lorette* has caused social stability (60), she becomes "presque un objet de terreur." Dumas then justifies his case study on her in the name of social welfare: "Dès lors on examina la Lorette sous ses rapports sociaux, politiques et intellectuels: on voulut la connaître pour la combattre, l'étudier pour se défendre. On se livra à son endroit à des études physiologiques profondes, et voilà ce que l'on reconnut" (60).

The third chapter also addresses the issues of containment and attempts on the part of the authors to dismantle the threat of the Other. Part of containing the prostitute of course involves locating her in the sea of Parisians, and then punishing her. Distinguishing an honest woman from a whore was one of the major concerns in urban Paris throughout the nineteenth century, especially as industry transformed the big city, opening it up to more and more people who encountered each other in public.²⁵ The need for *physiologies*, Walter Benjamin argues in his chapter on the "flâneur," developed in response to the radical changes brought about by the rapid urbanization of cities like Paris. Before Hausmann's project of widening the boulevards of Paris, city dwellers had little room to stroll about the town. However, Benjamin notes how the onslaught of the wide, new boulevards, gas lamps, bright arcades, and public transformation drew people into the public sphere. As he explains, the arcades, with their brightly lit

²⁵ For more on the effort to decode a woman's morality from her appearance, see Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991) 56-112.

passageways, posh shops with expensive goods, and thick crowds, were "miniature" cities that the leisurely "flâneur" made his home.²⁶ The arcade afforded the flâneur an "unfailing remedy for the kind of boredom that easily arises under the baleful eyes of a satiated reactionary regime" (37). Although he felt at home in the crowd, constantly amused at the spectacle of the Other, the majority of Parisians were ill at ease in the presence of strangers. Benjamin cites Georg Simmel's explanation of this discomfort:

Interpersonal relationships in big cities are distinguished by a marked preponderance of the activity of the eye over the ear. The main reason for this is the public means of transportation. Before the development of buses, railroads, and trains in the nineteenth-century, people had never been in a position of having to look at one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one another. (38)

Because people worried about the secrets these strangers they encountered in public were carrying, the *physiologies*, according to Benjamin, were designed to "brush such disquieting notions aside as insignificant," and "to give people a friendly picture of one another" (38-39).

Capitalizing on the *physiologie* genre, Balzac expounds on what separates the honest "femme comme il faut," from her imposter equivalent--the "femme comme il en faut" in the *Français peints par eux-mêmes*. In Balzac's fictional universe of the *Comédie Humaine*, the ability to read the Other empowers the individual because it imparts a certain knowledge that will keep other characters in line. In *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, for example, Bixiou, Blondet,

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, "Le Flâneur," *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1973) 36-37.

Des Lupeaulx, Rastignac, and company know how to pick the women out of the crowd at the Bal de l'Opéra despite the fact that these ladies are wearing masks. Balzac writes

Eux et quelques habitués du bal de L' Opéra savaient seuls reconnaître, sous le long linceul du domino noir, sous le capuchon, sous le collet tombant qui rendent les femmes méconnaissables...les choses les moins saisissables aux yeux vulgaires et les plus faciles à voir pour eux. Malgré cette enveloppe informe, ils purent donc reconnaître le plus émouvant des spectacles, celui que présent à l'oeil une femme animée par un véritable amour. Que ce fut la Torpille, la duchesse de Maufrigneuses ou madame de Serisy, le dernier ou le premier échelon de l'échelle sociale, cette créature était une admirable création [...] ²⁷

In Balzac's universe, to be able to read signs is to be powerful; Richard Terdiman attributes the first sign reading in the nineteenth-century to the *physiologies*. In fact, Terdiman considers Balzac's *Illusions perdues* and its continuation, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, as two *romans d'éducation* which are natural, albeit "further developed" extensions of the *physiologie*; both genres sought to initiate the "new arrivals ...unprepared for the complex hierarchizations" of Paris by providing a map of a cultural system "depicting the signs and status signals."²⁸ The "project" of the roman d'éducation, Terdiman explains "is really to gain an understanding of the manner by which codes and signs in the social world are constituted, transmitted, and manipulated" (103). Once one cracks the code

²⁷ Honoré de Balzac, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1964) 24.

²⁸ Richard Terdiman, "Discourses of Initiation," *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 93.

and lays bare the signs, one should be able to manipulate the system or rather maneuver within the dominant ideology in order to carry authority.

The ability of this elite group of males to decipher the expression of a woman in love (*voir-savoir-pouvoir*) and make her aware of their power illustrates their power to command. They locate Esther in the crowd, then punish her by calling out her name and destroying her anonymity as well as reminding her of her tainted past. They know her sexual history and make it clear to her that her past cannot be erased because others will always be there to remind her of her sins. Therefore she is contained in the sense that she will always have to look out for others who are capable of exposing her transgressions and turning her over to the *police des moeurs*. In fact, Esther internalizes her perceived dominance by Vautrin, who ultimately coerces her into betraying Lucien by prostituting herself again. Convinced that Vautrin holds the power, she subjugates herself to his will, and utterly humiliated, kills herself.

However this fantasy of control is illusory, Terdiman argues, because it is always undone in the end. As master interpreters of social codes, Vautrin and the men at the bal "understand signs which no one else can read," according to Terdiman, "*but they cannot penetrate the regulative structure of the semiotic phenomenon itself*" (106). Terdiman claims that the Balzac characters trying to transcend the system of dominance, unwittingly legitimize the very social system they had hoped to master. Lucien's suicide therefore represents his failure as well as that of Vautrin "to impose their will upon the system whose code they have so exhaustively mastered" (106).

In the fourth chapter, I argue that the popular narratives of the *demi-mondaine's* extreme wealth, her irrepressible pursuit of pleasure and luxury, as well as her increasing public presence are directly related to writers' anxieties about class, culture and politics in the Second Empire. In the first part of the chapter, I explore how Alexandre Dumas *fil's*'s sympathetic *La Dame aux camélias* (1852), and its rewriting in *La traviata* (1853) portray the *demi-monde* as glamorous, fun, and intoxicating. This glamorization in turn leads to a backlash against the *demi-mondaine*, whose power and public presence threaten the patriarchal order. In plays like Alexandre Dumas *fil's*'s *Le Demi-Monde* (1855), Théodore de Barrière's *Les Filles de Marbre* (1853), and Émile Augier's *Les Lionnes pauvres* (1858), as well as Zola's novel *Nana* (1880), writers destroy the *demi-mondaine* in order to "resolve" issues about class, sexuality and politics and to assure the patriarchal order.

Though he glamorizes the "whore with the heart of gold" who redeems herself through love in *La Dame aux camélias*, Dumas *fil's* expresses distress at the thought of women pursuing sexual relations outside of marriage.²⁹ It is easy to forgive and even idealize Marguerite Gautier, because she, like Marie Duplessis, the woman on whom the novel/play is based, dies young, beautiful and repentant. Her threat of negatively influencing any bourgeois women seeking adventure outside of marriage is sealed off when she is buried in a coffin. However, contemporary *demi-mondaines* and *courtisanes* who were writing about their

²⁹ Alexandre Dumas *fil's*, "À Propos de *La Dame aux camélias*," *Théâtre Complet* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1867).

experiences and even reenacting their dramas with powerful lovers were another story. For example, Lola Montès performed in a stage version of her life story in New York, Washington, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New Orleans from 1852-1853. In *Lola Montez in Bavaria*, she performed in a play based on her liaison with King Ludwig of Bavaria who had bestowed her with an aristocratic title in 1847.³⁰ I establish in Part Two of this chapter that autobiographical writings of the Second Empire attributed to *demi-mondaines* like Lola Montès, Céleste de Chabrilan, and Marguerite Bellanger fueled anxieties about women creating lives and careers outside the domestic sphere of motherhood and marriage. These autobiographies, which stirred up public outcry and censorship, serve as important testimonies to the prostitute's response to her own social alienation.

In view of the notoriety *demi-mondaines* such as Montez achieved for their highly visible and non-traditional pursuits, a backlash against the *demi-mondaine* ensued as a reaction against these women as public figures. The *lorettes* and *courtisanes* who had made a name for themselves at the Bal Mabille or on the stage at the Théâtre des Variétés were discussed in newspapers, but were not perceived as having the power that the *demi-mondaines* who aligned themselves with powerful politicians had. As actresses and dancers, Lola Montes (1840s) and Celeste Mogador (late 40s early 50s) attracted attention with their "art," and subsequently published "mémoires" about their experiences. Céleste

³⁰ Bruce Seymour notes "No copy of *Lola Montez in Bavaria* has survived, but the play was clearly based on Lola's version of what happened in Bavaria." Bruce Seymour, *Lola Montez: A Life* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996) 293.

Mogador, the Comtesse de Chabrillan by 1854, was encouraged by the likes of Dumas, to publish her story. Women writers were well published in mid-nineteenth century France and were even more powerful consumers, as Balzac acknowledged "un ouvrage de femme est une bien meilleure spéculation de gloire qu'un ouvrage viril."³¹ Alexandra Wettlaufer contends "These *femmes auteurs* not only presented direct competition to their male counterparts," they also stirred up anxieties about the dangerous effect women writers had on the social order (176). Wettlaufer explains "Thus, the proliferation of female authors and readers during the July Monarchy provoked strong resistance from the patriarchal order, promulgated in negative images of *intellectuelles*, *bas-bleus* and *femmes auteurs* and their injurious effects on literature and society" (177).

Just as the female writers and intellectuals of the July Monarchy aggravated critics who feared these women might exert a negative influence on the social establishment, the *demi-mondaine's* professional pursuits (as a writer, dancer, or actress) and relatively independent life-style also alarmed "moral" writers of the Second Empire, who worried that her pursuits might encourage bourgeois women to follow suit, taking up careers and bucking the *status quo* in general. Jules Janin's "Bas-Bleu" *physiologie* in the *Français peints par eux-mêmes* exemplifies this fear. In the "Bas-Bleu," he depicts the intellectual

³¹ Balzac, *Lettres à Mme Hanska*, ed. R. Pierrot, 4 vols. (Paris: Le Delta, 1967-71) 2: 183. Alexandra Wettlaufer cites Balzac in Chapter 5 of *Pen vs. Paintbrush*, arguing that although Balzac begrudged female writers' (such as George Sand, Mme de Staël, Claire de Duras, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, and Flora Tristan) success during the July Monarchy, he acknowledges the importance of the female readership who had both the time and money to invest in books. Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, *Pen vs. Paintbrush: Girodet, Balzac and the Myth of Pygmalion in Postrevolutionary France* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

woman as a menacing figure whose need to write makes her an abomination of nature and a "plaie social" which anticipates both Sue's and the Goncourts' label of the wound. Thus male writers perceived female economic and intellectual independence as emasculating.

In the same way writers and critics such as Janin and Balzac mocked the professional and public pursuits of the *intellectuelles* and the *femmes auteurs* to undermine the influence they feared these women exercised over bourgeois women, Dumas *filis*, Barrière, and Augier also denigrated the *demi-mondaines* in the form of a backlash. As I argue in chapter two, this backlash against the *demi-mondaines* of the Second Empire began as early as 1853 with the publication of the Goncourts' *La Lorette*, a work that protested her "ascension." Likewise, Sue's "La Lorette" followed suit. Dumas *filis*'s 1855 play, the *Demi-Monde*, is the most conspicuous example of the backlash against the *demi-mondaine*. In this play, he coined the very term for the image of the women he greatly shaped in *La Dame aux camélias*. Despite the huge success of the latter, Dumas *filis* purportedly regretted his sympathetic portrayal of the courtesan according to Mrs. E.G. Squier, who translated his play into English. She claims that he retracted any approbation he showed toward Marguerite in order to save his reputation.³²

Thus, in order to counteract his captivating portrait of Marguerite, *demi-mondaine* extraordinaire, Dumas *filis* not only precludes any mention of kind-hearted prostitutes or their bohemian cohorts, but he also redefines the "demi-

³² Alexandre Dumas *filis*, *The Demi-Monde: A Satire on Society*, trans. Mrs. E. G. Squier (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co, 1858) 1.

monde,” or “half-world,” as a band of married women whose various marital infidelities caused their husbands to subsequently chastise and abandon them. As such, these alienated women lack the social status necessary to circulate in the *grand monde*, therefore they create their own “*demi*” society.³³ While on the surface this “bastard society” appears legitimate, beneath its sparkling, glamorous allure lies a history of scandalous tales of dishonored families, financial ruin, and mothers separated from their children (101). Though Dumas *fills* dodges criticism by shying away from direct references to prostitutes, he does moralize about the evils of female sexual activity outside the sacred union of marriage, suggesting that women separated from their husbands are a more innocuous form of a harlot. He claims to illustrate the danger women without legitimate status exert on the lives of innocent girls hoping to marry well. According to Dumas, the “honest” young woman who associates with these adulteresses and social climbers could ruin any chances at marrying a bourgeois gentleman who would be weary of the corrupt ideas the *demi-mondaines* could have transferred onto her. In the *Demi-monde*, the ambitious Suzanne d’Ange’s plans to escape her debased past by making a socially sanctified marriage with officer Raymond de Nanjac are impeded by the aristocrat Olivier Jalin, her former lover who resents her efforts to use sex to climb the social ladder.

While Dumas *fills* counteracts the fascinating image of the *demi-mondaine* he helped shape through his very denial of the idealized prostitute in the *Demi-Monde*, in his *Filles de Marbre*, Théodore de Barrière invalidates the ancient

³³ Alexandre Dumas *fills*, *Le Demi-Monde* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1884) 100-101.

courtesan of the past romanticized by Dumas and his cohorts. In the first half of the play, Barrière dramatizes tensions between crass materialism and pure artistic appreciation against the backdrop of Ancient Greece. In the tradition of Pygmalion, Phidias promptly falls in love with the life-sized reproductions of the courtesans Aspasia, Lais, and Phryné that he has executed for Gorgias, and thus refuses to give them to the rich bourgeois. Phidias's friend proposes to settle the matter by asking the animated sculptures whom they would like to follow. Phidias, convinced that art is as priceless as genius and love, is inconsolable when the "filles de marbre" chose Gorgias because he offers them gold.

In the second half of the play, which takes place in contemporary Paris, Marco, the manipulative and heartless reincarnation of a Greek courtesan, destroys an artist by tearing him away from his family and distracting him from his art. In the end, the courtesan has cost him his artistic ability, his family, and his life. Hence, in the *Filles de Marbre*, Barrière not only denounces the wickedness of the modern courtesan, but also denies that the ancient courtesan so romanticized by writers in the 1830s and 1840s, ever merited worth or praise.

In his *Les Lionnes pauvres*, Augier joins Dumas *fils* and Barrière in the backlash against the Second Empire *demi-mondaine* in an effort to underscore the way the alluring wealth and luxury of this privileged harlot could cause a married woman to prostitute herself. Indeed, in her efforts to increase her social standing, Séraphine, the young woman in the play plunges herself into debt when she attempts to imitate the *demi-mondaine's* glittery lifestyle. In order to appease the *revendeuse de toilettes*, she borrows money from her husband's friend and

eventually sleeps with him because she cannot afford to pay him back with anything other than her body. Thus, in her efforts to reproduce the glamour of the *demi-mondaine*, the bourgeois woman alienates herself from her husband, loses her financial support because he refuses to forgive her infidelities, and thus turns to prostitution to survive.

While completing my research, I turned to popular culture sources such as *physiologies*, caricatures, newspaper articles, songs, and encyclopedias for explicit definitions or terms such as *lorette* and *demi-mondaine* now lost on the modern reader unfamiliar with the colloquial speech employed during the mid-nineteenth-century. Given these definitions, I examined major canonical works such as Hugo's *Marion de Lorme*, Balzac's *Splendeurs et misères de courtisanes*, Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale*, Zola's *Nana* to examine the way the writers wove these cultural references into their work. Though perhaps not appreciated today as much as they were at the time they were writing, Dumas, Dumas *filis*, Sue, and Edmond and Jules de Goncourt dedicated entire works to defining the figure of the prostitute—and I chose to examine these works because they influenced Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola. At the beginning of my project, I wondered if any women had written about the often misogynistic way prostitutes were represented. I “discovered” memoirs written by *demi-mondaines* at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and consider my privileging of the female response to the outlaw status of the prostitute an integral part of this study. For the

purpose of scope and space, I excluded works that feature prostitutes by George Sand (*Lélia*), Maupassant (“Boule de suif”), and Baudelaire (*La Fanfarlo*) because they do not address issues of social climbing, capitalism, modernity, and gender roles as well as the others that made it into the dissertation.

Ultimately, I have discovered in completing this project that the myths and classifications surrounding the *demi-mondaine* reflect more than a literary shift from romanticism to realism or a dialectical pattern of fascination and disgust. Rather, they offer insightful glimpses into how the changing status of women played out against the class upheaval, political uprisings, and industrial transformations throughout the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER ONE:

CLASSIFICATIONS AND CONTAINMENT: SOCIAL HIERARCHIES AND THE HARLOT

Why social hierarchies exist: Bourdieu's *Distinction*

One of the hallmarks of nineteenth-century texts treating the prostitute in her many guises is the desire to classify the *fille publique*, placing her inside and outside of the extant social hierarchies. In order to analyze this trend, in the pages to follow I will apply a Bourdieusian analysis of the nature of hierarchies and classifications to the drive of nineteenth-century French writers, sociologists, and scientists to rank and classify prostitutes. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu claims that the structure of the social world revolves around a system of “classificatory schemes” whose divisions are determined and reinforced according to the interests of the individuals who dominate.³⁴ According to Bourdieu, the “primary forms of classification owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will” (466). Because perceptions of these social classifications occur unconsciously, divisions between the dominant and the dominated appear perfectly natural. The internalized divisions “common to all agents of the society” thereby “make possible the production of a common, meaningful world, a

³⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984) 471.

common-sense world” (468). Hierarchies therefore exist because they create a sense of order in the world.

Bourdieu’s notion of the habitus accounts for the way the various social classes differentiate themselves from one another, thereby reinforcing the structure that holds the entire discriminating mechanism together. As defined by Bourdieu, the habitus is a structure that both generates social order and shapes itself after the internalized triadic division of the social world. He explains:

The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes. (170)

In simpler terms, the habitus enables a class to define its life-style. According to Bourdieu, one’s class determines the art one cherishes, the education one attains, the employment one pursues, the food and drink one consumes, the clothes one purchases, the decorating scheme one chooses, the newspaper one reads, the vacation one takes, etc. He maintains that the habitus encompasses the “capacity to differentiate and appreciate those practices and products (taste) that the represented social world, i.e. the space of life-styles” (170). The habitus influences one’s taste unconsciously because this discriminating force is acquired, shaped, and internalized over several years. In sum, the manner in which a child is raised, the environment that surrounds the individual, the education the individual receives both at school and from his/her parents disposes the child over several years to a certain way of acting, speaking, pursuing leisurely activities, eating,

socializing, etc. Social capital, economic capital, and cultural capital determine the life condition of an individual and shape both the way he or she perceives the world and the social trajectory (for example, the individual's hopes, fears, and ambitions) the individual follows.³⁵

In addition to shaping taste, the habitus naturalizes class divisions, making the conditions that separate the upper classes from the lower ones seem perfectly normal. As Bourdieu explains, in order to understand the conditions of one's own existence, a person must compare his or her lifestyle to those individuals both above and beneath him or her on the social scale. He states:

Each class condition is defined, simultaneously, by its intrinsic properties and by the relational properties which it derives from its position in the system of class conditions, which is also a system of differences, differential positions, i.e., by everything which distinguishes it from what it is not and especially from everything it is opposed to; social identity is defined and asserted through difference. (170-172)

Though there are many theories of identity formation, the habitus plays a capital role in an individual's efforts at self-definition in Bourdieu's conception of social identity. Only in comparing and contrasting one's own manner of living with that of others does one come to form an identity. As such, individuals use each other as negative poles against which they identify themselves.

³⁵ In *Distinction*, Bourdieu addresses the three elements that shape the habitus (114). He defines economic capital in relation to the individual's father's profession as well as the wealth the family possesses. Bourdieu envisions cultural capital as a combination of scholastic studies and one's familial and personal knowledge of the arts. He labels social capital as "a capital of social connections, honourability, and respectability that is often essential in winning and keeping the confidence of high society" (122).

Dominance and differentiation

Having established the nature of social hierarchies and the role they play in the social order, I will argue that the efforts to classify the prostitute stem from an unconscious incertitude about the social establishment in post-revolutionary France. Under the Ancien Régime, Bourdieu explains, the rigid, demarcated social boundaries separating the classes “left little room for social fantasy but were comfortable and reassuring even in the unconditional renunciation they demanded” (156). However, the Revolution of 1789 destroyed these boundaries, leaving France with the daunting task of rebuilding the social order. Despite the continued cry for “liberté, égalité, and fraternité” for all, various social groups vied throughout the nineteenth century for dominance, thereby perpetuating inequalities and oppression. The Restoration briefly brought back the aristocracy (1815-1830); the 1830 Revolution brought the bourgeoisie and their king Louis-Philippe into power (1830-1848), while the 1848 Revolution heralded a very short victory for the socialists under the Second Republic until the monarch Louis Napoléon rose to power during the Second Empire (1851-1870). The ongoing political turmoil cast a shadow on political and social stability throughout the century. Hegemony depended not only on military victory, but also on the capability to shape social and political ideologies.

Throughout this dissertation, I will examine the social, cultural, and political anxieties projected onto the figure of the prostitute during the July Monarchy, the Second Republic, and the Second Empire, as writers, sociologists, and scientists participated in the struggle to mold ideologies. In this chapter, I

analyze the ways in which Parent-Duchâtelet, in his *De la Prostitution dans la ville de Paris* (1837) and Alexandre Dumas père, in his *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes* (1843) use their works on prostitutes to stake out a place amongst the elite. Parent, a staunch advocate of the administration, and Dumas, a member of the patriarchal literati, represented the interests of the dominant class (the richest bourgeois) during the July Monarchy. As such, Parent and Dumas shape their texts on prostitutes according to the dominant group's interests. Indeed, Bourdieu states:

All knowledge, in particular all knowledge of the social world, is an act of construction implementing schemes of thought and expression, and that between conditions of existence and practices or representations there intervenes the structuring activity of the agents, who [...] respond to the invitations or threats of a world whose meaning they have helped to produce. (467)

Thus, according to Bourdieusian theory, the discourses generated by Parent and Dumas deliberately respond to the menace of social chaos with the goal of structuring the social world according to the dominant group's agenda.

Indeed, in nineteenth-century French literary works, the prostitute represents the disorderly outcast who resists all categorization and who refuses to adhere to the rules of social convention. For this very reason, Parent, Dumas, and their successors locate the prostitute and then force her to submit to the will of the dominant group so that a sense of order can be reestablished -- if only on paper. In short, the ability to master the unruly member of society allows the dominant group to retain its sense -- illusory or not -- of dominance. However, in order to dominate, the prevailing group must first prove its superiority. Thus, the ruling

group, in order to achieve mastery, must define itself in terms of its preeminence over the inferior, hostile “outsider” group” (479). In this dissertation, the rich bourgeois and the writers who support their authority constitute the superior group because they represent the ruling class, while the outlawed prostitutes make up the “outsider” group because they have been marginalized from the social order. Hence, the prostitute plays a key role in the dominant group’s battle for supremacy – for she serves as the dominant group’s foil, representing everything that they are not.³⁶ Her constant wandering, her illegality, her promiscuity, and her hedonism oppose the establishment’s ideal of the stable, housebound couple that is hardworking, monogamous, and sober.

“Surveillance and control”: Foucault dissects discipline

Michel Foucault’s readings of systems of discipline expose the power plays – namely classification and hierarchization – that Parent and Dumas employ to justify their call for harsh surveillance of the prostitute. Foucault documents and analyzes similar disciplinary measures that were developed by administrators in a plague-stricken town in seventeenth-century France.³⁷ Out of the chaos and confusion of the plague, Foucault argues, comes strict regulation and order: every person accounted for, every inch of the town contained, harsh rules enforced in the name of stopping the spread of contagion. Moreover the plague provides the

3 In a similar manner, the lower class serves as a foil in Bourdieu’s analysis of contemporary French society. 250-251.

³⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 195-200.

excuse for absolute power and order in cities, creating what Foucault calls a “political dream” (197-198).

In short, the plague offers the perfect opportunity to organize societies into hierarchies, to ensure containment of outcasts (beggars), and to instill methods of discipline in order that “disciplinary power” rule over “all individual bodies” (198). According to Foucault, such measures held that “lepers” should be excluded, but individualized in their exclusion so as to mark their exclusion, thereby guaranteeing “differential distribution (who he is; where he must be; how he is to be characterized; how he is to be recognized; how a constant surveillance is to be exercised over him in an individual way)” (199).

If the physical/literal plague offers the “political dream” to the privileged few of an all-encompassing power to rule over all individuals, the metaphoric “plague” of prostitution presents itself as an equally compelling opportunity to wield similar power in nineteenth-century society. By playing up the dangers of prostitution and the contagion and sickness associated with it, writers like Parent and Dumas envision disciplinary measures that ensure hierarchizations and complete surveillance. Tellingly, Dumas evokes images of the plague, calling the prostitute a pariah and a “pestiférée”³⁸ and Parent amplifies the threat of syphilis that the promiscuous prostitute will spread if not quarantined. Dumas and Parent label the prostitute/leper as different, and therefore, excluded from normal society; at the same time, however, they brand her as “excluded” and abnormal in order to define against her what is normal (199). By classifying her and

³⁸Alexandre Dumas, *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000) 21.

identifying her abnormalities and her threat, the Parisian administration (with the writers as its functionaries) subject her to extreme discipline in order to give the appearance of order in society. Insisting on the danger and contagiousness of the prostitute offered writers and administrators the perfect excuse for dreaming up what Foucault calls a perfectly “disciplined society” in which they can participate in the exercise of extreme power (198).

Thus, the administration could define itself as organized, orderly, stable, hygienic, moral, and in control in contradistinction to the pestilent prostitute who embodies chaos, mayhem, instability, dirtiness and disease, corruption, and uncontrollability. Although in nineteenth-century France prostitution was considered a “mal nécessaire” because it contributed to social stability, Alain Corbin claims that apologists for regulation, such as Parent, believed nonetheless that prostitutes need to be studied and policed to prevent them from slipping back into society unnoticed.³⁹ According to Corbin, “il importe de bien connaître les prostituées afin de les empêcher, dans toute la mesure possible, d’acquérir des vices qu’elles risqueraient de transmettre lorsqu’elles auront abandonné la “carrière” (17). However, in order to validate this regulatory scheme, Parent first needed to establish the prostitute’s marginality. As such, Parent rationalizes the oppression of prostitutes, the outsider group, by depicting these “deviants” as lacking the intelligence, skill, and maturity to govern themselves. Indeed, Parent-Duchâtelet justified the strict regulation project based on the prostitute’s

³⁹ Alain Corbin, *Les Filles de noces: misère sexuelle et prostitution au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1982) 15-16.

marginality, for “la marginalisation autoritaire se trouve justifiée par la marginalité de fait qui lui est antérieure” (17).

“Les prostituées sont pour la plupart de véritables enfants”: Parent’s paternalism and the containment project

Paternalism operates as one of the ways the dominant group rationalizes its oppression of the outsider group. In the case of colonization of the Orient, Africa, North America, and the Carribean, European colonizers depicted natives as child-like, irresponsible, and lazy in order to condone the harsh measures they inflicted on the dominated. The dominant groups justified their colonization and domination by insisting that the savages needed to be ruled because they were unable to take care of themselves. According to Homi Bhabha, a “major discursive strategy” in the “discourse of colonialism” consists of perpetuating the stereotype of the Other as incompetent.⁴⁰

In a similar manner, Parent adopted a paternalistic stance and portrayed the prostitute as child-like to further rationalize the administration’s domination. Indeed, her immaturity indicated her inability to integrate herself successfully into society and therefore validated the need for her constant surveillance⁴¹. Though the race of prostitutes did not factor in Parent’s study, one could substitute “on the basis of racial origin” with a statement about class discrimination. For example, the upper classes and the bourgeois generally associated the swelling population of prostitutes with lower-class women. In depicting the prostitutes as “degenerate

⁴⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism,” *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 66.

⁴¹ Corbin writes: “Cela provient en partie de ce que, demeurée proche de l’enfant, il ne lui a pas encore été possible de les assimiler” (20).

types,” Parent and the administration he represented defended the harsh system of regulation and punishment that often dehumanized the prostitutes. Nonetheless, fantasies about her sexuality undermined the authority’s ability to completely control the prostitute, for one cannot regulate intangible thoughts that exist in the subconscious. A dialectical relationship then existed between the quest for absolute authority/mastery over the prostitute and the unconscious desires that haunted Parent and the writers he influenced. This polarity echoes the division that Bhabha identifies in Said’s *Orientalism*: “It is, on the one hand, a topic of learning, discovery and practice; on the other, it is the site of dreams, images, fantasies, essentialism...” (71). In the case of Parent, the scholar on the one hand cherishes the thought of learning everything there is to know about prostitutes (just as he wanted to study every facet of the sewer). On the other hand, his fantasies about the prostitute’s depraved sexuality undermined his ability to study her with the safe distance of scholarship. His essentialist view of her reduced her to a child. Thus, paternalism is a weapon used not only by the European colonizers, but also by authority figures like Parent who sought to justify their oppressive measures against prostitutes.

As yet another justification for surveillance of the prostitute, Parent depicted her as savage, dirty, infantile and animal-like in his chapter on “Moeurs et habitudes des prostituées.” As Bernheimer explains in *Figures of Ill Repute*, Parent’s obsession with the prostitute’s filth sets the tone for subsequent nineteenth-century writers who associate her with “animality, disease, castration,

excrement, and decay.”⁴² Bernheimer’s psychoanalytic analysis of male writers’ anxieties about female sexuality unveils their desires to contain fears about the prostitute’s threat to “male mastery”; however, a complementary reading of identity adds another dimension to the argument about the need to control. An analysis of the prostitute’s important role as Other -- so vital to the master group’s conception of its superiority -- provides yet another example of the male desire to contain fantasies about loss of supremacy. In sum, a sociological reading of the way in which the Other functions in the battle for mastery builds on the psychological one, for both lay bare the quest for dominance.

One finds the best examples of Parent’s paternalism in *De la prostitution* in chapter III (“Considérations physiologiques sur les prostituées”).⁴³ There, he claims that the ‘animalistic’ lifestyle of the prostitute explains her plumpness (I, 117). Parent insists that the prostitute’s “malpropreté générale” and her animality exemplify her natural state, leading her to revel in filth: “on dirait que ces femmes se plaisent dans la fange et les ordures” (86). To prove his claims, Parent cites 1811-1812 Prefecture de Police records that purportedly document the “malpropreté extrême” of the prostitutes. According to Parent, only the intervention of the administration’s doctors and inspectors could rid the First Empire prostitutes’ of their widespread “vermine de corps” and even compel some to take excessive measures at cleanliness (87). He insists on the harlot’s propensity for filth not only in the subheading entitled “Malpropreté des

⁴² Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997) 2.

⁴³ Alexandre-Jean Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris*, 2 vols, (Paris: J. B. Ballière, 1837).

prostituées” but also in the sections which discuss the opinions prostitutes have of themselves; according to Parent, prostitutes have internalized their inferiority, for “ce qui les désespère, c’est de savoir qu’elles passent, dans l’esprit de tout le monde, pour la fange et la boue de la société” (71). Moreover, in certain cases, they are painfully aware of their disheveledness, which he illustrates with the case of the prostitute who fears she dirties a man just by kissing him (71).

“J’ai dû appeler les choses par leur nom”: The key role the power to name plays in Parent’s containment project

The power to name and define plays a key role for a group jockeying for dominance because it enables this group to shape public opinion to the detriment of the “outsider” group and consequently to the benefit of itself. In the case of Parent’s project, the power to name and categorize the different types of prostitutes confirms the order in the system and makes the administration appear to have the chaotic situation under control to a public normally scandalized by the discussion of prostitutes and alarmed by their growing presence in the capital. As Bourdieu explains, the struggle to classify plays an integral part in the strife between social groups. The group who wins “over the classificatory schemes and systems” earns the ability to manipulate “the representations of the groups and therefore of their mobilization and demobilization” (Bourdieu, 479). As for Parent, he strives to categorize the prostitutes in order to attain the power needed to shape the way the public perceives her. Parent acquires the upper hand because he possesses the words that mold the representations of the prostitutes, while the prostitutes, on the other hand, have no way to fight these perceptions. In fact, in

chapter one, he defines the prostitute and prostitution (*“Définition d’une prostituée et de la prostitution”*) in order to establish his authority immediately and hence manipulate public opinion.

According to Parent’s “système réglementariste,” prostitutes must be ranked according to a hierarchy in order to better observe them and thus exercise more control over them.⁴⁴ Corbin explains: “Pour être efficacement contrôlé, ce milieu doit être rigoureusement hiérarchié et cloisonné; en évitant dans toute la mesure du possible le mélange des âges et des ‘classes,’ on facilite l’observation et, du même coup, l’emprise de l’administration” (25). Indeed, Parent views prostitutes as a “*classe à part*,”--“une population particulière” whose substandard morals, habits, and customs separate them from the rest of society (106). Though the prostitutes are uniformly debauched, they exhibit their lasciviousness in differing manners. In effect, according to the members of the administration Parent is citing, this separate group of *débauchées* forms several classes, which in effect categorize, women in relation to their different tastes, habits, morals, and manners. Parent notes:

Mais si on examine cette classe avec soin, on ne tarde pas à reconnaître que les êtres qui la composent ne sont pas uniformes, et que, sous le rapport des goûts, des habitudes extérieures, des mœurs et des manières de vivre, ils nous présentent des différences remarquables dignes de fixer l’attention de l’observateur, et en particulier de tous ceux qui sont chargés de l’administration. (106)

Thus, Parent argues that in order to better regulate the prostitutes, one should recognize their habits that not only distinguish them from bourgeois women, but

⁴⁴ Corbin 24-25.

also to ensure that they do not reintegrate themselves into society once they have abandoned earning their living as prostitutes.

Further, Parent's insight into class markers anticipates Bourdieu's premise in *Distinction* that class distinctions and hierarchal divisions are symptomatic of "the intersection of the two principles of division" which exist in all "class-divided societies," that is, the struggles "between the dominant and the dominated" (470). Class markers identify the social status of a member of society, locating where that individual stands in the battle for hegemony. In contrast with Dumas, who ranks the prostitutes from the lowest (the *filles*), to the middle-class (the *lorettes*), and finally to the highest (the *courtisanes*), Parent employs a different method. Instead of placing the prostitutes into three categories, he singles out a problematical "catégorie distincte" essentially composed of what Dumas labels the courtesan. Secondly, Parent claims *femmes entretenues* aside, that two classes of prostitutes exist, which he further subdivides. While Dumas collapses these complicated subdivisions into three succinct categories, Parent's complicated schema, when scrutinized, essentially condenses into the same divisions. Namely, an elite group of prostitutes ranks above a middle and lower-class group of prostitutes. Hence, both Parent and Dumas promote a triadic structure, although Parent adheres to a scientific method, and thus, further hierarchizes the prostitutes within these three divisions the way a scientist would a species and subspecies.

His effort to prove that the class system of prostitutes is valid because the prostitutes themselves buy into class distinction is another way Parent shapes the

image of prostitution for the public. In several places in *De la prostitution*, Parent cites examples of prostitutes discriminating against one another because they have internalized the system that reinforces prejudice. In Parent's opinion, anyone doubting that such a complex system of class divisions in the world of prostitution even existed, need only remember that the such distinction subsists in part because Parent's research tells us so; but more importantly because the prostitutes themselves would confirm as much. According to Parent, the suspicion, scorn, and contempt society casts upon the prostitute heightens her sense of extreme pride. This sense of pride, Parent claims, causes class prejudice among the prostitutes themselves. He explains: "C'est cet orgueil que provient le mépris que les différentes classes de prostituées ont pour celles qui sont au-dessous d'elles, et la haine que les classes inférieures portent aux supérieures ou à celles qui l'emportent en graces et en beauté" (72). In claiming that even the prostitutes affirm the categories that identify their place in the social order, Parent hopes to assure the reader that the prostitutes themselves have internalized the class structure. As such, he offers further proof that some sense of order must exist since even the most chaotic individuals can organize themselves.

“Elles ont le sentiment de leur abjection”: The prostitute's fantasized subjection to male mastery

In the same way that Bentham's Panopticon predicts the internalized subjugation of potentially unruly prisoners, Parent and Dumas (as well as other writers such as Balzac, *Dumas fils*, and Maurice Alhoy) fantasized that the

prostitute's internalized inferiority secures her submissiveness. Foucault, explaining how the Panopticon functions, states:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjugation. (203)

Thus, the Panopticon -- at least in theory -- persuaded prisoners to act as their own jailers. In a similar manner, the prostitute's own internalized sense of inferiority -- at least in the writer's fantasies -- kept her actions in check. Parent confirms the prostitutes' self-derision when he writes: "Elles ont, comme je l'ai dit ailleurs, ce sentiment de leur abjection; elles savent qu'elles sont en opposition avec les lois divines et humaines, et qu'elles se trouvent par le fait même de leur métier" (497). In Parent's opinion, social and moral authorities as well as writers are not the only ones convinced of the prostitute's abject status; if she accepts the same fatalistic view of her flaws, it must be because it is true, for everyone is in agreement about her pariah status. As such, the fact that she accepts her guilt ensures a certain amount of docility on her part. In theory, she knows that she is being constantly observed by the *police des moeurs*, therefore, she readily submits to registration and gynecological exams even though the diagnosis of a venereal disease will lead to her internment in clinics where she will undergo painful treatments to eradicate her symptoms. Moreover, she acts as her own jailer, restricting her behavior to the boundaries dictated by the administration.

This fantasy of the self-loathing prostitute who esteems both social classifications and morals, and thus regulates her behavior accordingly coincides

with the myth of the submissive *grisette* (as explored in chapter two) and the harlot with the heart of gold (as explored in chapter three). Consequently, I argue throughout this dissertation that writers generated fictions to counteract anxieties provoked by women's active entry into the public sphere of politics, art, and revolution during the July Monarchy, the Second Republic, and the Second Empire.

“Nécessité de distinguer les prostituées en classes et en catégories”

Although Parent claims that only two “classes” of “véritables prostituées” exist, he begins his exercise of categorization with the elite, completely “distinct” category of women – the “*femmes galantes*,” the “*femmes à parties*,” and the “*femmes de théâtres*” (106). He dedicates two pages to these women who escape the administration's punitive measures. In addition to the two classes of prostitutes regulated by police authorities, he devotes five pages to other “characters” who populate the world of prostitution, such as the *proxenètes*, the *marcheuses*, the *filles à soldat*, and the *pierreuses*, who participate in the sex trade, but who do not “fit” into the heuristic categories which classify the “population des véritables prostituées” (108). Indeed, Parent spends more time discussing the prostitutes who resist the “legal” characterization than he does describing the ones who comply with the juridical definition.

Parent addresses all areas of prostitution for two reasons: 1) he establishes himself as an authority familiar with every aspect (however revolting it may be) of prostitution; and 2) he builds his case for surveillance of this complicated,

multi-layered world. Controlling the prostitutes themselves does not suffice, for Parent deems that those entangled in the web of prostitution pose just as much danger to society as the harlots themselves because they promote illicit sexual activity, which in turn threatens public health as well as the moral laws and customs that cement the legitimate social order.

Parent's creation of a "catégorie distincte" with "trois divisions particulières" poses a challenge to the modern scholar because the terms "*femmes galantes*," "*femmes à parties*," and "*femmes de théâtre*," with their distinctions that separate them from their "colleagues," are now lost on an audience familiar only with the blanket term of *courtisane*. These labels of distinction demonstrate to what extent the triadic class system (the dominant privileged aristocracy, the rich bourgeois middle class, and the struggling lower classes) shaped Parent's vision of the class division of prostitutes. Dumas, however, collapses these names into one category – the courtesans – six years after the publication of Parent's study.⁴⁵ Although these three particular divisions of women practice prostitution and perpetuate venereal disease, Parent claims that technically the administration cannot arrest them as prostitutes because the appearances they maintain seem to validate social decency. Parent asserts:

Personne ne niera que les femmes qui forment les trois divisions particulières que je viens d'indiquer, ne soient de véritables prostituées; elles en font le métier; elles propagent plus que toutes les autres les maladies graves et les infirmités précoces; elles détruisent la fortune aussi

⁴⁵ The terms describing prostitutes mutated every few years throughout the entire nineteenth century. Throughout this dissertation, I demonstrate how neologisms such as "*lorette*" and "*demi-mondaine*" reflect the important socio-historical changes that occurred throughout the century. In this manner they serve as markers for the different political regimes. Perhaps the terms Parent employs no longer held sway in the early 1840s when Dumas was writing.

bien que la santé, et peuvent être considérées comme les êtres les plus dangereux que renferme la société. Cependant, et cela paraîtra singulier à quelques personnes, l'administration ne peut pas les saisir et les traiter comme des prostituées; elles ont toutes un domicile; elles paient des impôts, elles se conforment extérieurement à toutes les règles de la décence; elles jouissent de tous leurs droits politiques; on ne peut leur refuser les ménagemens que méritent les seules femmes honnêtes, et par conséquent, elles échappent aux mesures de l'administration. (107)

If the “*femmes entretenues*” are not policed by the administration, it is in part because they “ne représentent pas un réel danger pour les classes dirigeantes, auxquelles elles s'intègrent de fait.”⁴⁶

Though Parent implies that the majority of kept women were excluded from the surveillance system, there were indeed multiple attempts during the Restoration to submit the courtesans to regulatory exams, though ultimately they failed, according to Jill Harsin. For example, Harsin cites the time the police engaged an individual to help them locate *femmes galantes* in 1817. Though they arrested 60 *femmes galantes* and examined them for venereal disease, the police failed to institute the exams with any regularity because the courtesans' rich lovers complained.⁴⁷ In 1820, authorities established a “petite dispensaire” for 70 courtesans who were to undergo exams in a clinic that ensured separation from the less prestigious and thus rougher prostitutes.⁴⁸ One special agent was sent on social calls to remind the courtesans of their medical obligations; however, this privilege provoked the jealousy of other agents who were eager to do the same. Some of the agents brutalized the courtesans, who, in turn, stopped going to their

⁴⁶ Corbin 14-15.

⁴⁷ Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985) 17.

⁴⁸ Harsin 17-18.

exams. As such, the administration closed down the “petite dispensaire” in 1822. Prefect Jean-Claude Mangin’s efforts, in 1830, to set up exams for elegant prostitutes on specified days failed as well, and thus, as Harsin claims, the courtesan “remained unpoliced for the rest of the century” (18).

In the same way the wealth and respectability of the courtesan’s protectors prevented the administration from seizing courtesans and forcing them to undergo exams, the high regard for privacy and property prevented agents from rushing into “maisons à parties” as they could a bordello. In the case of bordellos, or “maisons closes,” they were tolerated as long as the woman running them kept detailed records and allowed police to inspect the premises on a regular basis. Because part of the thrill for rich individuals involved danger and intrigue, the locations of the “maisons à parties” which couples frequented for brief trysts remained hidden from the police. Parent insists that even if authorities were to suspect a certain location of being such a place of ill repute, the acquisition of search warrants was difficult and slow. Hence, many such houses remained unknown to the police or out of their jurisdiction for lack of tangible evidence required for them to be able to search such sites.

“Homme exempt de préjugés”: Parent claims to forsake fiction for science

Parent’s speculation about the orgies and debauchery that occurred behind the closed doors that lie beyond the reach of authorities illustrates how his conflicts with female sexuality prompted imaginative flights of fantasy. Yet, despite the creative liberties he takes in his discussion of the *femmes entretenues*, Parent labels himself as a researcher whose work differs from that of fiction

writers. First of all, Bernheimer writes that Parent relied on scientific objectification to justify his own project, which he considered far removed from his imaginative predecessors. He notes: “The purpose of all these information-gathering activities is to make prostitution the object of positive, quantifiable knowledge, the only kind worthy of consideration by the serious men to whom his study is addressed.” (17). In fact, Parent describes himself in the introduction of *De la prostitution* as the ideal researcher adequately removed from his licentious subject:

Homme libre et sans place, je distribuerai avec impartialité la louange et le blâme; homme religieux, je n’aurai pas à rougir de ce que ma plume aura trace; homme exempt de préjugés, je saurai dire tout ce que peuvent réclamer de moi la science, le bien de la société, et celui de la classe infortunée qui m’a fourni tant de sujets d’études et de meditations. (15)

Parent adamantly distinguishes himself from earlier writers on the subject, whom he dismisses as frivolous women who “se renferment dans leur cabinet, font travailler leur imagination, et sans recueillir aucun fait, sans s’informer de ce qui existe, elles parviennent dans l’espace de quelques jours à composer un livre, qu’elle distribuent à leurs amis” (DP, I, 16). Bernheimer says that “they saw only the eloquence of their brilliant style [...] not the stubborn realities of social abuse” (17).

Second of all, Parent, while he insists on brothel visits to collect tangible data (unlike his predecessors, whom he claimed relied on their imaginations), in order to establish himself as a credible scientist, he ensures that authorities accompany him in order to fend off criticism from anyone tempted to accuse him of committing lewd acts in the *maisons closes*. He claims that his study would

have been too difficult had he faced the task alone: “La nature de ces difficultés les eût rendues insurmontables, si j’avais été abandonné à moi-même” (DP, I, 21). With policemen and agents at his side, he will always have a witness to back up his conduct; better yet, the presence of authorities will prevent him from acting on any lewd desires in the brothels that might have been “insurmontables” to the self-doubting⁴⁹ Parent had he been left to his own devices.

Despite his respect and desire for scientific proof to back up his work, Parent nevertheless lets his imagination soar, especially when he confronts the nebulous subject of the prostitute’s ability to deceive. Though he takes great pains to “legitimize” his unusual research project with charts, tables, and endless statistics, his discomfort with female sexuality and his fear of prostitutes reintegrating themselves into society stimulate his fantasies, and thus, betray his objectiveness. Bernheimer links the danger of the prostitute defying police authority with clever disguises or clandestine behavior that so troubled Parent, with the danger of sexual desire or venereal disease. He asserts, “Both of them” trouble Parent because they “subvert scientific discourse and ferment fiction. Venereal infection is the virulent illness embodying this subversion” (27). Thus, Parent not only fears unbridled female sexuality, but also the potential decay the spread of syphilis could generate—for in his mind, the two are linked. The *insoumises*, prostitutes not registered with the police, and their clandestine prostitution particularly worry him, for he says: “Les filles assujetties à la police n’ont que des bobos en comparaison de la gravité des maux que présentent les

⁴⁹ It is possible that Parent insists on his upstanding principles and his self-control in order to convince himself that he indeed does possess these qualities—for if he possessed them, he would not be compelled to discuss them.

insoumises” (144-145). Even more dangerous are the courtesans, for Parent claims that one only need to look to historical documents for the proof that “la crainte des plus effroyables maladies n’a jamais éloigné des courtisanes” (42). Hence Parent, who considers these women the most syphilitic of all, bases his belief on emotions or feelings expressed in these documents rather than on scientific proof. He considers courtesans threatening because they construct social façades so perfectly that the police can never legally arrest them. Not only do they use their bodies for capital, they pick and choose whom they want as clients. Thus courtesans, who resemble honest women, unnerve Parent and menace patriarchal domination because the police, or any other man for that matter, cannot control their sexuality. The courtesan takes charge of her own sexuality, and in this sense, men cannot dominate her.

“Les égouts où elles exercent”: Sewers and sickness in Dumas and Parent

Indeed the threat of syphilis and the infection it spawned⁵⁰ posed a formidable problem in nineteenth-century France and thus legitimately warranted measures to regulate the spread of venereal diseases. However, the blame for the disease seemed to fall solely on women,⁵¹ though paradoxically Harsin indicates that men were “lavished” with all the “medical concern” (259). As such, Parent’s desire to contain the prostitute through strict regulation and frequent gynecological exams became problematical in light of Parent’s blurring of

⁵⁰ The deadly cholera epidemic in Paris in 1832 exacerbated the fears of contagion that would grow throughout the century in France as faith in the potential of science increased and medical justification of theories of degenerate heredity and syphilitic infection grew.

⁵¹ Harsin states: “In the peculiar politics of venereal disease, women were always the guilty transmitters, men (and the wives and children of these men) their hapless victims” (258).

scientific and moral boundaries. Bernheimer's psychoanalytical reading sheds light on why Parent wanted to use science and medical exams for more than just preventing physical contagion caused by syphilis. Bernheimer argues that Parent intended to use it for moral grounds as well – namely to discover ways of discerning the sex organ of a virtuous woman from that of the prostitute (he was frustrated at the failure to discover any physical differences between the two). In sum, Parent's research on prostitutes extends beyond concern for public health; as Bernheimer has suggested,⁵² Parent's ambitious study on prostitution permitted Parent to vent his own desires and fantasies about female sexuality (15-16).

Following in Parent's tradition of associating the prostitute with sewers, Dumas also betrays his anxiety about the female sex organs by describing the prostitute in terms of darkness, decay, and humidity, while the images of mud and sewers that permeate Parent's work also appear in Dumas's. Both men used these tropes to insist upon the prostitute's moral degradation and her dangerous contagiousness. Consequently, Dumas seconds Parent's insistence on the prostitute as the dangerous carrier of infection and contagious diseases like syphilis in his first chapter entitled "Filles." For example, he claims that the *filles publiques* who frequented the Palais-Royal would drag their clients to an "escalier humide et tortueux" not far from the *tripots* men with feverous, corpse-like appearances frequented (18). In his discussion on the Palais-Royal, Dumas claims that men never leave because they have everything they need there -- namely harlots, restaurants, and gambling houses. Prostitutes would have searched for

⁵² As Bernheimer indicates, Parent considered the prostitute as a type of sewer that collected the "seminal excess of male desire" (16).

clients in the *tripots*, so one assumes that the men's sickly faces indicate illness from a venereal disease they contracted from prostitutes. In keeping with the idea of Parent's vision of the prostitute as the insidious carrier of dangerous infectious diseases, Dumas proclaims: "La fille publique est le Paria de la civilization; c'est la pestiférée, sans le Lazareth" (21). More than just the dangerous Other (le Paria), Dumas considers the prostitute to be a disease-ridden creature that must be contained in the name of social order. Though Parent couches his disgust with her in scientific terms, the literary artist Dumas denounces her deviancy outright with biblical hyperboles. The prostitute's world, which Dumas characterizes as a "cloaque immonde," a "marais infect" or an "étang fangeux" must be penetrated by light that Dumas associates with surveillance (24). Dumas claims that he lacks the courage to go down into "les égoûts où elles (the prostitutes) exercent," further reinforcing Parent's dehumanized vision of the prostitute as sewer (25).

Thus, for both Parent and Dumas, the prostitute as sewer represents not only the lowest depths of society, but also an emblem of their unconscious anxiety about female sexuality. Images of wetness symbolize the prostitute's vagina, just as the words that suggest dirtiness and infection indicate Parent's belief that the prostitute's sexuality is degraded, dirty, and dangerous because it can spread venereal disease. The images of dark mud suggest their fears of being swallowed up by the prostitute's vagina during intercourse. Yet despite these horrific fears, Parent views the prostitute as the indispensable receptacle of the "seminal excess of male desire."⁵³ In other words, though the prostitute's sex organ may be filthy,

⁵³ Bernheimer 16.

disgusting, and anxiety-inducing, it is an essential element in sexual intercourse, a human function that provides necessary release. In short, Parent believes that the harlot is like a sewer; like the sewer, the prostitute should be active, but hidden from public; study and regulation of both is therefore necessary for public health. Yet both are problematical because they are at once necessary and vile. Just as the sewer is both beneficial because it drains waste, yet repulsive because it transports filth, the prostitute renders a practical service, yet disgusts with her menacing sex organ.

***Filles, lorettes et courtisanes*: Dumas continues Parent's containment project**

With *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris* as his model, Alexandre Dumas's *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes* continues Parent's containment project by emulating Parent's classifications of prostitutes. Dumas's efforts to expose the prostitute's threat as well as the "underworld" she is associated with in order to track her down and thus control her mirrors Parent's desire to see patriarchal order restored. Penned just six years after Parent's *De la prostitution*, Dumas's work follows Parent's example by perpetuating the exploration of the prostitute's hidden world and all the deviant players that frequent it, such as the brothel madam, the pimps, the former prostitutes who recruit young women, the *amant de coeur*, and the second-hand dress sellers. Nonetheless, despite the broad similarities between the two works, the two approach the subject in very different manners. While Parent considers his work to be primarily sociological and spends pages trying to convince his reader that his tome is an objective work of science,

Dumas does not entirely embrace Parent's seriousness. On the contrary, as a novelist he seeks to entertain and titillate. Dumas's eclectic work defies neat categories and the writer does not seem perturbed in the least by its singularity. Neither entirely scientific, nor entirely fiction, Dumas's *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes* is a curious hybrid of sociology and storytelling⁵⁴ that nonetheless gives voice to the widespread effort to contain the menace of the prostitute in the first half of the nineteenth century.

“Les pages suivantes ne sont point écrites ... pour les demoiselles qui sortent du couvent”: Dumas and the fiction factor

Dumas's focus on the salacious details about prostitutes, his flights of imagination, and his anxiety about social mobility (which he projects onto the prostitute) separate the novelist from his public hygienist predecessor. Unlike Parent, who consistently rationalized addressing such a racy topic, Dumas capitalizes on the lewdness of his subject in the preface of *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes* and with a nod to Balzac, lauds himself as the only person daring enough to paint such a scandalous area of the great Parisian panorama. He claims:

⁵⁴In an effort to set himself apart from other writers, Dumas (he is writing on the heels of the popular *physiologie*) announces that his work will delve into more detail than the short works sold as inexpensive pamphlets or assembled in series like the *Français peints par eux-mêmes*. Indeed, Dumas claims that he wants to present the public with a more serious study, stating: “Nous voudrions que le cadre de cet article nous permit de prendre la fille à la formation de notre société et de la suivre à travers notre civilisation croissante [...] cela donnerait à notre travail un cachet de gravité et un reflet de science historique [...]” (15). Despite his purported serious historical pretensions, Dumas immediately launches into the heart of his subject (thus avoiding pages of historical analysis) because he claims to be limited by constraints of space. He claims: “Malheureusement nous sommes enfermés dans des limites infranchissables. Hâtons-nous donc d’arriver au coeur de notre sujet” (15). In a true example of historical abridgement, Dumas limits his discussion on prostitutes in Paris since the time of François Premier to two paragraphs. The fact that he at least provides a few historical facts nonetheless distinguishes his works from the *physiologies*, which relied on brief anecdotes accompanied by caricatures and engravings, to convey their subject matter in the simplest terms to their readers.

“Voici, à ce que m’assure l’éditeur du present livre, un coin du grand panorama parisien que personne n’a osé peindre, une page du grand livre de la civilization moderne, au bas de laquelle personne n’a osé mettre son nom” (11). In reference to Balzac’s project to capture all of French society in his *Comédie humaine*, Dumas claims to undertake an equally momentous task: “Il y a dans mon esprit une tendance toute particulière à entreprendre les choses que personne n’ose accomplir; aussi ai-je du premier coup accepté la tâche proposée, si difficile et surtout si scabreuse qu’elle fût” (11). While the conscientious Parent spends pages rationalizing a project on the abject world of prostitution, it only takes Dumas two paragraphs to embrace his lurid subject. In fact with great zest he proposes to take the reader “du coin de la borne où la prostituée des rues guette le nocturne passant, jusqu’au boudoir princier où l’élégante courtisane, qu’on a envoyé chercher dans une voiture sans armoire, est introduite par un valet sans livrée” (12).

From the outset of the work, Dumas promises his reader a titillating journey into the underworld of prostitution. His study, which Emmanuel Pierrat, the editor of the 2000 Flammarion edition of *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes*, labels a “véritable document libertin,” is a work of fiction in the sense that it promises to explore forbidden parts of Paris that Parent does not dare discuss (Parent himself chides eighteenth-century writer Restif de la Bretonne for relying more on fiction than fact in his treatise on prostitution entitled *Le Pornographe*). In a libertine *clin d’oeil* reminiscent of Laclos’s suggestion that this *Liasons dangereuses* be given to a daughter on her wedding day, Dumas warns that his tome is not written for

the “demoiselles qui sortent du couvent” (12). Along the same lines, Dumas coyly reveals in a note to the reader: “[...] pour les choses que Parent-Duchâtelet a oubliées, j’en ai appelé aux lumières de quelques-uns de mes amis, fort savants sur la matière [...]” (14).

Dumas’s eagerness to use his imagination to fill in the gaps about mysterious facts concerning prostitutes is yet another way in which Dumas distinguishes himself from Parent. While Dumas takes poetic license in his portraits of the *filles*, *lorettes*, and *courtisanes*, often providing salacious details about them, Parent shuns any imaginative inventions. According to Pierrat, Dumas “rapporte encore nombre d’anecdotes galantes, dresse des portraits croquants, rapelle les fait divers édifiants...” (8). Like any great fiction writer, Dumas provides vivid details in order to bring his subject alive for his readers, a skill quite evident in his portrait of the *filles* who haunt the Palais-Royal. At the Palais-Royal, Dumas explains, circulated a hundred

créatures, dernière traditions des costumes du sacré, dernier échantillon des toilettes de l’Empire, coiffées de fleurs, de plumes et de faux diamants, décolletées jusqu’à la ceinture, vêtues de satin, de velours et de soies, avec les joues éliminées, les sourcils peints, les lèvres rouges; marchant d’un pas de reine de theatre, [...]agaçant par une parole libertine le provincial nouvellement débarqué; provoquant par un geste lascif l’employé trop inconnu pour aller dans le monde [...]; jetant une promesse de luxure au commis-voyageur dont la journée est finie. (17)

In sum, Dumas’s page-and-a-half description (crammed into one sentence) of the *filles* not only intended to arouse the reader (the prostitute’s painted lips and her racy décolletées), but also to describe in minute detail her life, so as to demonstrate Dumas’s expertise on the subject. In the same way that Balzac uses detail describing the dining room in the Pension Vauquer in *Père Goriot* to show

his god-like knowledge of the bourgeois social milieu, Dumas assures the reader that he has mastered the *fille* with his skillful eye for detail.

The male gaze and female agency

Dumas's observation of the Palais-Royal filles also reveals the way he masters these reputedly wanton figures with his look. Dumas views the hidden aspect of prostitution—that is the illicit behavior the *filles* engage in behind the administration's back (in dark alleys and stairwells) — as troubling. Indeed, one needs the power to see the prostitute in order to locate her concealed threat. While the ability to see allows men to either track or to elude prostitutes, it also serves as a key element in masculine subjecthood as it symbolizes the ability to control. According to Laura Mulvey, man's capacity to see allows him to seize the active subject position by subjugating the woman with his look.⁵⁵ Mulvey contends that the woman, as the passive object of his gaze, lacks subjecthood, and consequently functions merely as “a signifier for the male other,” a silent screen onto which man projects his “fantasies and obsessions” (15). In short, the man determines with his gaze, whereby the “silent image of woman” remains “tied to her place as bearer, not marker, of meaning” (15). In the case of Dumas, Mulvey's use of psychoanalytical theory to break down the male gaze cast on the passive female icon in cinema, applies to his work, for his obsession with “seeing” the prostitute entails tracking her down so that he may project his illusions of patriarchal domination onto her.

⁵⁵ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Visual and other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989) 14-15.

At first glance, Dumas's depiction of the painted prostitutes at the Palais-Royal seems only to indicate his yearning to scandalize or arouse erotic feelings in the reader. As Mulvey explains, in the cinema, "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (19). Woman then is "displayed as sexual object" of the "erotic spectacle: [...] she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire" (19). Viewed in such a way, Dumas's suggestive portrait of the Palais-Royal prostitutes reduces the women to erotic objects for the men who encounter them in public, for Dumas the writer, and for his audience, the male reader is positioned as a spectator (19). By male spectator, I am referring to the voyeurism promoted in Dumas's text. In the cinema, Mulvey explains that certain cinematic conventions, such as the contrast "between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation" (17). Along the same lines, Dumas manipulates contrasts between darkness and light and allusions to the theater in order to give his male reader, "the spectator an illusion of looking in a private world" (17). In the introduction, Dumas promises to expose the hidden world of prostitution to his readers, providing erotic stimulation along the way.

In spite of the playful tone in his introduction and his lascivious intentions to arouse male desire, the fact that the prostitute's acts are largely uncontrolled disturbs Dumas, who admits: "Ce métier une fois adopté, voyons l'emploi de sa journée, ses joies, ses plaisirs, ses douleurs, pendant tout le temps qu'elle disparaît

à nos yeux” (22). In fact, the prostitute is the one who got away, fleeing into the darkness despite Dumas’s determination to locate her, and his implicit failure at never quite stopping her in her tracks. His desire to completely capture her and control her is an impossible fantasy reflecting and reinforcing the anxieties of the castration complex. Mulvey argues that the two ways the male unconscious attempts to avoid this “castration anxiety” include: “preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original drama (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery) counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object (...); or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object [...] so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous” (21).

Paradoxically, Dumas’s attempt to locate her will never completely be successful, so the screen onto which he may project his fantasies of exposure and mastery will always elude him. The prostitute represents a threat to male mastery because agency and subject position are implicitly possible when the female escapes the dominating force of the male gaze. Thus, when she frees herself from the male field of vision, she resists patriarchal domination because she takes the liberty of acting as she wishes. When she flees into “the dark” or evades police surveillance, she thumbs her nose at authorities by doing as she sees fit and threatens the social stability, because she may succeed in slipping back into “normal” society as a wife or salesperson as Parent had feared. As argued earlier, in spite of the pleasure he takes in looking at and in scrutinizing the prostitute, Dumas remains firm in his belief that she is the “Paria” of civilization, a person suffering from the plague, and that laws and morality have rightly placed the

harlot “au ban de la société” (21). In Dumas’s opinion, the prostitute, when left to her own devices, will act as an agent of contamination who will eventually erode society by committing obscene acts that undermine male mastery.

The Prostitute and fears of female subjectivity: The first rumblings of emancipation?

Indeed, Dumas’s insistence on patrolling the prostitute stems from Parent’s drive to check the prostitute’s defiance of order. In order to make his case for the strict regulation of prostitutes stronger, Parent employs several concrete examples of how the prostitutes escape authorities and argues that regular surveillance remedies these problems. For example, Parent claims that throughout the centuries prostitutes changed their names in order to escape punishment by the justice system or surveillance by the police administration. He states: “Le besoin d’échapper aux recherches ou à la surveillance de la justice ou de l’administration était autrefois bien plus commun qu’à l’époque actuelle” (82). Because he cannot support his claim, it is difficult to tell whether Parent speaks the truth or whether he is just trying to reassure the public that the prostitute’s mobility is limited. Although he asserts that the administration passed a measure in 1829 requiring all prostitutes registering to provide their birth certificate, he seems unsure about its effectiveness. He admits: “Aujourd’hui, en inscrivant les prostituées, on est à-peu-près sûr d’avoir leur véritable nom; mais, lorsqu’elles restent isolées, et surtout lorsqu’elles logent en garni, elles emploient encore souvent ce stratagème pour dérouter les agents de l’administration” (83). Parent then provides data on the number of name changes prostitutes undergo in order to

give the appearance of controlling the situation. Moreover, in order to prove his detailed knowledge about their lives, he provides the reader with two lists of *nom de guerre* of the lower-prostitutes (“classe inférieure”) and the high-class harlots (“classe élevée”). He concludes that the administration’s measures will limit the number of name-swapping episodes, and asserts: “car la vérité ne pouvant aujourd’hui rester inconnue, celles qui tromperaient, s’exposeraient inévitablement à des châtimens sévères” (86). Thus he seeks to guarantee the prostitute’s containment by proposing punishment for daring to escape surveillance.

In contrast, Parent avoids analyzing the prostitute’s jargon -- for it is too shocking and too unnerving that she would have a vocabulary that would escape him. Indeed, possession of a clandestine language would endow her with a type of independence beyond the reach of authorities. As such, Parent even cites a few words from their colorful vocabulary to show that they are accessible to everyone and therefore not a subversive means of communication. The fact that he claims at least three times that no such “argot particulier” exists, makes the reader wonder whether Parent repeats these statements in order to persuade himself that the prostitute does not possess a subjecthood as represented by her untouchable language.

“La prostituée reparut sous une autre forme, avec un autre costume [...] avec un autre tournure”: The prostitute as menacing figure of social mobility

For Dumas, the prostitute and her lovers embody disturbing social mobility and hence instability in post-revolutionary France. From his alarm at the

prostitute's resurfacing in the Bourse district after her expulsion from the Palais-Royal to his digression on the *savate* (a "lutte populaire" and a rite of initiation for the *hommes entretenus* of the *filles publiques*), Dumas's fears about social chaos shine through his words: anything associated with prostitutes reeks of social mobility. To the chagrin of authorities, the prostitute's menace does not diminish when they expel her from the grounds of the Palais-Royal. Her quick relocation proves her resourcefulness and her refusal to go away. Dumas writes: "Refoulée dans la rue Vivienne, sur la place de la Bourse, dans la rue de Richelieu, dans la rue Laffitte et sur le boulevard de Gand, la prostituée reparut sous une autre forme, avec un autre costume, et, si on peut le dire, avec un autre tournure" (20). Indeed, Dumas claims that she poses as a frightened countess in order to trick a provincial bourgeois into believing that she is a member of a class far superior to her own. Her immorality and mobility must be stopped in Dumas's opinion because "les lois et la morale ont mis la fille publique au ban de la société" (21). Disturbed by her refusal to stay in her proper place, Dumas, like Parent, hopes exposing all her mystery will dismantle her threat. He announces his project: "Pénétrons dans l'intérieur de cette vie exceptionnelle [...] Grâce aux recherches que nous avons faites près des gens les mieux renseignés à cet endroit, peut-être parviendrons-nous même, après Parent Duchâtelet, à en dire quelque chose de nouveau et d'inconnu" (21). Though he pays homage to Parent by citing *De la prostitution* extensively and by continuing the tradition of scrutinizing the prostitute's behavior, Dumas hopes to set himself apart by uncovering facts that even eluded Parent.

In addition to his associating social climbing with prostitution, Dumas's preoccupation with class instability appears in other forms in the text. By way of a discussion of the prostitute's lover, he addresses the sensitive topic of insecurities about class legitimacy indirectly. Hence Dumas's eight-page digression on the *savate* and the fille's lover, the "homme entretenu," is essentially a disguised treatise on fears about social mobility. Although Dumas claims that the *savate* discussion stems from the ritual initiation rite of the *homme entretenu*, the remarks he makes about class instability indicate that he is using the *savate* as pretext to deal with the battle between the social classes (either consciously or not). Dumas explains that the neophyte must rise up to the challenge of a fight in order to be admitted into the association of *hommes entretenus* or be dismissed as a coward, and hence return to his former profession of wood-carver, painter or miller.

Dumas employs his parenthesis on the *savate* as a means of discussing the instability of the social hierarchy, insisting that the sport once centered around the proletariat and that it did not evolve much until the classes began intermingling.

Dumas writes:

Mais la fusion des rangs a amené la rencontre des grands et des petits, de l'homme du monde et du crocheteur [...] autrefois, pour l'homme du peuple, le grand seigneur était un protecteur qui le faisait vivre; aujourd'hui, pour le dernier manant, l'homme comme il faut est un usupateur qui lui prend sa part des biens de ce monde. (32)

The class confusion Dumas addresses stems from the fact that feudal paternalism gave way to a capitalist society that after 1789 promoted equality – at least in theory -- leaving both the disenfranchised aristocrat and the newly empowered

proletariat worker perplexed about their new roles. According to Dumas, the proletariat, bombarded with newspaper stories about the socialist beliefs of the Saint-Simoniens and the Communists, embraces the ideals of equality and therefore considers the “homme du monde” the enemy responsible for his miserly existence. Dumas explains the post-revolutionary crisis in terms of the messy equality promised in 1789:

D’ailleurs, si pauvre qu’il soit, et cela est juste, l’homme du peuple est, devant la loi, l’égal de l’homme du monde: il jouit des mêmes droits, et peut réclamer de tout agent de l’autorité une égale protection.

D’un autre côté, comme en même temps qu’il prenait à l’homme du peuple le désir de monter, il prenait à l’homme du monde le caprice de descendre. Il résulta, de ce double déplacement, un terrain neutre sur lequel le goujat et l’homme comme il faut se rencontrèrent. (32-33)

Despite the mention of neutrality, Dumas’s subsequent comments reveal that his sympathies lie with the “homme du monde” who fights the lowly “goujat,” especially when he claims that no possibility exists of bringing the lower-class man up to the well-to-do man’s level.⁵⁶ Dumas implies that the worker lacks the skill, intelligence, and education required to duel with swords or pistols which remain second nature to the worldly man. Faced with the brute force of this lowly sort of combat, the gentleman was often defeated, according to Dumas. In order to tip the scales back in his favor, the *homme du monde* hired a *savate* master and thus became the workingman’s equal in fighting. However, Dumas’s prejudice for the gentleman compels him to reestablish the upper class’s superiority, for he proclaims: “il fallait l’écraser par une puissante supériorité” (34). In order to

⁵⁶ Dumas states: “Il n’y avait pas moyen d’élever l’homme du peuple jusqu’au duel à l’épée et au pistolet, force fut à l’homme du monde de descendre jusqu’à la lutte à coup de pied, et le combat à coups de poing” (33).

achieve such a mission, a French gentleman studied the art of “boxing” in London, then came back to France and combined the two sports. Dumas explains: “La victoire de l’homme du monde sur l’homme du peuple ne fut plus douteuse, et la supériorité se trouva établie en faveur de l’aristocracie” (37). Thus, the aristocrat’s participation not only elevated la *savate* to an art, but ultimately proved his superiority.

Introducing an unexpected subject allows Dumas to throw the reader off guard yet all the while address an anxiety-provoking issue such as class instability without the reader becoming too alarmed or defensive. Dumas furtively introduces this sensitive subject by discussing the *homme entretenu*, whom Dumas describes as basically the *fille publique*’s pimp and bodyguard, and occasional *amant de coeur*. However, in a book that claims to discuss prostitutes, Dumas spends an inordinate amount of time talking about the *homme entretenu* as an excuse for discussing the issue of social classes, a topic made taboo during the Revolution. Because the man of the people fought out of resentment against his oppressor, Dumas asserts that the *homme du monde* was often defeated. Ironically, the man of the world’s desire to become the man of the people’s equal in the world of the *savate* pushes him to study its art so as to not be outshone by his socially inferior rival. Through the mastery of *savate*, the aristocrat reasserts his dominance with his intelligence over perhaps heartier and stronger man of the people. With the hierarchy reinstated, Dumas closes his digression on the *savate* and casually resumes his study of the streetwalkers’ habits. In sum, Dumas’s

curious divergence about the *savate* illustrates anxiety about the “dangerous” lower class and issues of legitimacy.

**“La fille publique symbolize encore le désordre, l’excès et l’imprévoyance”:
The Prostitute and revolution**

According to Corbin, for Parent, “La fille publique symbolise encore le désordre, l’excès et l’imprévoyance; bref, le refus de l’ordre et de l’épargne” (21). Though she embodies wantonness for Parent, the *fille publique* for Dumas represents the chaos that develops during revolution and the social instability that ensues once the violence has ended. Indeed, Dumas links the prostitute with revolution in his discussion of the way in which the *filles publiques* overtake the Palais-Royal in 1789. Though he acknowledges that prostitutes had existed in France for centuries, Dumas claims that her ubiquity is born out of the mayhem of 1789. He declares:

Mais ce ne fut qu’en 1789, je crois, que l’entrée du jardin et des galeries du Palais-Royal fut promise à la fille publique; de ce moment elle s’en empara, elle en fit sa chose, et comme la lice de la fable, elle parut y avoir établi son domicile pour toujours. Nous avons encore vu le temps où le Palais-Royal appartenait exclusivement à la fille publique. (16)

Upstart prostitutes commandeered this exclusive area once reserved for aristocrats, nobles, and other “respectable” citizens as soon as the tumult of 1789 broke out, thereby ushering in a political and social chaos that permitted such disorder.

He claims that at the Palais, “c’était la prostituée qui en faisait les honneurs; elle y avait son salon de reception et son parc” (16). His sarcasm about the prostitute being the new noble of the Palais reveals his ambivalence about the

loss the revolution caused in terms of private privileges once reserved for the most exclusive classes. For Dumas, the Palais-Royal, which once represented the interests of the monarchy and all its rights to rule and dominate, came to symbolize a place of debauchery during the revolution and immediately thereafter. In sum, the prostitute for Dumas represents a part of the marginal society threatening to overturn stability in the same destructive way the *sans culottes* did in 1789. Indeed, I will explore this important connection between prostitution and revolution throughout this dissertation.

**“On voulait la connaître pour la combattre, l’étudier pour se défendre”:
Defusing the threat of the *lorette***

While Dumas borrowed heavily from Parent in his chapter on the *filles*, he relied more on his imagination (delivering subjective appraisals of their beauty) to size up the phenomena of the *lorette*, partly because the term did not exist when Parent penned his study six years earlier. For Dumas, the challenge of locating the essence of this new “species” of a woman who lived around Notre-Dame de Lorette in the early 1840s both captivates and alarms him. On the one hand, she symbolizes the rapidly changing landscape of Paris that seems to dazzle him. Remarking on how much Paris has changed in 20 years, he says: “Or, parmi tous ces quartier qui sont élevés à l’envi l’un de l’autre, il y a un quartier qui semble bâti par la baguette d’une fée. “C’est le quartier Notre-Dame de Lorette [...] En effet, ce quartier improvisé se peupla avec cette miraculeuse rapidité” (57-58). Dumas greets the unclassifiable *lorette*, the new creature that haunts the area, with pleasure. He declares: “Elles se composait de charmants petits êtres propres,

élégants, coquets, qu'on ne pouvait classer dans aucun des genres connus: ce n'était ni le genre fille, ni le genre grisette, ni le genre courtisane" (58). His delight in her novelty continues for two more pages and he credits Nestor Roqueplan with coining the word "lorette" on Jan. 20, 1841 in the *Nouvelles à la Main*. He explains: "C'était un genre absolument nouveau, une variété de l'espèce de femme, un produit de la civilisation contemporaine n'ayant précédant parmi les sociétés passées" (59-60). On the one hand, Dumas as a writer appreciates the cleverness and beauty of Roqueplan's label for the *lorette*. On the other hand, however, his wariness of the *lorette's* dangerous sexuality underscores his fascination with her. Although briefly mesmerized by her novelty, Dumas brusquely breaks away from the spell, declaring: "Rien ne popularise comme le mal: y-a-t-il un homme, si ignorant qu'il soit, qui ne sache ce que c'est que la peste ou le choléra, que Tibère et que Néron?" (60). Overcome with ambivalence about her unexpected debut on the scene and his fascination with it, Dumas seems to catch himself and revert back to the standard Parent formula linking the ubiquitous prostitute to decay ("la peste"), disease ("le cholera"), and destruction ("Néron").

Dumas's ambivalence toward the *lorette* stems not only from contamination and contagiousness, but also from the social leveling she causes. He says: "En effet, art et finance, bourgeoisie parvenue et aristocratie ruinée, fils de banquiers, fils de famille, fils de prince, fils de roi, tout se jeta dans la Lorette" (60). Because the *lorette* accepts lovers from all different social backgrounds, she razes the class boundaries in a way that offsets the class distinctions that give a

sense of order to society, if only unconsciously. As such, she represents a challenge to the social system in which individuals define themselves against both those above them and those below them in order to grasp their place in the social order. In a society still reeling from the aftershocks of the 1789 revolution, social hierarchies comforted individuals (even if they were not happy with their status) by providing them with a sense of security in an era when political and economic systems were constantly evolving. The *lorette*, in distinguishing her clients according to financial criteria rather than social pedigree, called into question the validity of the social order. Indeed, a backlash developed to counteract her notoriety as a social leveler, as Dumas notes: “Enfin, la Lorette qui n’avait été jusqu’à là qu’un objet de curiosité devint presque un objet de terreur” (60). Mirroring the popular *physiologies* of the 1840s, Dumas tries to categorize and explain the Other in order to defuse her threat. He thereby asserts: “On examina la Lorette sous ses rapports sociaux, politiques et intellectuels: on voulait la connaître pour la combattre, l’étudier pour se défendre:” only in exposing her secrets and habits can the *homme du monde* subjugate her illicit sexuality (60).

The Lorette at Carnival: Fears of mobility and modernity

At the beginning of his chapter on the *lorette*, Dumas conflates the amazing pace at which Paris is changing and the *lorette* as the symbol of the fast-changing times. In the same manner, Dumas projects his uneasiness about the unreasonably fast-paced way in which Parisians conduct their lives in the early 1840s onto the *lorette*, a fact most evident in his descriptions of her “folie” during

Carnival. Thus he describes her behavior during the carnival as though it were a sickness. He writes: “Il n’y a plus de jour, il n’y a plus de nuit, la division ordinaire du temps a cessé d’exister; le sommeil est retranché de l’existence” (85). Her feverish symptoms, Dumas states, “se manifeste en général chez elle, au commencement du mois de décembre de chaque année” (84). The *lorette*, according to Dumas, reigns during Carnival and spends the entire year calculating how she can procure “un carnaval insensé, fiévreux, vitriolique” (83). Indeed, Dumas sets the *lorette*’s exaggerated vitality (which will be further explored in chapter two) against the backdrop of the topsy-turvy atmosphere of Carnival in order to address in a humorous way such troubling issues as the breakdown of traditional gender roles and fluctuations in the class system associated with the *lorette*.⁵⁷

Dumas employs the *lorette* as the ambivalent figure of modernity, for while her frenetic pace and preference for technologically advanced transportation (such as the locomotive) during Carnival inspire wonder, they also appear insane to Dumas. Indeed, Dumas refers to Carnival as “cette époque de folie” (86), and claims that the *lorette* relies only on the quickest means of transportation possible. He writes: “Toute locomotive est bonne, seulement plus elle est rapide, plus elle est appréciée; on voudrait appliquer la vapeur à la chaise sur laquelle de temps en temps on s’assied; on regrette le tapis magique des Mille et une Nuits....” (155). In contrast, he claims that the common carriage is the only means of transportation that maintains any semblance of traditional order. Dumas states:

⁵⁷ Natalie Zemon Davis, “Women on Top,” *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1975) 131.

“Il n’y a que le fiacre patriarcal qui ait conservé le droit d’aller encore de temps en temps à l’heure et au pas” (155). The “fiacre patriarcal” or the old social order, in which men dictated social activity and mobility, especially when it came to women, symbolizes for Dumas a sense of traditional order. As for her frenzied pace, according to Dumas, a mathematician estimated her activity during the two months of carnival to be 14,440 hours (156). Indeed, these unreasonable and exaggerated hours represent the way the pace of life has been accelerated with the increase in technological and industrial innovation. Steam engines allowed the French to travel at a pace they previously considered unimaginable -- and the new capitalist system required many individuals (namely factory workers) to work extremely long hours. Though the mathematician calculates the *lorette*’s insane pace, he cannot determine how her body withstands such fatigue -- a common anxiety in individuals who fear they will not be able to maintain the pace the system dictates.⁵⁸ Thus, just as Dumas and the mathematician cannot determine exactly how the *lorette* maintains her speed during Carnival, they wonder how society will endure the confusing and hectic pace of modernity.

Theorizing patterns of demonization and seduction

Though they employ different critical approaches to interpret this “dialectic of fascination and disgust,”⁵⁹ Charles Bernheimer, Hollis Clayson, and Jann Matlock concur that nineteenth-century writers fashioned the figure of the

⁵⁸I further develop the link between capitalism and the accelerated pace of life in chapter four in my discussion of Susan Sontag’s *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

⁵⁹Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991) xviii.

prostitute after their own fears and fantasies about the onslaught of modernity. Through a psychoanalytical lens, Bernheimer deciphers the way in which authors identified with the prostitute, yet at the same time were repulsed by her. On the one hand, Bernheimer underlines the way the prostitute symbolized the writers' own "artistic practice"; the prostitute "represented a creative artifice, surface illusion, seductive falsity, even a kind of inspiring void."⁶⁰ On the other hand, Bernheimer exposes what the writers denied in their fascination with the prostitute – namely "the female sexual body" which they "associated with animality, disease, castration, excrement, and decay" (2).

Bernheimer argues that the prostitute's ubiquity in novels and paintings in the nineteenth century stemmed from her "prominence as a social phenomenon," as well as her function in stimulating artistic strategies to control and dispel her threat to male mastery" (2). These "artistic" strategies of regulation figure prominently in Jann Matlock's *Scenes of Seduction*, though she differs from Bernheimer in that she reads the containment project through a Foucauldian lens.

Moreover, Matlock compares and contrasts regulatory measures taken to control the figure of the prostitute to those used to restrain the female hysteric. To paraphrase Matlock, systems of control – ranging from police regulation of prostitutes, to mental asylums for women, to narrative devices in novels about prostitutes -- were designed in such a way as to subdue the prostitutes and hysterics who threatened to disrupt society with their debased "desire." As Matlock has argued:

⁶⁰ Bernheimer 1.

Prostitute and the hysteric are textual products elaborated in case studies, codified into narratives, emplotted into fantasies [...] their desires were provoked so that they could be channeled and controlled. Their differences were interpreted and labeled so that they could be easily recognized and kept in check.⁶¹

In other words, what drew writers to the prostitute was the fact that she served as a “matrix for the struggle aimed at reading women” (9). The ability to read her thus insured the ability to govern her.

Like Matlock, Hollis Clayson presents the prostitute as a figure that male writers and authors could “read.” Though both writers agree on the prostitute’s general function in novels and paintings, for art historian Clayson, the prostitute served rather as a symbol through which French Impressionists could read and respond to modernity. Paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, Clayson claims that the prostitute “takes the position of matchless signifier of alienated relations under capitalism” in the modern city, for “like no other merchant, like no other good or service for sale, she is all of them at once” (8). Clayson contends that the dialectic of “fascination and disgust” artists displayed toward the prostitute reveals their ambivalence toward modernity. She states:

We can begin to see that the attraction to prostitution was pervasive in these years – appealing especially to avant-garde painters of modern life but to many men in the larger culture as well – because “she” marked the point of the intersection of two widely disseminated ideologies of modernity: the modern was lived and seen at its most acute and true in what was temporary, unstable, and fleeting; and the modern social relation was understood to be more and more frozen in the form of commodity. (9)

In short, Clayson claims that the prostitute intrigued artists because she characterized modernity, but at the same time, she disgusted them because she

⁶¹ Jann Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 7.

symbolized what modernity meant for them – namely the steely emphasis capitalism placed on money and the social estrangement that resulted. Thus, critics have read the “dialectic of fascination and disgust” toward the prostitute in terms of male anxieties about female sexuality and desire, as well as reticence about social and economic changes associated with modernity.

Conclusion

Following in the tradition of Parent, whose study claims to expose the threat the prostitute poses to public health and social order, Dumas’s portrait of the *lorette* supports Parent’s insistence on increasing measures to contain the harlot’s menace. Hence, the underlying message implies that keeping her actions in check will enable society to protect itself from her ability to defile social and moral order. Curiously enough, Dumas seems to contradict himself by ending his chapter with the *lorette*’s motto: “Facile à prendre, impossible à garder” (88). Dumas’s concession at the end of the chapter implies that she will always resist the constrictions of social boundaries. Dumas’s ambivalence toward prostitutes makes it impossible for him to take an absolute stand either way. On the one hand, his anxieties about the prostitute’s unruliness and potential contagiousness make him lean the majority of the time toward Parent and his strict policy of regulation and containment. On the other hand, however, the novelist in Dumas embraces the novelty of the *lorette* and delights in the difficulty in classifying her, which in turn allows his imagination to run freely. For the first three or four

pages of the chapter on the *lorette*, Dumas appears charmed by her beauty, mystery, and dubious social origins. Nevertheless, his dramatic declaration that “rien ne popularise comme le mal,” as well as his sarcastic tone in regard to her *arriviste* lovers indicate that he ultimately embraces the status quo.

For Dumas and subsequent writers analyzed in this dissertation, the prostitute symbolizes troubling issues such as social mobility, capitalism, modernity, and challenges to gender roles. Indeed, Dumas is one of the first writers to express his anxieties through the figure of the prostitute and seek to control her in order to allay fears about social, economic, and political instability in nineteenth-century France.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE *LORETTE* AS THE AMBIVALENT FIGURE OF MODERNITY

“O Lorettes, que d’ovations vous attendent! braquez donc sur votre poète vos lornettes-Derepas, et dites-vous:

Voilà celui qui a donné le premier coup de trompe de notre marche triomphale”

Maurice Alhoy

“Il [le lecteur] verra ainsi qui, le premier, a protesté contre l’assomption de la Lorette.”

Edmond and Jules Goncourt

INTRODUCTION

When the chic exotic new creature called the *lorette* burst forth on the Parisian scene in the early 1840s, journalists and writers alike feted her debut. Up to this point in the July Monarchy, the *grisette* had prevailed in Paris. During the 1830s, *grisette* referred to a struggling seamstress, who, in contrast with the streetwalker, lived in the Latin Quarter with her sole lover – normally a financially strapped law student or bohemian. Writers praised her for her industriousness, naivety, and cheerfulness in times of hardship. Throughout the 1840s, writers portrayed the “lorette” as a sort of popular muse in plays, poems, songs and articles, and paired her in their works with impoverished artists and bohemians, store clerks and law students. Indeed the diminutive “ette” of her name reinforced her humble economic and social status.⁶² The “lorette” denoted a kept woman who lived in relative luxury in the new apartment buildings

⁶²As noted in the Introduction, her moniker was a metonymy for the rough material of cloaks worn by the working class.

constructed near Notre-Dame de Lorette. More cunning, competitive, and ambitious than the *grisette*, she sought to increase her financial and social position by entertaining several lovers at one time.

As the 1840s progressed, the stock market gained ground, the bourgeoisie grew richer from the factories and railroads in an increasingly industrialized France, and the neighborhood around Notre-Dame de Lorette blossomed and boomed. In fact, Nestor Roqueplan coined the fashionable neologism “lorette” to capture the novelty of the district and the new money associated with it. Thus, the shift in focus from the *grisette* to the *lorette* reflected the social and economic changes of the 1840s.

Historically, the advent of the *lorette* marks a key shift in the myths of illicit sexuality, for her arrival signals a transition between the opposing fictions of the harlot with a heart of gold and the *demi-mondaine* as the personification of prurient sexuality and political misconduct. More specifically, at the beginning of her reign, writers idealized the *lorette* in the same way that they had the *courtisane* and the *grisette* in the romantic works penned in the 1830s. However, the initial zeal about her waned and, by the end of the 1840s, realists and precursors of naturalism began to lash out against her increasing notoriety.

The earliest representations of the *lorette*, as sketched by Gavarni and outlined by Nestor Roqueplan, characterize her as alluring, charming, and amusing. By casting her as the symbol of Bréda, the new neighborhood in the ninth arrondissement, they praise the *lorette*'s novelty and associate her with modernity. Also, they make her the central figure of their lively portraits of

Carnival celebrations. Nevertheless, in later texts by Alhoy and Dumas, while the writers appreciate the *lorette's* charm, they are nonetheless wary of her sketchy background and her unprincipled pursuit of wealth.

The *lorette's* upbringing and fervor about money are not the only issues that vex Alhoy and Dumas: they also tie the *lorette* to the once stigmatized practices of cross-dressing and sex inversion. As women began staking out places in the public sphere, the equally discredited practices of cross-dressing grew more prevalent in the mid-nineteenth century. In their tales about *lorette's* behavior and dress during Carnival, Alhoy and Dumas marvel at her energy and charisma, but protest the way her actions and cross-dressing undermine male dominance.

Alhoy and Dumas not only link the *lorette* to social climbing and scheming, cross-dressing and sex inversion, but also to capitalism and modernity. In their anecdotes about the stock market, deceitful business practices and technological innovations, the writers use the *lorette* as a screen upon which they project their fears and frustrations about the rapid social transformations taking hold as industrialization pushed France toward modernization. Indeed, as established in chapter one, Dumas claims that because the *lorette* is “presque un objet de terreur,” her social, political, and intellectual relations should be examined if her threat is to be diffused.⁶³

As Rita Felski has suggested, the fact that writers made the *lorette* their “collective screen” is typical of tales of the modern era.⁶⁴ Though she does not

⁶³ Alexandre Dumas, *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000) 60.

⁶⁴ Rita Felski, “Modernity and Feminism,” *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995) 1. Felski states: “Accounts of the modern age, whether academic or popular, typically achieve some kind of formal coherence by dramatizing or personifying historical processes;

address the phenomena of the *lorette* per se, her theory about the need to concretize historical processes in the form of an individual certainly holds true for representations of the *lorette*. Felski asserts: “The prostitute, the actress, the mechanical woman – it is such *female* figures that crystallize the ambivalent responses to capitalism and technology which permeated nineteenth-century culture” (20).

This theory, when applied to the *lorette*, interprets the artists’ and writers’ characterizations of her as a manifestation of their own conflicted desire to earn money without compromising their artistic originality. Indeed, the privileging of commodity over a single work of genius in exchange for currency often guaranteed them coveted financial security, and oftentimes, wealth. Such artists, however, frequently equated selling their works to the highest bidder with the act of prostitution in which a public woman sold herself to the client who provided her the money she demanded.⁶⁵ At its simplest level, writers and artists created the mythical image of the *lorette* to entertain their readers; nonetheless, the curious vocabulary they used and the quirky anecdotes they recounted signal a fascination and repulsion with prostitutes and the modern changes they represented.

On the one hand, this fascination may be read in part as a curious faith in the future, despite the ugliness and uncertainty brought about by revolution and

individual or collective human subjects are endowed with symbolic importance as exemplary bearers of temporal meaning.”

⁶⁵ In Henri Murger’s *Scènes de la vie de Bohème*, Jacques devotes his energy to his lover Francine, and is subsequently ostracized by the ascetic *Buveurs d’Eau* because he has placed comfort over art. Because the *buveurs d’eau* prize art above all else, they drink water so as to not offend their artistic colleagues too poor to buy wine. A large part of their philosophy consists of scorning those who would sacrifice artistic integrity for profit.

instability. Dumas claims in *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes* that the *lorette* was responsible for society's ills. According to Dumas, the *lorettes* gained notoriety by the "ravage que celles qui les portaient (the name "lorette") firent bientôt dans la société" (60). On an unconscious level, however, the artists were drawn to the prostitute because they needed to have a figure to embody the multiple forces over which they had no control. In directing their attention to the prostitute, they compressed their uncertainty into one figure and in their fantasies managed to master this figure and thus experienced a sense of relief. As Dumas has argued, society could master the *lorette* so long as it studied her.⁶⁶ On the other hand, one may argue that to a certain extent, this repulsion stemmed from anxieties about the instability accompanying these modern institutions if one considers the way Dumas and Alhoy link her to social climbing and stock market speculation.⁶⁷ Associating these organizations with prostitution was a way of discrediting them for literally selling out and defying tradition. Notwithstanding, the disgust with the prostitute not only stems from apprehensions about female sexuality (fear of castration), but also from the terror of decomposition, decay, and contagion that haunted the French psyche throughout most of the nineteenth century.⁶⁸ Beginning with the deadly cholera outbreak in the early 1830s and increasing with scientific positivism in the second half of the century, the threat of degeneracy

⁶⁶ Dumas writes: "On voulut la connaître pour la combattre, l'étudier pour se défendre" (60).

⁶⁷ Dumas uses economic terms to describe the *lorette's* love life and claims that she is the "thermomètre" that tracks "le mouvement gouvernemental" (87).

⁶⁸ For more on the fear of decomposition in nineteenth-century France, see chapters 7 and 8 in Charles Bernheimer's *Figures of Ill Repute* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997).

permeated the texts and influenced the treatment of prostitution in novels, plays, short stories, paintings, and caricatures.

“Jenny était soumise à l’artiste:” The *grisette* and fantasized female docility

The key to locating and understanding the fantasies and anxieties cast around the problematized figure of the *lorette* is to contrast her with the *grisette*, a figure romanticized predominantly during the 1830s -- for in understanding what writers largely admired in the *grisette*, the reader discovers what the writers reviled most about the *lorette* and *demi-mondaine*.⁶⁹ Though writers such as Victor Hugo, Louis Huart, Jules Janin, and Daniel Sterne, a woman writer, considered the *grisette* problematic in some ways, namely in terms of her renowned infidelity and her lack of intelligence, which in turn served to reinforce misogynistic belief in woman’s inferior status, on the whole, they generally depicted her as a positive figure. Given the political, social, and economic turmoil of the period, these writers extolled the *grisette* because she emblemized the static status quo. In sum, writers represented her as simple-minded, childlike, easily seduced, reliable and therefore predictable, set in her ways, self-sacrificing, phlegmatically accepting of her working-class origin, and completely devoid of any urge to protest her miserable, poverty-ridden lot in life. In contrast, the *lorette* is characterized as shrewd, enterprising, manipulative, unpredictable, dynamic, self-interested, and ambitious enough to want to move up the social ladder in

⁶⁹Louis Huart, “La Grisette,” *Bibliothèque pour Rire* (Paris: Aubert, 1850) 7.

Huart indicates that the *grisette* and the *lorette* are ultimately two different classes of women, for in his *physiologie* entitled “La Grisette,” he writes: “Sans doute plus d’une grisette se transforme en *Lorette*, mais du moins, ce n’est que vers l’âge de vingt-deux ou vingt-trois ans.’

order to acquire greater wealth and a higher status. Thus, in order to better contrast her with the *lorette*, I summarize portrayals of the *grisette* in this chapter before addressing the *lorette*.

Writers from Victor Hugo to Daniel Sterne (Marie d'Agoût) commented on the *grisette* as a “type social reconnue;” however, Louis Huart’s *physiologie* of her in the *Bibliothèque pour Rire* and Jules Janin’s piece on her in the *Français peints par eux-mêmes* are the strongest examples I found of writers promoting the *grisette*’s mythical docility. In Janin’s *physiologie*, he depicts the *grisette* as a lovely girl who blithely accepts her lowly place in society. Despite the fact that her “condition est toujours misérable,” Janin idealizes her because she resists trying to climb the social ladder or advocating any social change that would improve her status.⁷⁰ He insists on her self-sacrifice and dedication to art in his anecdote about Jenny, *la bouquetière*, a young *grisette* who models for artists and sleeps with them to make enough money to live. Although she prostitutes herself and poses nude for artists, Janin considers her behavior respectable and non-threatening because she yields to artists.

Just as Janin lauds the *grisette*’s compliance with male desire, so he praises her devotion to art, claiming that the creation she participates in redeems her from her abjection. He writes:

Étrange assemblage de beauté et de misère, d’ignorance et d’art,
d’intelligence et d’apathie! Prostitution à part d’une belle personne qui
peut sortir chaste et sainte après avoir obéi en aveugle aux caprices les
plus bizarres! C’est que l’art est la grande excuse à toutes les actions au

⁷⁰ Jules Janin, “La Grisette,” *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes; encyclopédie morale du dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: Curmer, 1840-1842) 10.

delà du vulgaire; c'est que l'art purifie tout, même cet abandon qu'une pauvre fille fait de son corps. (15)

Her participation thus purifies her lewd acts. In other words, the male artist's interest in creating art cleanses and ultimately excuses any vulgar behavior on the part of the *grisette* because her actions serve the interest of the man, not herself.

What makes Jenny so admirable in Janin's mind is her willingness to remain forever a martyr to art despite her step up on the social ladder. Even when Jenny becomes a duchess, she occasionally sits as a model. Janin lauds her submission: "Jenny était soumise à l'artiste, aveuglément soumise tant qu'il s'agissait de l'art, mais là s'arrêtait sa vocation" (15). Instead of using men to advance herself socially or to create her financial independence, she sacrifices her own wants or needs, and in turn is praised for selfless devotion.

Daniel Sterne's definition confirms Janin's privileging of the *grisette's* lack of social ambition. She writes: "Les *Grisettes* sont des ouvrières de tous les genres, trop gentilles pour vouloir être du peuple, et trop sages pour vouloir sortir de leur sphère."⁷¹ Writers like Janin, Sterne, and Huart can therefore romanticize the *grisette* because she is too docile to call any social inequities into question.

Whereas Janin's *physiologie* focuses on the loveable, but often-tragic nature of the *grisette*, Huart emphasizes her naiveté and child-like nature by christening her "notre insouciant jeune fille" (13).⁷² Huart claims that "demain

⁷¹ "La Grisette," Pierre Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe Siècle* Vol. 8 (Paris: Administration du Grand Dictionnaire, 1873).

⁷² In Janin's pessimistic estimation, the typical *grisette* is doomed to suffer, for despite all her love and dedication to her student lover, he always breaks her heart by abandoning her when he becomes too ambitious and anxious about a legitimate career and marriage.

est un mot qui n'existe pas pour la grisette," and his paternalistic attitude toward her is double-sided. Though he celebrates her gaiety and applauds her ability to laugh at her poverty, he ultimately mocks her for being too childish, too unintelligent, and too capricious to be of any harm to society. Huart writes:

Mais de quoi ne rit-elle pas, l'heureuse jeune fille! Ah! Si cependant, il faut être juste; son petit minois fait la moue quand, sautillant légèrement sur le pavé de Paris comme un petit oiseau, elle est tout-à-coup éclaboussée par un maladroit qui vient tigrer horriblement ses jolis bas blancs, qui avaient traversé tout Paris sans attraper une moucheture.
Mais quelques minutes après elle n'y pense plus. (13)

Thus she is easy to glorify, for she is too simple-minded (after all, she is compared to a bird) and too forgetful to manipulate men or undermine the patriarchy. Like Janin, Huart admires the *grisette* for her selflessness and her capacity to remain in her place. In short, she makes no demands on society. Huart, underscoring her irrational generosity, remarks: "Notez que la jeune grisette ne se laisse jamais aller, dans ses amours, à quelque bas calcul d'intérêt; elle se donne toujours et ne se vend jamais" (7).

The Grisette's ties to gender politics and capitalism

Huart's view of the *grisette* is often more light-hearted and playful if not irreverent than Janin's portrait, for it places more emphasis on her gullibility and tendency to fall prey to her wily suitor's seduction plots. While Janin characterizes the *grisette* as non-threatening as a result of her blind submission to art, Huart attributes her innocuousness to her simple-mindedness and her

wantonness. For example, he jokingly blames the *grisette*'s fall from virtue on her lack of an umbrella and her admiration for a *chapeau rose*. Huart's anecdote about the umbrella and hat exemplifies two important social factors: the gender politics of the period and the increasing influence of capitalism on the social classes.

During a period when women were rallying together and campaigning for the right to vote, to earn wages, and to assert more financial control, fictions of female sexual availability surfaced to allay male anxieties about the struggle for female autonomy.⁷³ In addition to the organized feminist movements, the mass influx of provincial single women who arrived in Paris in hopes of better economic prospects alarmed conservatives who frowned upon the tremendous increase in out-of-wedlock births and cohabitating couples. These modern trends challenged the traditional notion of woman as wife and mother dependent on her husband, and thereby put the guardians of the patriarchy on the defensive. Though Huart spends two pages discussing the habits of the many *lorettes* in France who live alone in the big city and struggle to survive financially, he reminds the reader that the average girl who lacks virtue and a dowry will fall prey to men because they exercise more social rights (4). Huart writes:

L'homme est un être qui a des procédés bien peu délicats vis-à-vis des pauvres femmes; Non seulement il s'est intitulé roi de la création et chef de la communauté conjugale, ce qui lui donne déjà des droits pas mal superbes, tels que ceux

⁷³ Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the 19th Century* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984) 19. The provisions in the Civil Code, Moses asserts, interdicted married women from "participating in the activities of jointly held property or from disposing of their own property without their husbands' sanction."

De faire des lois [...]. (4)

Thus, writers attempted to keep the scale of power balanced in their favor at least in their imagination by inventing fictions denigrating any woman's attempts to survive and thrive economically on her own.

In fact, Huart exemplifies this effort to render the *grisette* less threatening by insisting that her lack of education and her lower-class disposition make her an easy target for seducers.⁷⁴ Huart mocks her weakness for umbrellas when he writes:

On parle de l'immoralité des cabinets particuliers, de l'immoralité des loges grillés, de l'immoralité des romans de M. Paul de Kock, de l'immoralité des danseuses de l'Opéra, de l'immoralité des fiacres à rideaux rouges; mais qu'est-ce que tout cela, bon Dieu! Côté de l'immoralité de la parapluie! (9)

In sum, stories about the easily conquered *grisette* as typified by Huart's tale function as a collectively fabricated male fantasy that both titillates and establishes a sense of male mastery in the face of increasing feminist activism.

While the umbrella tale may be read in terms of male fantasy, it is also important to analyze it in terms of capitalism, for it reveals the large extent to which the ideology was shaping the social order. The umbrella embodies class and culture, for it functions as a pecuniary symbol of status that is beyond the *grisette's* reach. Thorstein Veblen in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* argues that in

⁷⁴ Huart writes: "C'est que la grisette est née vertueuse, excessivement vertueuse; et si cette vertu attrape presque toujours une entorse dès ses premiers pas dans la carrière de la vie, cela tient uniquement à la funeste influence qui viennent exercer sur la destinée de la grisette le chapeau rose et le parapluie" (9). In the anecdote, her love for the hat and her desire to keep it beautiful, in other words -- sheltered from the rain -- leads to her downfall, because the moment it begins to rain and some "profond scélérat" offers her refuge under the umbrella, she will not be able to resist his seductive powers.

the industrial age of high capitalism in late nineteenth-century America, expensive objects conveyed a sense of class superiority and economic dominance.⁷⁵ The respect and desire on the part of the lower and middle classes for these tokens of prestige were the glue holding together the economic system, for a capitalist economy encouraged all classes to pursue the accumulation of wealth. An individual must therefore strive for more wealth in order to purchase and display images of leisure and thus climb up the social ladder. Though he is writing about American society of a slightly later era, what Veblen says about the desire of individuals to emulate members of the upper class certainly applies to the Parisian *grisette* of the 1830s.

Indeed, the umbrella represents for the *grisette* the shelter wealth affords individuals facing unpleasant circumstances, such as an unexpected rainstorm. For the *grisette*, the “chapeau rose” and the “petit bonnet à rubans coquets” prove that she is wealthy enough to purchase trifles and she needs an umbrella to protect these items that exhibit her newfound status. According to Huart, “La malheureuse jeune fille qui n’a pas été fournie par sa mère d’excellents principes et d’un parapluie d’occasion se trouve dans la position la plus critique, la plus fâcheuse que l’on puisse imaginer” (9). For the *grisette*, the umbrella represents a cultural level unavailable to the working-class woman; she therefore covets these articles because they will afford her (at least in her imagination) superior standing the moment she obtains them and protection from events that disturb defenseless working-class individuals. Whereas in the case of the *grisette*, she loses her virtue

⁷⁵ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, ed. Max Lerner. (New York: The Viking Press, 1958).

to a man who promises her the shelter of an umbrella, an individual of wealth and status would have the means to prevent such an occurrence.

**“J’ai entendu dire que les femmes ne devaient pas se mêler de politique”:
Feminist politics and the grisette**

Huart aligns the *grisette* with the faithful, naïve, and submissive heroine of Bernadin de Saint-Pierre’s *Paul et Virginie* to emphasize the *grisette*’s appealing apolitical nature. In Huart’s *physiologie*, he features three *grisettes* discussing the vaudeville version of the play with their supervisor. Edmé Guillaume Favières penned the words for an operatic adaptation of Saint-Pierre’s novel in 1791 and then drafted the stage *comédie* in 1794. Both versions were revived in the 1840s, and Elisa -- the *grisette* portrayed in Huart’s work-- undoubtedly attended one of the Vaudeville versions because it appealed to the working class for its melodrama, sentimentality, and exoticism. Though she can identify to a certain point with the character of Virginie, for Elisa, Virginie’s privileging of virtue and chastity over death seemed implausible. Despite her appreciation of the plot, Elisa calls it “invraisemblable,” for she has confused the exotic island with “l’île de France.” In her misreading of the ending, Elisa explains to her colleagues:

Virginie se met donc en route pour revoir son chéri, et voilà qu’arrivée devant les côtes de l’île de France, elle fait naufrage et est noyée, toujours avec sa vertu...Ça fait frémir...mais ça ne fait rien, j’en reviens toujours à dire que c’est invraisemblable...A ça vous me direz que c’est en Amérique... (14)

Although Elisa seems to believe that such uprightness could not exist outside of America, her supervisor claims that Jeanne d’Arc, one French woman with “une très-bonne reputation,” saved France.

Her supervisor refers to the classical French heroine par excellence whose heroic proportions would have been impossible to emulate. It is important to note, nonetheless, that more pragmatic role models for women emerged out of socialist and feminist movements in the 1830s. For example, proponents of Saint Simonism and Fourierism called for the emancipation of women in the name of social progress.⁷⁶ Although males headed up both of these “feminist” movements, women, some more forthright than others, joined in the struggle to fight against their oppression. For example, writer/activist Flora Tristan combined feminism and utopian socialism in her work advocating social change. In addition, writers like George Sand (Aurore Dupin) and Daniel Sterne (Marie d’Agoût), though they did not necessarily define themselves as feminists, defied the conventional role of woman as passive, financially dependent wife in three ways: these writers freed themselves of marital restraints (both separated from their husbands), adopted male pseudonyms, and earned their livelihood through their literary endeavors.

In an effort to subdue these feminist challenges to traditional roles, Huart voices the largely male rejection of the call for female liberation; thus through his character Elisa, Huart expresses the cynical attitudes about women’s lack of morality and ineffectiveness in politics, thereby impairing their efforts to integrate themselves into civic affairs. Elisa remarks:

⁷⁶Moses 90-91. She asserts that Saint-Simonian feminism, which was largely invented by Prosper Enfantin, and Fourierism, a political movement founded on the principles of Charles Fourier, connected the “liberation of women” and “sexual liberation” and believed that “a new social order was necessary to achieve equality.”

Ah! Bah! Des contes de la mère l'oie...en tout cas c'était avant la Révolution...Après tout, ça ne me regarde pas...du moment que c'était par opinion politique que cette demoiselle d'Orléans est restée si sage, c'est différent...et encore j'ai entendu dire que les femmes ne devaient pas se mêler de politique...J'aime bien mieux aller au bal Musard... y viendrez-vous dimanche? (14)

In spite of the passage's patronizing tone, Huart essentially celebrates the *grisette's* habits, for the *grisette's* inability to spell, coupled with her failure to comprehend literature, virtue, or the power of participating in politics, reassures him of her intellectual inferiority and utter powerlessness.

In effect, this period insists on the apolitical nature of the *grisette* in order to discredit and repress any progress women may have made in weakening the patriarchal social structure. Moreover, Claire Goldberg Moses asserts that the majority of feminists advocating women's emancipation were poor working class and bourgeois (37). Though not directly aligned with the feminists, the *grisette*, with her problematic class and her illicit lifestyle, would have alarmed critics enough to earn her a place among the deviant women stirring up trouble. Making the *grisette* the symbol of this group of underprivileged women and then insisting on her inability to effect political change was a way of assuring that women of her class were not credible or dangerous.

The *grisette's* lack of interest in politics acted as a foil to the feminist movement of the 1830s and early 1840s, a period in which women held positions of political influence and organized clubs that challenged the exclusively male political order. The movement for female liberation during this period was linked to Saint-Simoniens and socialists. Suzanne Voilquin, one-time Saint-Simonien

and later director of *La Tribune des Femmes*, Claire Démar, author of *Ma loi d'avenir*, Pauline Roland, Saint-Simonien writer, Madame Poutret de Mauchamps, publisher of the *Gazette des Femmes*, and Tristan all undertook a crusade to free women of their subjugation. However, memories of the violence of the July Revolution and the specter of the bloody Terror 30 years earlier prompted the government to censor new ideas, an action that slowed growth of the feminist movement.⁷⁷ Though these women, according to Moses, failed to construct a cohesive, lasting feminist movement in the 1830s and early 1840s, their efforts nonetheless inspired an organized movement in 1848-51.⁷⁸

The “préoccupations du moment” which shape the depictions of the *lorette*

Both the *grisette* and the *lorette* are social constructions that embody the anxieties and ideologies of their respective periods. In response to their fears about women living and working on their own and oftentimes infiltrating the male workplace, troubles with procreation outside of marriage, and anxieties about feminist movements being organized in the 1830s and 1840s, writers such as Maurice Alhoy, Alexandre Dumas, Jules Janin, and Louis Huart, tried to repress any progress toward female enfranchisement. They thus reinforced in their narratives the idealized and traditional (read non-threatening) notions of women

⁷⁷ Moses 38.

⁷⁸ While writers celebrated the *grisette*'s apolitical nature, they chastised *demi-mondaines* such as Lola Montès (1821-1861), Céleste Mogador (1824-1904) and Marguerite Bellanger (1838-1886) for having political opinions, holding sway over politicians, and receiving publicity for their purported agency. For them, taking a political figure as lover provided them access to political influence and involvement. Because their political activity challenged the patriarchy, writers derided and demonized the *demi-mondaine* in novels, plays, and political pamphlets. Texts on the *grisettes*, on the other hand, glorified her for her passivity and *joie de vivre* that drove her to celebrate at *bals publics* rather than engage herself politically.

in all their sexual, social, and financial submissiveness and purported lack of intelligence.⁷⁹ By the same token, writers fashioned the *lorette* as a figure that would crystallize the ambient anxieties about the frantic and instable climate of the 1840s. Pockets of feminist activity further exacerbated their apprehension of female independence that the *lorettes* represented in their ability to manipulate several lovers at once in order to live freely on their own. Stories about the *lorette's* free-spiritedness coupled with her unquestionable greed, represented their fears about female emancipation and the capitalist ideology that promoted the acquisition of goods over honest human relations.

As Lucette Cyzba contends in her article “Paris et la Lorette,” the *lorette* stands for the changes industrial capitalism and real estate speculation brought on bourgeois social customs and spending habits, as well as the transformations it caused the city’s urban layout.⁸⁰ Cyzba’s analysis of the influence Gavarni had on stereotyping the *lorette*, and the manner in which she highlights the objectification of this kept woman adds much to the scholarship on prostitution. I will nonetheless argue that the texts examined in this dissertation that treat the *lorette* depict her as more than an empty sexual object who enlivens a bourgeois’s stifling marriage as Cyzba has claimed. While it is interesting to examine how the *lorette's* expensive eating habits and luxurious clothes reflect the increasing

⁷⁹ Felski writes: “Thus the ideology of separate spheres was undercut by the movement of working-class women into mass production and industrial labor, causing numbers of writers to express their fears that the workplace would become sexualized through the dangerous proximity of male and female bodies” 19.

⁸⁰ Lucette Cyzba, “Paris et la Lorette,” *Paris au XIXe siècle: Aspects d’un mythe littéraire* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1984) 107. According to Cyzba, the word *lorette* “connote simultanément l’évolution des mœurs de la bourgeoisie contemporaine, les progrès d’une société de consommation, la mutation profonde de la ville, du cadre urbain, par suite de l’essor du capitalisme industriel et de la speculation immobilière.”

bourgeois consumption of goods, I assert that what the *lorette* emblemizes is more than the superficial trappings of wealth and the immoral sexual habits of the bourgeois made possible by capitalism: she embodies anxieties about modern social transformations spurred by what Cyzba calls “l’essor du capitalisme industriel et de la spéculation immobilière” (107).

Indeed, the *lorette* captivated writers and figured prominently in literature because she emerged in response to their reactions to the fascinating social transformations of the period. According to the *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe siècle*,

La *lorette*, en sa qualité fascinatrice, a exercé une notable influence sur la littérature; les moralistes ont analysé et expliqué ses moeurs, ces dessinateurs ont fait apparaître sa silhouette à toutes les pages de leurs albums. Qu’on feuillette l’album de Gavarni, les *Partageuses*, les *Fouberies de femmes*, le *Carnaval*, les *Lorettes*, on verra quelle place tenait la *lorette* dans les préoccupations du moment, du 1840 à 1850. C’est là qu’elle est étudiée sous toutes les faces, par un esprit éminemment observateur.⁸¹

Although the passage from the *Grand Dictionnaire* indicates a specific time period, it does not detail in full the *lorette*’s “qualité fascinatrice” that so intrigued the writers and caricaturists who recorded her manners and customs. For these writers describing the *lorette* as a frantic modern machine during Carnival⁸²

⁸¹ Pierre Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe Siècle* Vol. 10 (Paris: Administration du Grand Dictionnaire, 1873).

⁸²Indeed, Alhoy compares the *lorette* during Carnival to a steam engine, one of the new innovations of the period. He writes: “Il faut que les corps des *lorettes* soit bien mieux confectionné que les machine à vapeur a haute et basse pression; il n’est pas possible de les faire fonctionner ainsi autrement sans retouche” (77). Moreover, the lack of words in French to describe her incredible pace during Carnival corresponds to a frantic pace of life which Alhoy calls “ce mouvement incessant, cette action galvanique, ce tournoiement continue” – brought on by technological innovations such as the steam engine which the *lorette* symbolizes.

served as a pretext for generating fiction to express their anxieties and depict their confusion about modernization.⁸³ These modern “*préoccupations du moment*” included fluctuations in the social order, technological advances, an increasing emphasis on the pursuit of wealth, changing gender roles, and an ambivalent fascination with the unruliness and role reversals at Carnival.

“La lorette avec aïeux achète chez ancêtres chez les marchands de bric à brac”: Questions of class legitimacy

The shift from an agrarian-based economy to a capitalistic one founded on industry in post-revolutionary France triggered changes in both the economy and the social balance. The bourgeois enjoyed greater prestige and wielded more influence and power than ever before on account of the wealth acquired through ties to industry and speculation. The middle bourgeoisie’s swelling ranks and its vying for more money, power, and prestige created anxieties about who occupied the top rung of the social ladder. Though the *haute bourgeoisie* competed with the aristocrats for the highly prestigious government posts with all their titles and privileges, they considered the middle bourgeoisie a growing threat.

Writers also participated in the rush for money, power, and social standing -- especially members of the middle bourgeoisie like Balzac, Dumas, and Sue. By selling their work in *feuilleton* installments to newspapers, a practice that more often than not promoted quantity over quality, Balzac, Dumas, and Sue amassed

⁸³Felski defines modernization as denoting “the complex constellation of socioeconomic phenomena which originated in the context of Western development but which have since manifested themselves around the globe in various forms: scientific and technological innovation, the industrialization of production, rapid urbanization, an ever expanding capitalist market, the development of the nation-state, and so on” (13).

fortunes and won fame. However, their pursuit of wealth plagued them with guilt because they considered selling their art to the highest bidder as abhorrent as the prostitute trading the use of her body for money.⁸⁴ Thus, Balzac, Dumas, and Sue associated the manipulative and cunning schemes the *lorette* employed to acquire more goods with their own actions. Criticizing the *lorette*'s method of earning money was a way they could chastise themselves for selling out their art in a similar manner. Indeed, Alexandra Wettlaufer identifies this "contemporary preoccupation with commodification of art and the prostitution of the artist" in her study on Balzac's '*Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*' and documents Balzac's sale of his story to raise money, despite his earlier critique of what he called "that prostitution of thought they called *publication*."⁸⁵

Just as art and sex were for sale in postrevolutionary France,⁸⁶ so too was social standing, as individuals like the *lorette* profited from the anonymity of the city, invented fictions about their cultural status, and used wealth to purchase prestige. Questions of class legitimacy played out against the backdrop of urban transformations of Paris, as the city increased in size due to the large influx of provincial workers looking for employment in the city's new factories. The hidden worlds within Paris, particularly the realm of underground crime depicted in Balzac (Vautrin's seedy associations in *Illusions perdues*, *le Père Goriot*, and

⁸⁴ As Alexandra K. Wettlaufer has argued, "The metaphor of prostitution, so closely tied to the iconic figure of the model, has also increasingly applied to the artists' own activity, as he sold his work to the highest bidder. The bourgeoisie's ambivalence toward artists and their world – one part fascination, one part repulsion – was echoed by the artists' own hostility toward the audience upon whom they relied, as the laws of the market place asserted their forces upon creative production." Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, *Pen vs Paintbrush: Girodet, Balzac and the Myth of Pygmalion in Postrevolutionary France* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 215.

⁸⁵ Wettlaufer 233.

⁸⁶ Wettlaufer 215.

Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes), in Eugène Sue (*les Mystères de Paris*), in Victor Hugo (*Notre Dame de Paris*), fascinated writers throughout the nineteenth century.⁸⁷ The neighborhood around Notre-Dame de Lorette was no exception. According to the *Grand Dictionnaire*, special circumstances drove the *lorettes* to neighborhoods behind the church. It explains:

De vastes terrains, aujourd'hui couverts de maisons à quatre ou cinq étages, avaient été longtemps déserts dans le haut du faubourg Montmartre; lorsqu'on commença d'y faire construire, les propriétaires ne furent pas d'abord très exigeants sur le chapitre des loyers et toutes la bohème galante vint y installer ses nids.

Young artists, in search of cheap rent and pretty models, joined the *lorette* in her neighborhood. In this new section of Paris, several classes intersected. Upstart bourgeois furnished apartments for *lorettes* to flaunt their new wealth. Stockbrokers, who were sometimes ruined aristocrats and sometimes upper-class bankers, wandered into the nearby neighborhood in search of sex. In some cases, *grisettes* who had graduated into *lorettes*, sneaked their student lovers into their furnished apartments while their lovers were out. Because the *lorette* juggled lovers from several different social backgrounds, she came to symbolize the mingling of classes.

Rita Felski, in her discussion of "Modernity and Feminism," claims that the prostitute's body "yielded to a number of conflicting interpretations:" one of them signaling "the breakdown of social hierarchies in the modern city."⁸⁸ Indeed,

⁸⁷ The effects of industrialization on France and urbanization in Paris also shaped literature as described in Flaubert (*l'Éducation sentimentale*, 1869), in Baudelaire (*Peintre de la vie moderne*, "Les Yeux des pauvres," 1864) and in Zola (*la Curée*, 1874, *Au bonheur des Dames*, 1883).

⁸⁸Felski 19.

the *lorette* best emblemizes the confusion over the scrambling for social class validation, at least according to Dumas's, Alhoy's and Flaubert's accounts, for she serves as a sort of social leveler, exploiting lovers from all classes. According to Dumas, "En effet, art et finance, bourgeoisie parvenue et aristocratie ruinée, fils de banquiers, fils de famille, fils de prince, fils de roi, tout se jeta dans la Lorette."⁸⁹ A popular song entitled "La Lorette," by G. Nadaud, confirms the *lorette*'s social promiscuity in the name of wealth and ambition. The narrator in the song is a *lorette* who announces: "Arrière, arrière Pauvreté fière/ Je suis lorette et je règne à Paris."⁹⁰ The gifts and furniture she receives from her lovers tell the story of her life. In addition to ageing French deputies, the *lorette* in Nadaud's song frequents men of all nationalities, haughtily claiming: "Mieux que Guizot, de ma diplomatie/Je sais partout étendre les filets." Her ability to circulate among the classes makes her dangerous, for she fools others about her origin in order to extract wealth from them.

Her privileging of money over dignified social relations is not the only habit that troubles the writers: the possibility that she will slip one day into the upper echelons of society unnoticed and threaten social stability haunts them, for such an act could result in the contamination of both blood and morals.⁹¹ Her

⁸⁹Dumas 60.

⁹⁰The *Grand Dictionnaire* as a catalogue of popular culture sheds light on what the *lorette* meant to the public at the time by including "La Lorette," by G. Nadaud, a song the *Grand Dictionnaire* claims is an encyclopedia in itself.

⁹¹ See Alexandre Dumas *fils*, "À propos de la Dame aux camélias," *Théâtre complet*, vol 1 (Paris: Calmann Levy, 1867). According to Dumas *fils*, by the year 2000, "La prostitution par l'héritage, par les habitudes, par l'exemple, par l'intérêt, par l'indifférence, et parce qu'elle apportera l'argent avec elle, aura pénétré fatalement dans toutes les familles. Le mal ne sera plus aigu, il sera constitutionnel. Il aura passé dans le sang de la France" (31).

diseased blood could weaken future generations of sickly children plagued with syphilis and her immorality could encourage depraved habits among the innocent and proper bourgeois girls who might unwittingly emulate her immoral behavior.⁹² Even 40 years later, these fears plague France. In fact, in Émile Zola's *Roman expérimental*, he argues that the social body of society must be cured of infected parts as in the case of *Nana*, a work in which the prostitute affected all social levels.

Though writers like Dumas and Alhoy could pinpoint directly where the *lorette* lives, they depict her social origins as fuzzy and mysterious at best: they express doubt about her claims of having ruined nobles as ancestors. Mocking her fabricated past, Alhoy quips: “La brette avec aieux achète ses ancêtres chez les marchands de bric à brac de la cour des Fontaines, ou bien elle demande à un peintre un grand-père de fantasia quand elle ne rencontre pas un aieul d’occasion” (23). Through his remark about the *lorette*'s purchasing of nobility, Alhoy indirectly comments on the questionable practice of buying titles of nobility throughout the nineteenth century. He mocks the *lorette*'s habit of putting on airs by adding a “particule nobiliaire” when introduced to guests, as he does the fabrications of the “*lorette* à parents anonymes” who claim to be daughters of colonels of “la grande armée” (23-24). Equally troubling is yet another one of the *lorette*'s schemes in which she convinces a well-connected lover to file a claim that the chambermaid with the name “Denise” is descended directly from the

⁹² Dumas *filis* criticizes French society for its hypocritical and cowardly stance on prostitution. He states: “Des milliers de fille jeunes, saines, belles, dont il pourrait faire des auxiliaries intelligentes, des compagnes fidèles, des mères fécondes, ne soient bonnes qu’à faire des prostituées avilies, dangereuses, stériles [...]” (23).

noble “de Nises” family ruined during the Revolution. Once the *lorette* obtains the “pension ou un secours pour la descendante des Nises,” she announces to her maid, “Tant que tu seras ici, tu resteras noble et pensionnée du gouvernement” (104). Hence the *lorette* ensures her servant’s salary without ever having to pay her. Anecdotes such as Alhoy’s reflect larger questions about the injustices of the revolution and the proper means of recompensing ruined families in light of unscrupulous individuals, like the *lorette* featured in Alhoy’s tale, who manipulate the system to their own advantage, regardless of the truth.

Social mobility and the *lorette*

According to Alhoy, the *lorette* demonstrates the extremes to which an individual may move up and down the social ladder, for one day she resides in a lower-class *hôtel garni*, and the next she moves to a chic hotel. The *lorette*, who manipulates appearances so as to give the impression that she has more money and hence credibility than she really has, successfully dupes individuals unable to read the signs that reveal an individual’s class. For example, when misfortune lands her in an *hôtel garni*, she escapes this “terre d’exile” of high rent and interrogations by the police commissioner by putting on layer upon layer of clothing covered by a coat and telling the doorman she is off to the bath. She therefore avoids paying rent, and despite her lack of luggage, she fools the hotel employee of her new residence into thinking that she has money when he sees all her fine clothes hanging before his eyes.

The *lorette* manipulated her appearance to pass herself off as someone she really was not, and falsified her name to escape police surveillance and landlords.⁹³ Apprehension about her ability to deceive others about her identity reflected larger tensions about her threat to patriarchal order. This system insisted upon the separation of the private and public spheres in order to keep women out of politics and confined to the home. The *lorette* blurred the division by oscillating between the two worlds: she could present herself as an actress to be consumed on stage, or could array herself in the finery of Balzac's "femme comme il faut." Before the 1789 Revolution, however, and even the short period that followed under the *Directoire* and the First Empire, a quick glance sufficed to determine an individual's social class and occupation. In the case of the First Empire, her garish attire and make-up, not to mention the ignominious places she haunted like the arcades of the Palais-Royal,⁹⁴ gave away her prostitute status. Guides such as *Biographie des Nymphes du Palais-Royal* detailing the physical descriptions and life stories of prostitutes and their arcade addresses circulated among Parisians and foreigners alike, giving the impression that lasciviousness was geographically confined to this one area of the city while all other respectable women were confined to the home. As the city expanded, and neighborhoods like Bréda attracted *lorettes* and other bohemians to their residential areas, women began selling themselves in their apartments instead of openly in public.⁹⁵

⁹³ See Bernheimer for more on the prostitute's ability to manipulate signs.

⁹⁴ Dumas discusses the debauchery at the Palais -Royal in his chapter on "Filles" in *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes*.

⁹⁵ According to Dumas, although the entrepreneurs responsible for Bréda's construction hoped "grands seigneurs, de riches capitalistes, ou des grands propriétaires would rent populate the neighborhood, artists, painters, dancers, actresses, and *lorettes* settled there instead (58).

Furthermore, the *lorette* rebelled against tradition by soliciting money from several men at once in order to retain her freedom.⁹⁶ In other words, she controlled her wealth while wives lacked control over their finances.

As the century progressed, signs indicating a person's status became harder to read, as more individuals both foreign and from the provinces infiltrated the city and mass manufacturing made clothing more uniform and accessible to all classes in a way that was not possible before industrialization.⁹⁷ The *lorette*, at least the one in literary works, took advantage of the opportunities opened up by a society in transition. Indeed, one of the more aesthetic instances entailed cunning *lorettes* who knew how to dress themselves in such a way that they could trick uninitiated individuals lacking the experience and urbane sophistication to fend off scheming prostitutes. More specifically, the changing social conditions of the city facilitated the prostitute's social mobility, Felski claims, for they allowed her to "make use of her erotic and aesthetic possibilities of urban culture" (75). Though she is writing about Zola's *Nana*, Felski's assertion about the prostitute and the city applies to the *lorette*. Furthermore, the boulevard café facilitated her erotic exchanges, for as Clayson states, it was "the appropriate rendezvous spot for illicit lovers from different social orbits" (99). In short, her social versatility seemed to writers to destabilize the social order because she resisted being strictly labeled public or private. Having mastered a certain amount of decorum enabled her to profit from the fortuities the metropolis afforded her.

⁹⁶ Dumas claims that the average *lorette* had between six and twelve lovers to support her (65).

⁹⁷ See Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997) for a brief history of the "democratization" of fashion and its implications.

Seduction and the Stock Market

Writers such as Alhoy tie the *lorette* to capitalism, for the *lorette*'s unscrupulous business habits reflect the growing frustration and alarm at practices like "l'agiotage," or illegal speculation.⁹⁸ Feminizing the business of shady stock trading and speculation discredits the practice to the extent that these organizations took on the feminine qualities of the sex coded "inferior." According to Felski, feminization could be positive or negative, for she asserts: "Increasingly, images of femininity were to play a central role in prevailing anxieties, fears and hopeful imaginings about the distinctive features of the 'modern age'" (19). Modernization in so much as it links the *lorette* to the stock market arouses misgivings, for it signals the increase in the exchange of commodities. Just as the prostitute deals illicit sex, so too does the broker sell shares in companies that are often illegitimate. As asserted earlier, artists and writers prostitute themselves for cash, thus privileging money over art; brokers sell to the highest bidder, favoring the currency of the anonymous individual willing to bid on a profit, rather than honoring the traditional practice of conducting business with social equals.

The elements of seduction and deception implicit in the practice of *agiotage* mirror the dishonest habits of Alhoy's *lorette*, for she, too, seems to earn

⁹⁸ According to the *Grand Dictionnaire*, "Agiotage sert à designer les manoeuvres auxquelles des spéculateurs peu scrupuleux ont recours pour s'assurer des bénéfices qu'ils ne sauraient espérer du cours régulier des opérations commerciales et financières." The *Dictionnaire* quotes Horace Say in order to explain the difference between "spéculation" and "agiotage." Say states: "La spéculation est une opération régulière; l'agiotage est un pari où les joueurs conservent l'arrière-pensée de tricher au besoin."

money dishonestly. Doubts exist as to how the *lorette* acquires her opulence in the same manner that concerns circulate about how stock market speculation and *agiotage* generate money. Alhoy labels “sa fortune non patrimoniale et très peu héréditaire” in order to emphasize her non-traditional methods of obtaining wealth (97). Alhoy’s quip that her material possessions “sont une manne bienfaisante qui tombe gratuitement sur la *lorette*” may be read as skeptical pessimism and as a protest against any attempts to legitimize deceitful practices like prostitution and illegal speculation. Along these lines, a curious connection exists between the unscrupulous *agioteur* and the wily *lorette*, for the *lorette* uses seduction to sell goods she is not capable of delivering. For example, Alhoy’s anecdote on the *lorette*’s “Table d’Hôte” scam show her seductively scheming to have men pay for a sumptuous dinner that she fails to provide. Alhoy even describes her as a speculator: “La spéculatrice déroule verbalement la carte du menu quotidien; elle a les meilleurs fournisseurs de Paris, un sommlier du roi lui donne du vin en contrabande, et un courrier de malle-poste lui apporte du Périgord des truffes d’occasion” (65-66). When her guests arrive, she informs them that fish was too expensive to serve and that her silver had been hocked earlier that day to pay a bill. In addition to making a profit off goods she has no intention to deliver, she auctions paintings off at inopportune times such as at dinner.

The fact that the *lorette* blurs the boundaries between sex and commerce further violates the traditional division between the private and public spheres, for sex and intimate dinners were once conducted in the privacy of one’s home often behind closed doors, while business dealings were conducted in public venues.

This curious mixture of business and pleasure troubled those who believed the two spheres should be separate. Felski explains: “Both seller and commodity, the prostitute was the ultimate symbol of the commodification of eros, a disturbing example of the ambiguous boundaries separating economics and sexuality, the rational and the irrational, the instrumental and the aesthetic” (19). Furthermore, the fact that intimate love could be sold to the highest bidder shocked those who believed it should not be auctioned off and that it is shared only with the privileged members of one’s own social class. If capitalism encouraged the sale of love, then even the formerly sacred marital and familial bonds also risked desecration.

Resentment of the ever-growing spirit of capitalism

As for the burgeoning obsession with money, Guizot, as Prime Minister of France, captured the spirit of the times, exclaiming: “Enrichissez-vous” during a speech to the Chamber.⁹⁹ Anti-bourgeois critics such as Balzac, who lamented the statement, states: “L’argent est le seul dieu auquel on ait foi.” In the same spirit, the works by artists and writers I examine in this chapter share Balzac’s ambivalence about the importance of money. Critics of the stock market and speculation remained as skeptical about how it functioned and generated wealth as they were about the legitimacy of the social-climbing bourgeois.

Hostility toward the bourgeois entrepreneur and his cohort, the *lorette*, irritated those clinging to the dominant culture’s ideological stance against new

⁹⁹ John and Muriel Lough, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Longman, 1978) 31-32.

money trying to purchase old guard prestige. In addition to her reputed lasciviousness, the entrepreneurial spirit of the lorette and her lover, the bourgeois businessman, further estranged her from sanctioned business practices. As Gordon Wright has argued, the dominant class embraced “a social ethos inherited from the old regime.”¹⁰⁰ Thus the “antibusiness social ethos” explains the general revulsion to capitalistic spirit and entrepreneurship in nineteenth-century France.¹⁰¹ Wright suggests that old families and entire business groups ensured that an eager upstart charged with “aggressive ambition” would be met with hostility and would “find sources of risk capital (which were meager enough, at best) closed against him” (156).¹⁰²

Carnival

Carnival is a brief period that celebrates the “world-turned-upside-down,” by temporarily toppling traditional hierarchies with sex and class inversions.¹⁰³ At the nineteenth-century Carnival *bals* in Paris, elite nobles socialized with base

¹⁰⁰Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times* (Fourth Edition)(New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987) 155.

¹⁰¹ Wright explains this aversion: “The businessman had traditionally ranked low in prestige; the way to gain status in pre-Revolutionary France had not been to succeed in business but to get out of business somehow, or to get one’s sons out. ‘In the bourgeoisie,’ ran the eighteenth-century maxim, ‘only the fool remains a bourgeois.’ Balzac’s novels reflect (though in rather distorted form) the persistence of an anticapitalistic atmosphere even in the nineteenth-century era of bourgeois rule. Dislike and contempt for the vigorous enterpriser marked the outlook not only of the old aristocracy, but also of the governmental bureaucracy” (156).

¹⁰²It therefore followed, according to Wright, that “most business expansion of the era was the work not of new men but of old families gradually expanding their plants through reinvestment of profits (as the de Wendels) or moving out from banking into industry (as the Périers)” (156).

¹⁰³Natalie Zemon Davis, “Women on Top,” *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1975) 131.

prostitutes; men in extravagant medieval masquerades fraternized with individuals in grotesque animal masks. Not only did Carnival temporarily collapse the rungs on the social ladder, it also permitted women to participate in activities not normally sanctioned for them. The *lorettes* donned male *débardeur* attire which allowed them a full range of motion -- whether it be kicking their legs up during cancan or dragging a worn-out lover home after a night of debauchery. Caricatures by Gavarni made the *lorette/débardeur* famous for her voracious appetite for food, fun, dancing, and alcohol—normally considered masculine pleasures— for her penchant for smoking, and for her ability to outlast and to out drink her male companions.

Writers expressed awe at the *lorette's* superhuman stamina during Carnival and glamorized her Carnival masquerade de rigueur as a *débardeur*.¹⁰⁴ While they appreciated her gender-bending *débardeur* attire, they disapproved of the way she challenged traditional gender roles by requesting to wear pants all year round,¹⁰⁵ by disguising herself as a man and hitting the individual who had struck her with a cane,¹⁰⁶ or by asserting herself as an enterprising businesswoman. Moreover, amidst the backdrop of social, financial, and technological changes, some women's pursuit of work and financial independence, as well as their public forays, challenged traditional gender roles that confined women to the domestic sphere while men made their way into the

¹⁰⁴ According to the *Grand Dictionnaire*, "Le *débardeur* est un type de carnaval et de bal masqué mis à la mode après 1830 et popularisé surtout par le spirituel crayon de Gavarni. Le costume du *débardeur* prête à toutes les hardiesses de la danse échevelée [...] Il se compose d'un large pantalon de velours, laissant paraître la cheville et découvrant un soulier mignon, et d'un bourgeron entré dedans, avec ceinture rouge flottante [...] Il convient aux deux sexes [...] 179.

¹⁰⁵ Alhoy 86-89.

¹⁰⁶ Alhoy 88-90.

world of enterprise and government. The bending of gender roles (with the *lorette* dressed in masculine pants) and the role reversals made possible by the brief Carnival period, served as a sort of social safety valve in which traditional order was inverted, thereby assuring a release of tensions over gender and social divisions in a way not possible in the “real” world.¹⁰⁷

Alhoy and Dumas used the topsy-turvy atmosphere of Carnival as an outlet to make light of the problematic issues they associated with the *lorette* – namely, the breakdown of traditional gender roles and fluctuations in the class system.¹⁰⁸ In fact, the Carnival rites in 1830s-1840s France constitute a type of “sexual inversion” that Davis discusses, because the *lorette* not only adopts masculine clothing, but takes on masculine traits as illustrated by her incredible ability to dance for hours, and to eat and drink excessively. Thus when read in conjunction with Davis’s assertion that Carnival “rites and ceremonies of reversal” “are ultimately sources of order and stability in a hierarchal society” because “they can clarify the structure by the process of reversing it,” the portrayals of the *lorette* at Carnival ultimately serve to reinforce male dominance put in question by the *lorette*’s assertive behavior outside of the Carnival period (130). Though Gavarni’s caricatures reinforce images of her vitality and strength as she is portrayed as outlasting men at the *bals*, and Dumas’s and Alhoy’s texts express wonderment at her incredible pace (the tremendous amount of time at the

¹⁰⁷ Davis 130. According to Davis, “Societies that “loved to reflect on the world-turned-upside-down” enjoyed the “*topos* of woman-on-top.” Celebrations like Carnival that include sexual inversions, Davis argues, “can provide an expression of, and a safety valve for, conflicts within the system.”

¹⁰⁸ Though the sex roles and class instability so pervasive throughout the 1840s had different nuances than the imaginative impersonations played out during Carnival revelry, an interplay exists between the two “worlds.”

bals), the fact that her superhuman ability is limited to Carnival reinforces that she is only powerful for a limited amount of time. For while the Carnival allows the male audience to ponder the possibility of the *lorette* on top, dominating and manipulating upper-class males and aristocrats at the *bals*, setting her behavior in a disorderly context takes credibility away from her reign, for it reinforces the idea that she is only in power for a short amount of time.

Alhoy, Dumas, and Gavarni's ambivalence toward the *lorette* shines through in their depictions of her as *débardeur*. On the one hand, works on the *lorette* represent her in a positive light, celebrating her vivacity during Carnival. She captivates the public with her beauty, power and richness and her sexual power casts her in the role of the unruly women. According to Davis, viragos appeal to communities in crisis. She asserts: "The males drew upon the sexual power and energy of the unruly woman and on her license (which they had long assumed at carnival and games)—to promote fertility, to defend community's interests and standards, and to tell the truth about unjust rule" (149-150). Though Davis is writing about customs in the Middle Ages, her theory applies to the *lorette*, who in the same manner conjures not only fantasies about sexuality, but also allows the public a means of release during a difficult period of political, social, and economic instability. On the other hand however, other depictions denigrate her as prone to violence, jealous rage, and dangerous political engagement, especially in texts like *L'Éducation sentimentale* that align her with the revolutionaries of the 1848 upheaval. The conflicting representations of the

lorette thus illustrate the dialectical attraction/repulsion toward the literary representation of the prostitute throughout much of the nineteenth-century.

Addressing the problems and tensions of contemporary France (at least in the 1840s) within the topsy-turvy context of Carnival cushions the blow of social critique. The whimsical poses of the Carnival revelers and the glamorous representations of the *débardeurs* takes the sting out of any social criticism Gavarni may be trying to convey. In regard to Gavarni's largely flattering series on the *lorettes*, the *Grand Dictionnaire* says: "Mais quoi qu'il la montre le plus souvent dans un déhabillé cynique, Gavarni n'a pas pu s'empêcher de la faire séduisante." In true *carnivalesque* fashion, he mixed the high with the low; one image of the *débardeur* highlights her sensuous rubenesque curves, while another one underscores the obscene gestures she uses to solicit a client; yet another features her triumphantly congratulating herself on her Carnival reign, while another features her crumpled over on a doorstep. Armand Barthet's poem, "Le Carnaval à Paris," as the preface to Gavarni's series by the same title, announces the ambivalent image of the *débardeur*, questioning whether she is a "femme ou diable." I argue that his line "Tantôt démon railleur, tantôt femme adorable," reflects the virgin/whore dichotomy strictly enforced in traditional legitimate society. One way of reconciling this schizophrenic division is pretending that a woman can be both angelic and demonic during the Carnival celebration.

Several caricatures feature a woman, normally considered the weaker sex, emboldened by her *débardeur* garb, proclaiming her physical superiority by declaring she is not tired, while her "suitor" is slumped over in exhaustion,

expressing a desire to stop celebrating. One caricature shows a man prostrate on a bench while a *débardeur* looks down on him, saying, “Voilà un fainéant qui dort, et qui laisse une pauvre femme danser toute la nuit.” Another caricature features a male *débardeur* declaring his exhaustion. Far from showing any sign of exhaustion or any sympathy, she questions his virility, saying, “Tu n’es donc pas un homme?” (see figure 1). Similarly, a *débardeur* defies her husband, bragging to another *lorette* while she holds her hat up as to announce a battle charge: “C’est demain matin qu’mon tendre époux va beugle...Ah! mais zut! ce soir j’suis Simonienne, enfonce l’conjugal!” She thus scoffs at traditional male fidelity, declaring her desire to practice free love as preached by the Saint-Simoniens.

By limiting her reign to the lawlessness of Carnival, Gavarni assures that her power is limited to Carnival season, a period discredited by excess and brevity. While Carnival tradition condoned female cigar-smoking, champagne swilling, and cross-dressing, any attempts by *lorettes* to re-create these eccentric habits outside of Carnival season were met with not only disapproval, but official reprobation. Indeed, the sexual politics of the period involved feminists protesting their imprisonment in corsets and in cumbersome dresses. In light of the question of adapting women’s dress, Gavarni plays with fantasies of alternatives in some of his work. George Sand’s unconventional wearing of pants, the introduction of Bloomers in America which the Saint-Simonians recommended to women as liberating garb, and animal painter Rosa Bonheur’s *travestissement* are the notable examples of cross-dressing that Gretchen van Slyke identifies as

transgressive.¹⁰⁹ The *lorette* who enjoyed the mobility and freedom that pants allowed her during Carnival and thus sought to adopt wearing them year-round, instituting a privilege only possible during Carnival, failed to maintain the sex inversion, because it threatened the status quo. Alhoy relates the anecdote about a *lorette* who does not understand why one sort of garment should belong to one sex, and not the other. Alarmed by this concept, the administration announces: “Toute personne que (au Carnaval excepté) sera vue, sans permission, dans des vêtements autres que ceux de son sexe sera considérée comme masque et mise au violon” (Alhoy, 87). Thus the *lorette* who wants to wear pants so she can better beat with a cane the person who insulted her, or the one who wants to drink her coffee comfortably on a stool, or one who would rather dress as a man on account of her unwanted facial hair, must work around the prefect’s refusal, claiming that for reasons of health, she must wear pants for two months. When she finally does obtain a cross-dressing permit, she enjoys her transformation. Alhoy says it suits her well, stating, “On croirait qu’elle a porté chapeau toute sa vie et qu’elle est née avec des bottes” (90). The “Lorette-homme” in Alhoy’s work enjoys lighting her cigarettes like a man and believes that no one recognizes her disguise. When a sergeant calls her bluff and asks for her permit, she claims she is not a woman and thinks someone betrayed her masquerade.

As Van Slyke has suggested, patriarchal order called for a clearly marked Other, and rigid gender divisions were enforced in order to blot out any possibilities of androgyny that could possibly challenge the purpose of strictly

¹⁰⁹ Gretchen van Slyke, “The Sexual and Textual Politics of Dress: Rosa Bonheur and Her Cross-Dressing Permits.” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 26.3-4 (1998): 321-332.

enforced roles.¹¹⁰ The constrictive clothing women wore was indicative of their confinement to the domestic sphere, and thus reinforced divisions between the private and domestic spheres. Comfortable clothing would make women more mobile and thereby more likely to venture out into the public sphere exclusively reserved for males. Since the patriarchal order depended on the exclusion of women from public life, the government was wary of permitting women to cross-dress for fear of establishing a trend that would disturb the order so reliant on public/private divisions.

The *lorette's* desire to dress as a man is a metaphor for her wanting to adopt male behavior and to enjoy the same privileges and freedoms that the male sex does. Alhoy's anecdote about the cross-dressing *lorette* makes her desire to enjoy more freedom and mobility seem ridiculous and ultimately implausible because the police can see directly through her disguise. The tale further reinforces the fact that social reversals or changes remained confined to Carnival period. Alhoy recognizes cross-dressing as a dangerous blurring of traditional gender roles, but dismisses it as silly and odd, thereby reinforcing the idea that any non-traditional habits like George Sand's wearing pants, is queer and therefore rejected as a viable possibility for women seeking change.

More importantly, Alhoy's dismissal of the *lorette's* penchant for cross-dressing as odd, and Gavarni's eroticizing the *lorette's* *débardeur* costume are strategies for alleviating anxieties about women and revolution. In other words, Alhoy and Gavarni snuff out the image of the woman on the barricade and similar

¹¹⁰ Grethen Van Slyke, "Women at War: Skirting the Issue in the French Revolution," *L'Esprit Créateur* 37.1 (1997): 34

viragos who began wearing pants during the 1789 Revolution.¹¹¹ Though many years had since passed, fears about women's participation in revolutionary violence not only lingered, but were indeed enflamed as political unrest and social disturbances threatened to re-erupt on the scene.¹¹² The military-like costumes of the *lorette* as *débardeur* could have stirred up these worries, therefore Gavarni focused on the sensual curves of the *débardeur* which rounded at least in the artist's imaginations, any visions of these women as upright, angular soldiers organized and ready to engage in political violence. Along these same lines, after women took part in the 1848 insurrections, and after news that a group of working-class women had formed a legion and marched to the Hotel de Ville in March of 1848 intent on ameliorating women's lives and demanding equality for everyone, the *Charivari* began publishing caricatures by Edouard de Beaumont (see figure 2). Laura Strumingher adeptly locates Beaumont's strategy to expel fears about the *Vésuviennes*: "This author [of the first humorous story on the *Vésuviennes*] sought to alleviate the fears of readers, who were adjusting to the radical changes brought about by the overthrow of the July Monarchy, by comically assuring them that women rebels would not be focusing their might on Paris."¹¹³ In a similar manner, de Beaumont's depictions of the *Vésuvienne* played down any virility she possessed by showing the public that her beauty precluded her capacity for violence.

¹¹¹ For more on women warrior's participation in the Revolution, see Van Slyke, "Women at War: Skirting the Issue in the French Revolution."

¹¹² For more on the legacy of women's participation in the 1789 Revolution in nineteenth-century France, see James McMillan, *France and Women: 1789-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000) 75-78.

¹¹³ Laura Strumingher, "The *Vésuviennes*: Images of Women Warriors in 1848 and their Significance for French History," *History of European Ideas* 8.4/5 (1987): 453.

Apprehensions about technology

The delirious pace of the *lorette* during Carnival fascinates and baffles Alhoy as much as it does Dumas. Alhoy claims: “La langue française, pas plus que la langue chinoise, n’a de mots pour exprimer ce mouvement incessant, cette action galvanique, ce tournoiement connu, ce bourdonnement aigu...” (75). Dumas also fails to find the words to describe her insane schedule: “Détailler la vie de la *lorette* pendant ces deux mois de cataclysme universel, serait chose parfaitement impossible: Il n’y a plus de jours, il n’y a plus de nuit, la division ordinaire du temps a cessé d’exister” (85). This blurring of time coincides with the increased speed of life associated with changes so foreign to the writers that they cannot find the words to describe the overwhelming feelings about rapid changes.

Where Dumas and Alhoy fail with words, however, Gavarni succeeds pictorially in the cover illustration to his *Oeuvres choisies* (1846). In this caricature, Gavarni captures the frantic pace of Carnival as identified in Dumas and Alhoy, as well as the anxiety about the future, which stems from concerns about the direction modernity seems to be taking (see figure 3). This multivalent image illustrates simultaneously what Felski identifies as both optimism about change and pessimism about the unknown changes on the horizon. At first glance, the image of the male *débardeur*, who is leading his sprightly dance partner, evokes the gaiety of the Carnival spirit. A closer look at the image nonetheless reveals the faintly sketched figure of a male reveler as well a leg of a female dancer. The horizontal lines behind the two principle figures not only serve to set

the couple off but to also make tangible the speedy movement of the pair leaving the rest of the party behind, thereby illustrating the rapidity of modern life. Furthermore, in focusing on the black blot, one recognizes a blindfold on the *lorette* that problematizes this vision. Is the blindfold simply part of a game played at the Carnival festivities, or does it represent a type of blinder that prevents the *débardeur* from knowing where her partner is leading her? Is her arm raised in the midst of a dance movement, or in protest against being dragged away against her will? If the blindfold indeed portrays the hampering of her vision, then this conception of modernity is coded negative; the *lorette* anxiously resists not recognizing the direction in which she is being pulled, just as Dumas and Alhoy, in their inability to fathom the *lorette*'s frenzied pace during Carnival, cannot anticipate where the innovations will lead society.¹¹⁴

The fact that both Dumas and Alhoy associate the *lorette* with trains or other “Machines à vapeur” indicates that both link her with modernity -- both its fast pace and its technological innovations. Their ambivalence about these changes resonates with criticism by certain of their peers who believed the necessity of trains and other industrial advances only seemed to quicken the already hurried urban pace of life. For them, a more modern and faster means of transportation is not necessarily tantamount to a better quality of life.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Alhoy 75 and Dumas 86.

¹¹⁵ Paris's first railway, which traveled to Saint-Germain, opened in 1837. According to Lough, not everyone was happy with the new progress the railway represented: “In 1842 a serious accident –the derailment of a Versailles-Paris train which caused some 60 deaths—led Alfred de Vigny to insert into ‘La Maison du Berger,’ his famous denunciation of this horrible new invention” 31-32. In the poem, Vigny suggests that the locomotive is a powerful yet frightening animal that man has perhaps invented too quickly without stopping to consider all the consequences (such as tragic wrecks) that its invention could bring about in the coming years. Yet despite the fact that the danger the trains could cause is imminent, Vigny concedes that the railway

Despite the cynical underpinnings about her, the works by Dumas, Alhoy, and Gavarni largely celebrate the *lorette*'s reign, claiming "Vive la *lorette*," as other writers had closed their texts about the *grisette*. Indeed, they address her lack of education, respectable social ties or even her capacity to be faithful, the anxieties about her association with the threatening fast-paced way of life and the illegitimate business practices such as her illegal speculation. Nonetheless, these writers overlook her faults because her reign corresponds to the relative prosperity and political stability of the July Monarchy in the early 1840s, therefore they have no need for a scapegoat. However, the bloody riots of the 1848 revolution cast a cloud over the relative social, political, and economic calm enjoyed earlier in the decade. By the late 1840s and early 1850s, writers lashed out against the *lorette*, recasting her as entirely demonic, greedy, scheming, dishonest, and dangerous. The second half of the chapter explores how these stereotypes factored into the backlash against the *lorette*.

PART 2: The Demise of the *Lorette*

While Alhoy, Dumas, and Gavarni sought to control the image of the *lorette* at the beginning of her reign, they were nonetheless captivated by the novelty she represented and the vivacious spirit she embodied. In this way, they differed from writers who rejected any idealization of modernity and who thus preferred the altruistic and submissive *grisette* because she posed no threat to the

is a necessary tool for all the French rushing around to get rich. The railways may allow people to travel rapidly and make money, however this fast-paced approach to life in urban Paris, in Vigny's opinion, is destroying all the beautiful events in life that are time-consuming, yet encourage meaningful human interaction.

status quo. However, by the end of the decade, any enthusiasm about the *lorette* had run its course.

As the decade progressed, political, social and economic tensions intensified and writers increasingly associated the *lorette* with doctrines they considered dangerous – such as capitalism, feminism and socialism. The writers’ escalating ambivalence toward social trends thus altered the writers’ conception of desire as projected onto the *lorette*. Specifically, realists like Gustave Flaubert in *L’Éducation sentimentale* (1869), precursors of naturalism like Jules and Edmond de Goncourt in *La lorette* (1853), and popular *feuilletoniste* Eugène Sue in “La lorette,” (1854) rejected any qualities of the *lorette* previously considered desirable by writers in the more stable 1840s. Indeed, in response to their doubts about capitalism, feminism, and socialism, they lashed out against the increasingly notorious figure aligned with these troubling forces.

“Une lorette est plus amusante que la Vénus de Milo”: De-idealizing the *lorette* in *L’Éducation sentimentale*

In Flaubert’s “roman de moeurs modernes,”¹¹⁶ tensions between the real and the ideal run throughout the text. Although Flaubert includes some aspects of Gavarni’s mythical *lorette* in his work, an analysis of his treatment of Rosanette and her cohort, La Vatnaz, uncovers his project to expose the *lorette*’s undesirable deviance from prescribed roles of femininity. In many ways, Rosanette fits the stereotype of the *lorette* propagated by Gavarni: she has one rich protector whom she cheats on with her *amant de coeur* du jour, she steals

¹¹⁶ Claudine Gothot-Mersch, introduction, *L’Éducation sentimentale*, by Gustave Flaubert (Paris: Flammarion, 1985) 26-27.

lovers from her rivals, she lives near Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, frequents *bals publics*, and acquires money through masterful manipulation of all her lovers. Yet, in spite of all these similarities, Flaubert ultimately denies the *lorette* any glamorization that Gavarni affords her. Rather, he transforms her into the antithesis of Gavarni's beautiful, charming, unpredictable, modern, fashionable, and entrepreneurial creature. Indeed, Frédéric initially resists forming any relations with the *lorettes* he encounters at the Alhambra *bal* as well as the private *bal* he attends with Arnoux, because he considers the *lorettes* vulgar.¹¹⁷ He admits his attraction to the exotic *Andalouse*, a stereotypical preference his friend Hussonet mocks when he says, "Une *lorette* est plus amusante que la *Vénus de Milo*!" (108). The fact that no one seconds Hussonet's preference for the real prostitute over the ideal beauty (Dussardier even admits that he wants to love the same woman his entire life) signals Flaubert's refusal to validate the *lorette* in any way.

Flaubert resists idealizing the *lorette* because he aligns her with two troubling trends: capitalism -- which encouraged social climbing and damaged social relations—and feminism -- which promoted female political engagement and challenged gender roles. For Flaubert, Rosanette's vulgar fixation on money is emblematic of the capitalist system. I apply to my reading of *L'Éducation sentimentale* what Edward Ahearn has argued about Flaubert's stance in *Madame Bovary* -- that he concurs with Karl Marx's critique of capitalism in that this new

¹¹⁷ Frédéric does not give way to the temptation of the *lorette* until he is overcome by a fantasy about what suits a Parisian of his class and means. Flaubert describes his desire: "Une autre soif lui était venue, celle des femmes, du luxe et du tout ce que comporte l'existence parisienne" *L'Éducation sentimentale* 183. Further references to this work will be noted by ES, followed by the page number.

system of values overemphasizes the significance of money at “the expense of human values.”¹¹⁸ Rosanette’s obsession with money compels her to sell her body to purchase more goods as well to marry the Père Oudry to successfully climb the social ladder. Her veneration of capitalism coincides with the threat of the dissolution of class barriers, for the *lorette* is a figure that levels any class distinctions. Rosanette beds the industrial bourgeois Arnoux and his wealthier rival the Père Oudry; she cavorts with the handsome cabaret singer Delmar; she manipulates the landed gentleman Frédéric; and snares aristocrats like the Russian Prince Tzernoukoff, de Cisy, and the Baron de Comaing. In sum, Flaubert’s vilification of the *lorette* corresponds to the anxieties induced by “l’essor du capitalisme industriel.”¹¹⁹

Just as Flaubert criticizes capitalism in his novel by aligning it with the vulgar pursuits of the *lorette*, so he derides feminist activity associated with the 1848 upheaval by tying it with women of questionable morals such as La Vatnaz. He achieves this by downplaying the political advances women made in clubs, newspapers, and on the barricades, and by mocking the feminist propaganda of the period.

Flaubert’s disapproval of female political activism and women’s organizations is manifested in his novel in the impossibility of lasting female solidarity. He depicts Rosanette and La Vatnaz as being too self-interested and competitive to forge an enduring friendship. According to Flaubert, this inability

¹¹⁸ Edward J. Ahearn, “A Marxist Approach to Madame Bovary,” *Approaches to Teaching Flaubert’s Madame Bovary*, ed. Laurence M. Porter and Eugene F. Gray (New York: MLA, 1995) 29.

¹¹⁹ Cyzba 107.

for women to remain united precludes the possibility of any female organization (such as the Club des femmes, the Vésuviennes, and *La Voix des femmes*) lasting long enough to significantly undermine the patriarchy.

Lastly, Flaubert's fantasized vision of the gender-bending *lorette* as potential castrator illustrates his misogynistic view of women and subsequent fear of female sexuality. More importantly, however, it serves as yet another narrative device to debunk the fashionable prostitute's mythical charm.

The *lorette's* ties to capitalism and social collapse

Nearly every character's actions in Flaubert's novel seem to be motivated by a selfish pursuit of money and pleasure predicated on incessant scheming.¹²⁰ Such scheming prevents any forging of social bonds or respectable behavior (even by aristocrats). This self-indulgent behavior, which Flaubert deems abject and bourgeois,¹²¹ is derived from what Bourdieu calls "necessity, self-interest, base material satisfactions, and salvation in this world; it clashes with Flaubert's idealized view of the artist as apologist for "freedom, disinterestedness, the 'purity' of the sublimated tastes, and salvation in the hereafter" (254).

Conventional thinking cancels out any hope in the novel for this superior way of living. Freedom does not exist per se, for all the characters are enslaved to capitalism and the pursuit of material goods. For example, the desire of Rosanette, Frédéric, Martinon, and Deslauriers to climb the social ladder precludes any disinterestedness, and the selling out of art by the painter Pellerin--who prostitutes

¹²⁰ Two notable exceptions are Dussardier and perhaps Madame Arnoux who resists such behavior until the end of the novel when she offers herself to Frédéric.

¹²¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984) 254.

himself by creating a gaudy portrait of Rosanette--annihilates the possibility of any pure 'sublimated' tastes. Objects and people pass from one social group to the next and, at times, social order as depicted in Flaubert's novel appears no more stable than quicksand: what appears to be solid caves in as the characters plot and scheme to advance themselves. Social divisions are difficult to demarcate in this novel in the sense that the majority of the characters representing the different groups behave similarly in their pursuit of wealth and prestige. In other words, the same motivating factors drive Rosanette, the prostitute, Frédéric, the bourgeois, and Madame Dambreuse, the "femme du monde."

In the Gavarni caricatures that preceded Flaubert's work by at least 25 years, class intermingling served as a pretext for Gavarni to make light of the rivalry between lovers vying for the *lorette's* affection. In his series "Les Lorettes," Gavarni depicts the dismay of a bourgeois man who discovers his mistress playing cards with her *amant de coeur*, who appears to be either a student or bohemian artist (see figure four). The motif of the card battle featuring the caption "Valet de tréfle et valet de coeur...-Bataille!" highlights the competition between her "sweetheart" (with whom she prefers to spend her time), and her "protector" (whom she receives in exchange for financial support). Flaubert incorporates similar competition in his work between Frédéric in the role of *amant de coeur* and Arnoux in the role of protector. In yet another instance of conventional discourse on competition between the classes, a Gavarni caricature illustrating the awkward conversation between two men gathered outside the dressing room of their mutual mistress makes its way into *L'Éducation*

sentimentale, for Frédéric passes Arnoux in the hall on the way to visit Rosanette at the point in the novel when they are both courting her. It is highly probable that Gavarni and Flaubert based their discourse on artistic creation rather than on real-life – that is, their depiction of the young financially insecure man confronting his richer bourgeois rival was a conventional way of dramatizing class conflict rather than a plausible quotidian occurrence.

Though Gavarni and Flaubert fantasize about situations in which men of different classes intermingle, they problematize any confusion between honest women and prostitutes in accordance with the patriarchal belief that social order depends on the separate coexistence of the harlot and proper wife -- one public and one private. As Evelyne Woestelandt has argued, the prostitute, as a “type capital dans le roman du 19e siècle,” embodies the “outrances de la féminité,” and is, “en quelque sorte le revers de la ‘bienséance.’”¹²² Furthermore, Woestelandt claims that the prostitute’s role is not only to provide her bourgeois lover with sex, but also to reinforce the bourgeois notion of balance: to appreciate his wife’s prudish and frugal ways, he needs to see a lazy, frivolous, spendthrift prostitute (121). She writes: “Sans la femme vénale qui vit selon un mode oisif et onéreux, mais par sa corruption même, le condamne, le bourgeois ne pourrait se convaincre du bien-fondé de son propre système de valeurs” (121).

Although Arnoux has no problem frequenting both worlds and keeping them separate in his mind, his protégé, Frédéric, lacks this ability; he fails to distinguish the public from the private throughout the novel. In his depiction of

¹²² Evelyne Woestelandt, “Le Corps Venal: Rosanette dans *L’Éducation sentimentale*,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 16.1-2 (1987): 120.

Frédéric's shuffle between Rosanette and Madame Arnoux, Flaubert problematizes the intermingling of the public and private woman.¹²³ Frédéric's faulty perception collapses the normally separate spheres; it thereby undermines the notion of what constitutes proper behavior and what transgresses it. Specifically, Frédéric circulates between Madame Arnoux's traditionally private bourgeois world of husband and children and the *lorette's* promiscuous life with men from all different backgrounds. What results is an alarming conflation of the two spheres when Frédéric confuses them. Flaubert illustrates the blurring:

La fréquentation de ces deux femmes faisait dans sa vie comme deux musiques: l'une folâtre, emportée, divertissante, l'autre grave et presque religieuse; et, vibrant à la fois, elles augmentaient toujours, et peu à peu se mêlaient; -- car, si Mme Arnoux venait à l'effleurer du doigt seulement, l'image de l'autre, tout de suite, se présentait à son désir, parce qu'il avait, de ce côté-là, une chance moins lointaine; -- et, dans la compagnie de Rosanette, quand il lui arrivait d'avoir le coeur ému. Il se rappelait immédiatement son grand amour. (202)

Flaubert attributes this confusion to the "similitudes" between the two households that exist, because Arnoux steals gifts from his wife, gives them to his mistress and vice versa (202).

This exchange of objects results in what I argue is an erosion of class barriers brought on by capitalism. In an era when everything is for sale, money breaks down obstacles and, as a result, classes converge, with all groups engaging

¹²³ According to Lucette Cyzba, Madame Arnoux represents the "madone" and Rosanette figures as the "lorette," in accordance with the virgin/whore dichotomy predominant in the nineteenth-century. Cyzba writes: "Cette opposition –complémentarité de la Madone et de la Lorette sur laquelle fonde la structure et le sens du roman rend compte de la réalité de la vie bourgeoise contemporaine. Le culte de la femme-mère, le mythe de la virginité, l'idéalisation romantique de la femme-ange ont fait de la prostitution une nécessité sociale." (164). *Mythes et idéologie de la femmes dans les romans de Flaubert* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1983) 164.

in the same solipsistic behavior. For example, near the end of the novel, aristocrat, bourgeois, and prostitute intersect at the sale in which Madame Arnoux's belongings are being auctioned. The *lorette* Rosanette stares down her rival at the event, and despite her superior social standing, Madame Dambreuse envies Rosanette and even fantasizes about being a *lorette*.¹²⁴ The fact that Madame Dambreuse “fait vendre aux enchères le mobilier de Madame Arnoux,” and that she purchases the “coffret d’argent” that originally belonged to Rosanette not only indicates Madame Dambreuse’s shameful “égoïsme sec,”¹²⁵ but also depicts the disintegration of classes brought about by a materialism that ignores sentimental value or class distinctions (the box passes from a prostitute, to a bourgeois, to an aristocrat). Where the separation of classes once demarcated social divisions, customs, and manners unique to each group (the most refinement and culture belonging to the aristocrats), the onslaught of capitalism razed these divisions; money and goods became the prime motivating factor determining behavior, not the *noblesse oblige* of the past.

“L’impossibilité de l’amitié des femmes”: Why Flaubert undermines female solidarity

In *L’Éducation sentimentale*, mercantilism spurs the competition between Arnoux and Frédéric as well as that between Rosanette and La Vatnaz because it encourages the pursuit of wealth over both social propriety and friendship. Thus Flaubert, who takes Gavarni as his source of inspiration, exaggerates the

¹²⁴ For more on these potential role reversals, see Gothot-Mersch’s discussion of Mme Dambreuse as a “lorette manqué” in note 349.

¹²⁵ Cyzba 222

competitive nature of the *lorette* for two reasons: to continue Gavarni's portrait of the *lorette*, and more importantly, to establish that female rivalry will eventually sabotage the work women's organizations achieve together.

Gavarni's caricature "Me souffler un amant..." in "Les Lorettes" best anticipates the contest between La Vatnaz and Rosanette. There a *lorette* reclines leisurely on a couch, playing with a tassel on her dressing robe while her rival, with a cross look on her face, her hat still on her head, and her fists balled up, scolds the nonchalant one for stealing her lover. She exclaims: "Me souffler un amant, toi!...à moi!...oh! que tu es bien heureuse que ça n'est qu'Anatole! Car si ça avait été mon Émile! Oh! Je vous ficherais, ma poule!"¹²⁶ Indeed, similar turf battles occur between Rosanette and La Vatnaz, though it is not clear whether the latter is technically a prostitute.

Further, initial scenes in *L'Éducation sentimentale* imply that La Vatnaz, a former primary school teacher and aspiring writer, is Arnoux's go-between, his procuress, and perhaps his mistress.¹²⁷ In addition to his ambiguous relationship with her, Arnoux "keeps" Rosanette and provides her with an apartment and expensive gifts. Though all the guests at Rosanette's soirée at the beginning of the novel believe Arnoux is her protector, Frédéric finds her secretly cavorting in a greenhouse with Delmar, the cabaret singer and actor linked to La Vatnaz. Far from faithful, Rosanette abandons Arnoux at the end of the evening for the wealthier Père Oudry. La Vatnaz congratulates Rosanette on her maneuver, but

¹²⁶ See Gavarni, *Oeuvres choisies*.

¹²⁷ After conducting a business matter with him, she pouts as if to flirt with him, then kisses him. "Arnoux semble jouir de ses rebuffades" (ES 124).

later curses her for stealing away Delmar. Humiliated by her loss and by her fading youth, La Vatnaz, explaining her predicament to Frédéric, proclaims her superiority over the promiscuous Rosanette. She asks “Est-ce que je suis une fille moi? Est-ce que je me vends?” (232).¹²⁸ She then lists Rosanette’s many infidelities in an effort to persuade Frédéric to inform Arnoux of Rosanette’s latest fling and, consequently, takes her revenge when Arnoux abandons his unfaithful mistress.

Through their representations of the quarrels between *lorettes*, Gavarni and Flaubert emphasize the petty jealousies between women; however, it must be noted that the two target different audiences. As a caricaturist for a popular culture periodical, Gavarni’s job is to amuse his audience in his *caricatures*. As a novelist, Flaubert has more grounds to problematize women’s inability to form enduring relationships in his novel, in order to show that the patriarchy is not threatened as long as women continue quarreling. As Cyzba has asserted about the hateful, spiteful conduct of La Vatnaz:

Le texte associe à la rivalité amoureuse et met aussi en parallèle avec la vengeance de Mme Dambreuse faisant vendre le mobilier de Mm Arnoux ne signifie pas seulement l’impossibilité de l’amitié des femmes entre elles; il sous-entend encore que la ‘nature’ féminine est mauvaise: dominées fondamentalement par leur sensualité, les femmes ne respectent rien. (189-190)

¹²⁸ La Vatnaz’s age and fading looks prevent her from ever winning against her younger, more beautiful rival in terms of selling her body for money. The activities she pursues to support herself are related to prostitution in the sense that she services individuals who will benefit her the most. For example, she works for Arnoux when he is prosperous, but drops him when he flounders financially and moves on to the next profitable opportunity.

That said, female rivalry is not the only issue that distracts them from uniting as one to effect change. Rather, their self-centeredness makes them incapable of experiencing any sense of civic duty or embracing any public cause.

For example, Rosanette enjoys playing the leader at her parties where she holds sway over everyone as “la Maréchale,” but refrains from employing her aggressiveness in any political activity in 1848 because self-indulgence blinds her to injustices or revolutionary potential. She initially enjoys the carnivalesque atmosphere reigning the first few days after the revolution, but soon laments the republic, largely because her rich aristocratic clients flee Paris; she also remains unsympathetic to any socialist or feminist causes promoted by La Vatnaz because they do not directly help her.

At its simplest level, Flaubert’s insistence on female rivalry and self-centeredness in the novel reads as blatant misogyny. However, when one takes into account the impact female journalists, activists, protestors, and even insurgents made in 1848, Flaubert’s characterizations take on a different light. Specifically, they are a narrative maneuver meant to reassure readers that the feminist call for female solidarity will never succeed as long as women as begrudging as the *lorettes* -- or the aristocrats for that matter -- are prone to such divisive disputes. It is as if Flaubert sanitizes the revolution of 1848 by re-writing it in his novel as a period in which women were too occupied with their own tiffs and personal concerns to effect changes in the nineteenth century that contemporary historians now consider significant.

The derision of feminism and female presence in the political arena

Flaubert's efforts to blot out the successful display feminists made in 1848, so evident in his insistence on women's antithetical nature and their disrespect for friendship, serve to diminish the impact of women's violent participation in the rebellion, as well as their political achievements. A comparison between the way Gavarni treats the *lorette* in relation to violence, revolution, and political activism and the way Flaubert avoids such connections underscores the manner in which Flaubert denigrates and undermines the female agency revolutionary activity afforded women.

Because he crafted his works in the early 1840s, during a period that was well before women descended in the streets to protest and fight with their socialist comrades, Gavarni merely hints at brutality and insurgence in his caricatures without probing too deeply into any serious transgressions that result.¹²⁹ Specifically, Gavarni represents two women fighting, but only shows the back of their heads, accompanied by a caption that states: "Vlà qu'elles ont des mots! Fameux! Angéline s'aligne...touché...bien joué... Amanda ramasse ses quilles."¹³⁰ The commentary on this "catfight" reads more like a male *débardeur's* effort to entertain his friends than it does as a disturbing portrait of violent behavior, for Gavarni includes no blood, nor vicious looks on the women's faces meant to frighten viewers (as later depictions of the Commune *pétroleuses* set out

¹²⁹ It should be noted that Gavarni did not witness the dramatic episodes Flaubert saw, and could not look back on them retrospectively the way Flaubert did.

¹³⁰ See the "Débardeurs" series, *Oeuvres choisies*.

to accomplish).¹³¹ Moreover, Gavarni avoids graphic violence altogether in another caricature by featuring a man blocking another from entering a room in which a lover is supposedly beating his *lorette*, an action which one of the jaded spectators considers normal. Gavarni also includes a brief allusion to Saint-Simonism, the only reference to political movements I discovered, in his portrait of the *débardeur*, who, anxious to celebrate at Carnival and forget about her conjugal duties, declares herself a partisan of free love for the evening (see figure five).

Gavarni's fleeting reference to women's political involvement in the 1830s is light-hearted because it is not grounded in any traumatic political event. However, throughout the 1830s and 1840s, the feminist movement's visibility increased as both working-class and professional women lobbied for change and utopian Fourierists and Saint-Simonists called for women's liberation in the name of social progress. Francine du Plessix Gray states:

Large groups of working-class French women, aligning themselves with the newly powerful labor unions, or using the network of the newly powerful labor unions or using the network of their own "political clubs," had already demonstrated for suffrage, more humane working hours, and day care centers. A new class of professional women – schoolteachers, postmistresses, journalists who proclaimed the same ideals as Flaubert's Mademoiselle Vatnaz – also campaigned for divorce laws and equal access to secondary education, and stated their demands in many new women's magazines [...].¹³²

¹³¹ For more on the mythical *pétroleuse* and the role she purportedly played during the Commune, see Jeannene M. Przyblyski, "Between Seeing and Believing: Representing Women in Appert's Crimes de la Commune," *Modernity and the Mass Press in Nineteenth-Century France*, Ed. Dean de la Motte and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (Amherst: Univ. of Mass. Press, 1999) 233-278.

¹³² Francine du Plessix Gray, *Rage and Fire: A Life of Louise Colet* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994) 219-220.

Anxieties about women's demands for emancipation escalated during the revolts of 1848 when several women participated in the uprisings. Flaubert, like his contemporaries, objected to women's involvement in the revolution, arguing that a woman's place was not in the streets, but in the home.¹³³ That is why 20 years after the 1848 insurrection, Flaubert purposely excluded any scenes in his novel in which women participate in the upheaval on the streets. In contrast with Daniel Stern's *Histoire de la Révolution de 1848*, Flaubert also neglects to mention the woman who perished during the street battles.

Flaubert not only dismisses the role women played in the 1848 uprising, but also the legitimacy of revolution in general if one considers the symbolism of the Tuileries episode in his novel. During the 1848 upheaval, Frédéric witnesses the ransacking of the Tuileries palace and the destruction caused by the "canaille," comprised in part of prostitutes. Flaubert thus codes the freedom won as negative, by representing liberty as a revolting and frightening prostitute "en statue de la Liberté, -- immobile, les yeux grands ouverts, effrayante" (ES 360). He blames the failure of the republic on the people willing to sell themselves like the "fille publique en statue de liberté" in order to advance themselves financially and socially, instead of worrying about how to lead a nation. Indeed, the prostitute as embodiment of the republic in *L'Éducation sentimentale* anticipates Zola's depiction of Nana as a metonymy for the Second Empire. The mayhem and violence that occurs during the pillaging of the Tuilleries in Flaubert's novel is

¹³³ Cyzba. *Mythes* 190-192.

deemed obscene by virtue of its association with a prostitute just as the corruption of the Second Empire is as contemptible as the *demi-mondaine* who exploited it.

Flaubert further discredits the debate on feminism and socialism through the childish banter of Rosanette and La Vatnaz. While discussing the political events of the insurrection, tension flares up again between La Vatnaz, who believes women have a place in society, and Rosanette, who not only supports whipping women in the “club des femmes,” but also believes that they belong at home, in love and raising children. The conflict escalates when La Vatnaz declares her support of communism and Rosanette calls the idea idiotic, quipping, “Est-ce que jamais se pourra se faire?” (383). Indeed, Rosanette’s successful collection of lovers and La Vatnaz’s business savvy and financial security define their problematical relationship. La Vatnaz ends the fight by reminding Rosanette of the money she owes her. As a third person present at the dispute who does not participate in the quarrel, Frédéric serves as a type of interpreter through whom Flaubert reveals the true source of the squabble: Frédéric suspects the argument over politics is symptomatic of their on-going rivalry and determines that the quarrel is in fact centered on Delmar. The Delmar row is yet another example of women too caught up in rivalry to effect any significant political change. Thus, the Delmar dispute serves as further proof that preoccupations with money and love drive women’s behavior more than politically influenced dreams of enfranchisement.

This example illustrates how Flaubert shifts the focus away from feminists’ publicized political engagement in 1848 and places it rather on the

trivial disputes over men the two women carry out. When Flaubert mocks La Vatnaz's feminist leanings and emphasizes the political impotence of Rosanette and La Vatnaz as well as the women gathered at the Dambreuse dinner after June 1848, he relegates the women to the private sphere where they are locked away from politics in the public spotlight. Flaubert's anti-feminist agenda echoes the belief that women must remain at home and perform tasks to please and serve others.¹³⁴ History shows us that women's participation in the insurgence was serious enough for them to be jailed or exiled in an effort to prevent any further enfranchisement. Because Flaubert was opposed to feminist political engagement, he allayed the threat of women ever recuperating the power they exerted, if only briefly, in 1848, by depicting his female characters as political incompetents.

Though Flaubert depicts women as incapable of serious political activism throughout the novel, Flaubert especially insists on La Vatnaz's inadequacy as a means of ridiculing the feminist petitions and literary pretensions of female intellectuals making demands in feminist newspapers of the period. Flaubert achieves this by associating the movement with a morally ambiguous and unethical character. Flaubert portrays her commitment to political ideas as questionable, for she changes her beliefs as many times as she changes employment.¹³⁵ As for La Vatnaz's apparent enthusiasm for the revolution,

¹³⁴ Moralist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon summed up the ideal bourgeois woman when he stated: "Please remain what we have always demanded you to be: gentle, reserved, cloistered, devoted, modest; only in this state can we set you on a pedestal and dedicated ourselves to you body and soul." Cited by du Plessix Gray, 73.

¹³⁵ In regard to her numerous career changes, Flaubert writes: "Elle s'était aigrie sous les bourrasques de l'existence, ayant, tour à tour, donné des leçons de piano, preside une table d'hôte, collaboré à des journaux de modes, sous-loué des appartements, fait le trafic des dentelles dans le monde des femmes légères" (ES 475).

Flaubert writes: “Aussi, comme beaucoup d’autres, avait-elle salué dans la révolution l’avènement de la vengeance; --et elle se livrait à une propagande socialiste, effrénée” (369). He deems her “support” of the revolution sheer opportunism, because La Vatnaz sees the movement as means with which she and other unhappy single women can avenge their bitter lack of “un amour, une famille, un foyer, la fortune” (369). In sum, Mlle Vatnaz, a slave to her own self-interest, aligns herself with whatever cause or person will advance her the most.

In one key example, La Vatnaz sacrifices her ideological principles when she is so impressed by the wound Dussardier acquired during the July Days of the revolution that she abandons literature, socialism, and her course on “la Désubalternisation de la femme” in order to win him back (476). Flaubert moreover mocks her “bas-bleu” pretension as the organizer of a raout because she spends the entire meeting furious at Rosanette and jealous of the women in attendance, rather than concentrating on the philanthropic goal of the meeting. In the same manner the caricatures of the Vésuviennes were intended to abate any fears of these women successfully bonding together, Flaubert conceived La Vatnaz as a farcical figure who symbolizes the type of woman who would half-heartedly embrace the cause of emancipation. As such, Flaubert reassures his audience that such movements would never again succeed because the women who support political movements only do so if it benefits them. Furthermore, Flaubert suggests that women quickly abandon their principles for more profitable opportunities.

The gender-bending *lorette* as castrator

In portraying Rosanette as a castrator, Flaubert stresses her menacing sexuality in a way that Gavarni, Alhoy, and Dumas do not in their allusions to gender bending. Although Gavarni depicts his energetic *débardeur* as usurping the virility of her partner when she outlasts him during the Carnival revelry, Flaubert takes this fantasy even further by imagining how the masculine *lorette* could completely destroy male potency. In his presentation of *lorette en débardeur*, Flaubert insists on Rosanette's aggressive and militant demeanor; he characterizes her as an imposing, domineering individual "en costume de dragon Louis XV," who asks Frédéric to dance. In response, Frédéric claims that he does not know how, as Rosanette's threatening stance has apparently paralyzed him. Flaubert describes her attitude: "Et, posée sur une seule hanche, l'autre genou un peu rentré, en caressant de la main gauche le pommeau de nacre de son épée, elle le considéra pendant une minute" (172). In direct contrast to the curvaceous Gavarni revelers without weapons, Rosanette carries a sword, the symbolic phallus that could castrate Frédéric.

Although Rosanette takes leave of Frédéric after a minute of staring him down, she risks castrating him again at the party when she is dancing in her spurs; then later that night, she haunts Frédéric again in a dream in which "La Maréchale, à califourchon sur lui, l'éventrait avec des éperons d'or" (184). The wound she inflicts while dominating him symbolizes his castration, for the spurs Rosanette is wearing may be read as an exteriorization of the normally interior *vagina dentata*. At this point in the novel, Frédéric is still a virgin and so it

follows that he would “realistically” have anxious fantasies about a woman’s sexual organ. Furthermore, Flaubert’s own bout with syphilis exaggerated his apprehension about woman’s sexuality and likely contributed, at least subconsciously, to his portrayal of Rosanette as a castrator.¹³⁶

“Essayons, dans ce récit, de cautériser la plaie:” The Goncourts and Eugène Sue’s battle against the *Lorette*’s contagion

While Flaubert lashes out against the *lorette*’s notoriety and consciously limits her influence, his denunciation of Rosanette is not the sole purpose of *L’Éducation sentimentale* as is the case with Edmond and Jules de Goncourt’s 1853 *physiologie La Lorette* and Eugène Sue’s 1854 short story of the same name. Rosanette is one of the more minor figures among the 20 or so characters in Flaubert’s opus, and his portrayal of her is more embedded and subtle than the “quelques lignes du cru, du brutal même” of the Goncourts.¹³⁷ In fact, the Goncourts and Sue make the *lorette* the object of their contemptuous study in order to knock her off her pedestal by stripping her of her glamour and thereby bringing to light her threat to society. Thus, the Goncourt brothers proclaim themselves the first writers to dispute the *lorette*’s glorification in an epigraph preceding the title page of *La Lorette* (Second edition, 1853).¹³⁸ They assert: “Les dates sont quelque chose dans un livre, si petit que soit ce livre. Nous prions donc

¹³⁶ For more on Flaubert’s health issues, see the “diseases” entry in *A Gustave Flaubert Encyclopedia*, ed. Laurence M. Porter (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2001) 107.

¹³⁷ Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *La Lorette* (Paris: Dentu, 1853).

¹³⁸ Concerning the publication of the work, André Billy asserts: “Dedicated to Gavarni, *La Lorette* was published in the summer of 1853. In it these reputed romantics boasted of being the first to protest against the apologias of the courtesan in love. *La Lorette* was their fifth work [...] At Dentu’s bookshop in the Palais -Royal, *La Lorette*, 6,000 copies of which were printed, was sold out in a week and a little later was reprinted with a vignette by Gavarni.” André Billy, *The Goncourt Brothers*. Tran. Margaret Shaw (London: André Deutsch, 1960) 49.

le lecteur de vouloir bien faire attention aux dates de publication de ces six articles. Il verra ainsi qui, le premier, a protesté contre l'assomption de la Lorette."¹³⁹

For Sue and the Goncourts, the *lorette* had achieved too much fame and notice, despite her woeful opposition to the traditional bourgeois social values, her lack of chastity, her promiscuous habits of juggling several lovers at one time, her laziness, and her rejection of honest work, as well as her outrageous spending habits. Given her dubious, but dangerous stature, the Goncourt brothers and Sue strive to seal off the prostitute's threat. They expose her as a contagious purveyor of social ills, and they wish to contain her infectiousness with the "fer chaud" of their harsh words (Goncourt, preface).

As the Goncourts have argued, "il est des plaies qu'on ne peut toucher qu'au fer chaud," and prostitution is one of them; as the dramatic gesture needed to deflate the *lorette*'s devious influence, they adopt an acidic tone in the 60-page *physiologie*. Thus, they employ a pitiless language at the *lorette*'s expense, insisting on her savage brutishness, her immodest way of earning money, her inferiority to the courtesans of the past, her capacity to dominate, degrade, and corrupt, as well as her lowly, violent background. Following in the tradition of Parent, these brief quips by the Goncourts in their "Lorette" chapter emphasize her animality, her uncouthness, her stupidity, her lack of manners, and her boisterousness:

¹³⁹ In the second edition, the Goncourts list the dates after the chapters on "La Lorette" (3 novembre 1852), and "Papa et Maman" (26 janvier 1853). They do not however list the dates for "Le Loret," "Le Vieux Monsieur," "les Messieurs de Passage," or "la Bonne." The second edition of this In-64 tome features chapter divisions, but no pagination.

“Elle mange comme un vivandière. Elle est bête. Elle est impertinente comme la bêtise”

Celle-là, dans un déjeuner du bal masqué, s’écrie: “Quatre heures! Maman épluche des carottes!”

Il est des Lorette réputées drôles. Celles-là cassent les verre du dessert, les glaces du vin chaud, chantent du Beranger au garçon, ou font le grand écart” (12)

Toutes n’ont ni esprit, ni gorge, ni coeur, ni tempérament. Toutes ont même dieu: le dieu Cent-Sous” (12)

Though in many ways they are rehashing stereotypes established by Alhoy, Dumas, and Gavarni, their terse, sarcastic sentences deflate any airy idealistic image of the *lorette*, particularly as purveyed by Gavarni. As for the illicit manner in which she earns her living, the Goncourts avoid the euphemisms and *jeu de mots* employed by Dumas and Alhoy; rather they directly name her ignoble pursuit of riches:

Elle a un entreteneur qui la paie, un monsieur qui la paie, un vieux monsieur qui la paie, des amis qui la paient, et beaucoup d’autre monde qui la paie encore.

Elle fait l’amour pour se faire rentière.

Elle n’aime pas qu’on la caresse, parce que cela chiffonne sa robe. Elle ne veut pas boire, parce que cela pourrait amener la livraison avant paiement.

The direct references to her being paid to deliver sex are daring; it should be noted, however, that Dumas *fills* had opened the door to a more direct frankness about sex and commerce with the scene in which Armand pays Marguerite in front of everyone at the gambling house in *La Dame aux camélias* (1848, 1852).

Despite their “realistic” candor about the prostitute selling her body, the Goncourts nonetheless fall back on the romantic myth of the harlot with the heart

of gold. Moreover, they end their chapter on the *lorette* by evoking the glorious courtesans of the past and lamenting their vulgar successors. They write:

Venez voir, vous qui viviez votre vie sans savoir où elle vous menait, ô vous qui jetiez le fond de votre coupe à l'avenir, et votre couronne fanée aux soucis qui s'empresment, et votre tête à toutes ivresses, et votre coeur à tous les vents, et vos lèvres à toutes les bouches, venez voir le vice avare de lui-même, et cette maigre carottière: la Lorette!"

Hence, they succumb to the romantic urge to extol the ancient hetaira, opposing the selfless and generous love of the courtesan with the crude egoism of the *lorette* in order to further scar the modern prostitute's reputation.

According to the Goncourts, the *lorette's* illicit sexual behavior must be curtailed because she inflicts sex role reversals on her clients that vanquish male virility. Indeed, the riches her lovers spoil her with only exacerbate her desire to dominate, for in the chapter that ridicules the cuckolded "Vieux Monsieur" who lusts after her, another frightening image of woman on top emerges. In a scene that anticipates Zola's portrayal of Nana asking Muffat to act like a horse or dog on all fours for her in chapter thirteen, the Goncourts recount the ridicule old men expose themselves to by submitting to the whims of their mistresses. The Goncourts, through the voice of a certain Champfort, recount the misadventure of the duc de La Vallière:

"La petite Lacour,--dit Champfort, --traitait ainsi le duc de La Vallière. Elle lui ôtait son cordon bleu, le mettait à terre, et lui disait: --Mets-toi à genoux la-dessus, vieille ducaille!"
Ainsi il se met à genoux sur sa vieillesse, le miserable vieillard! Rivé au *pieu*, ce mot terrible dont l'argot a baptisé le lit des sales amours, il a fait

de ses cheveux blancs le hochet de la Lorette; et puis, vient un jour où la femelle, rentée par lui, lui crache, brutale et cynique, ses dégoûts à la face: 'Eh bien, vas en trouver une autre, pour aimer un homme qui sent le rance!'"

In this harsh anecdote, the pathetic submission of the old man is almost as contemptible as the heartless behavior of the *lorette*. This decrepit patriarch "qui sent le rance" is not above the Goncourts' severe judgment; in fact, they further amplify his pathetic error by underlining his betrayal of the one woman, "une belle jeune fille, sa fille" who does love and respect him and who believes he leaves her every night after dinner because he no longer loves her. According to the Goncourts, he wrongly sacrifices his daughter in order to boost his weak ego with a prostitute.

The Goncourts further condemn the *lorette's* illicit sexuality by exposing the way it infiltrates the spirit of her inferiors, just as it has destroyed the life of the superior "ducaille." Thanks to her mistress's promiscuity, her maid, muse the Goncourts, "a le génie du corridor et de la double issue. Elle est l'huissier des galanteries. Elle est le régisseur des allées et venues" (50). Though the maid's adeptness for lies, her fondness for lowbrow Paul de Kock, and her drinking in the morning are amusing, the fact that "elle a l'ambition d'être MME" underscores the vicious influence the *lorette* has over her. The Goncourts write: "La bonne fait le lit de Madame sans rougir, et, en se baissant, sa petite croix de la Jeannette sautille les draps fripés" (55). In effect, the *lorette's* lasciviousness has contaminated her maid to the point of impiety and sacrilege by instilling in her the desire to lead the same vulgar life.

Lastly, the Goncourts uphold Parent's emphasis on the violent and depraved nature of the *lorette's* parents in order to explain her "fall." Though the anecdote about the mother is not as explicit about the story Rosanette tells Frédéric about her mother selling her to an older *debauché* in *L'Éducation sentimentale*, the matriarch in the Goncourts' work acts as a procuress for her daughter in the sense that she tells the director of the Conservatoire her beautiful child needs "des connaissances qui lui auront des débuts" (58). She acts in the same manner as the stage mother in Nestor Roqueplan's *Les Coulisses de l'Opéra*, who encourages her daughter's rich admirer to assure her a fortune when she says: "Il lui faut trois ou quatre mille livres de rente: secouez un peu votre fortune, et faites-en tomber ce grain de poussière."¹⁴⁰ As for the father in Goncourts' work, the lazy brute beats the child he believes is having an affair, but changes his mind because the relationship personally benefits him. According to the Goncourts, "Le monsieur était riche; mais il fut généreux. Il entretint la petite. Tous les deux jours, le père brutal met un chapeau et vient emprunter vingt francs à sa fille. -- C'est là le papa" (60).

The authors' blunt sentences leave no room for any fluffy embellishments associated with the romantic faith in the harlot with the heart of gold. Rather, as precursors of naturalism, the Goncourts focus on the social and hereditary factors that shaped the *lorette*. That said, the brief anecdotes they provide oversimplify the factors that drive her to prostitution and reiterate in a sharper, more lethal tone the platitudes about the *lorette* as a "type social" in the *physiologies* by Dumas

¹⁴⁰ Nestor Roqueplan, *Les Coulisses de l'Opéra* (Paris: Librairie Nouvelle, 1855) 42.

and Alhoy. Nonetheless, their terse dismissal of the *lorette* marks an important turning point in nineteenth-century French literature in signaling an unrestrained backlash against her figure. This move opens the floodgate to a new genre of literature treating the containment of the prostitute that continued throughout the rest of the century and which is now hailed as canonical.

The Devil vs. the *Lorette*

Eugène Sue's "La lorette" dovetails with the Goncourts' work and shares the same objective. However, Sue employs different narrative strategies that are even less subtle than the Goncourts' method. Sue warns the reader in the introduction, that his "récits ne seront pas sans moralité" (10). Indeed, his narrative serves as a pretext to warn readers about the dangers of the *lorette* and the capitalism she is aligned with, whereas the Goncourts' work critiques the *lorette* and her society without offering any sort of morals.

"La Lorette" appears in the first tome of Sue's *Diable médecin* series that the renowned *feuilletoniste* invented to rival Balzac's all-inclusive depiction of Paris. The diabolical-looking doctor is a "médecin des femmes" who entertains women with his knowledge of occult sciences. Subsequently, he annoys men jealous enough of his popularity with the ladies to snidely refer to him as the devil and to exaggerate "le renom satanique du docteur Méphistophélès" (6). Much like Balzac's Vautrin, he is able to penetrate every social class and to expose the secrets of "les types les plus tranchés de *la femme contemporaine*" (10). Contemporary readers are well acquainted with the epic struggle between good

and evil in Sue's nearly canonical *Mystères de Paris*; however, the obscurity of the present tale calls for a concise summary of Sue's story.

Sue sets the scene with a portrait of Georges Ducantal, whom he depicts as a hard working and economical *courtier de commerce* who is saving both for his daughter's dowries and for his retirement. Despite his miserly habits and vulgar manners, he is a good man at heart who loves his wife and his two daughters. Sue launches the narrative with Ducantal's fall from grace: his petit bourgeois trajectory is interrupted when he catches the "fièvre d'or" after learning one of his friends earned a hefty sum from the stock market. Ducantal, inspired by his friend's luck, risks his 20 years of savings (60,000 francs) and takes away 600,000 francs from his investment. Instead of giving his daughters large dowries and retiring early, Ducantal continues betting. Not wanting to spoil his wife and daughters, he hides his fortune from his family and turns himself over to a world of "faiseurs," "agioteurs and femmes perdues" – a prototype of Dumas fils' 1855 *Demi-monde*.

To further accentuate the heedless greed of the *lorette* who will ruin Ducantal, Sue juxtaposes Ducantal's decadent but secret existence with the misery his saintly wife and humble daughters endure at home. In one scene, they sew shivering by candlelight, too afraid to waste money by throwing another log on the fire. The daughters gaily liven up when their mother tells them she will buy them jade buttons for the old dresses they are mending. Sue focuses on the wife's sacrifices to save money each week that require her to endure the cold weather and the unpleasant individuals at Les Halles. As such, Sue contrasts her virtue

with the “bad” woman the wife secretly frets has turned Ducantal against his family.

The wicked woman is none other than Emilia Lambert, one of the most fashionable *lorettes* in Paris. Though Ducantal neglects his family to furnish a sumptuous apartment for this cold, haughty beauty, she complains that her rival Hélène has more money and a more luxurious *hôtel*. Sue warns the reader early on that she is not to be trusted: the description of Emilia’s brown hair is suspect, because it clashes with her fair eyes, and she has not only changed her name but also hidden a love affair with a store clerk. When the *Diable médecin* arrives at Emilia’s home to treat her cough, he is immediately appalled by her behavior and lectures the *lorette* on her rudeness and ingratitude. Our introduction to her ends with Ducantal’s fortune continuing to augment. In order to keep his richer rival, Malicorne, at bay, Ducantal gives in to Emilia’s desire to conquer Hélène with a more sumptuous hotel.

When Madame Ducantal is nearly run over by Emilia, Ducantal’s daughters accidentally learn that their father is indeed rich and supporting another woman. Ducantal learns of the event, visits his wife in her sick bed, and grouchily rebuffs her incriminations. She insists, however, on reprimanding him and exclaims: “Votre fille et moi, nous avons manqué d’être écrasées par la voiture d’une femme que vous entretenez” (270). Because Ducantal threatens to hit her and wonders how she discovered his liaison, Sue provides further proof of Ducantal’s degeneration, representing him as completely alienated from his bourgeois values.

His wife's ailing health does not stop Ducantal from hosting an "orgie" at the Maison-Dorée (which undoubtedly represents the Café Anglais). At the restaurant, Ducantal and Malicorne purchase large amounts of wine and champagne to outdo each other and to impress their mistresses, who return the favor with insults. Over the course of the evening, Emilia and her rival, as well as Ducantal and his competitor, disgust the Diable médecin with their "orgie," prompting him to deliver the harshest sermon in the narrative. The revelers' idea of wealth and "superflu" horrifies the doctor, who cannot believe the amount of luxury items they waste in an impromptu soup they concoct of champagne, pheasants, pineapples, candles, oysters, out-of-season strawberries and peas, and a chef's hat. Their watering of the asphalt with the 20 bottles of champagne that remain equally scandalizes the doctor, who believes that the rich should invest their money in crops and farms to benefit society. Moreover, he condemns the vulgar gestures of wealth the stock brokers and *lorettes* as "*improductives, stériles, égoïstes, ruineuses, signes certains de l'avilissement et de la corruption des mœurs publiques*" (293). He denounces both speculation and Guizot's call to the bourgeois to enrich themselves. Also, he predicts the legacy of the *lorette's* will be the memory of the *lorettes* as "*les arrosoirs d'où s'est écroulée à flots d'ors la richesse publique*" (296).

Soon after, Ducantal learns of his ruin. Distraught that he no longer has any money to support Emilia or his wife and daughters, he is at first horrified by his shameful actions. He locks himself in a study and ignores the pleas of his forgiving wife and daughters. He boasts: "Bah, j'ai joui," then shoots himself.

Unfazed by Ducantal's death, Emilia schemes after Malicorne, but she is interrupted by the *Diable médecin*, who tells her that he knows her true identity: she is the thief Madeline Froquet who escaped from a prison in Montpellier where he once treated her. When he threatens to turn her in unless she pays him 100,000 francs, she begrudgingly gives him the money, which he, in turn, offers to Ducantal's wife and daughters, thereby providing them with enough money to live comfortably the rest of their lives. In punishing the transgressions of the bourgeois and *lorette* with death and financial ruin at the end of the tale, and in rewarding the dutiful, thrifty bourgeois Ducantal women, Sue reestablishes the bourgeois values weakened by prostitution and capitalism.

“La fièvre d’or:” the *Lorette* and capitalism’s contagiousness

The “fièvre d’or” that infects Ducantal is a euphemism for capitalism, a force that Sue labels the “*épidémie régnante*” of the era. This fever makes Ducantal prey to the sycophant Emilia, who, blinded by greed, ruins Ducantal and his family. Sue maintains that her wicked behavior is contagious and that it must be monitored to prevent it infesting itself as jealousy among the proper bourgeois women who, blinded by riches and opulence, might be tempted to take the immoral path of the *lorette*. As the “*prêtresses*” “*du luxe*,” the *lorettes* enjoy the separation of public and private spheres which not only keeps their rivals at home, but grants them special status as the privileged few to possess “*le vice et le chic!*” (285-286). The get-rich-quick schemes of opportunists and their *lorettes* threaten the patriarchy in two ways: 1) such scams wrongly convince *arrivistes* like

Ducantal into believing that “la spéculation charrie des flots d’or” and that making money and wasting it on a *lorette* for fun is more important than supporting a wife and children; and 2) these intrigues encourage *lorettes* to flaunt their wealth, making the honest women jealous of their opulence and likely to abandon the self-abnegation that keeps them submissive. If honest women decide to imitate the *lorettes*, they will neglect their motherly and domestic duties, thereby destroying the stable bourgeois household on which the Second Empire is based. Just as Sue’s tale warns women against coveting the *lorette*’s lifestyle, it also sends a message to bourgeois men: placing personal pleasure ahead of conjugal and societal duty will end in dishonor and, possibly, death.

Far from subtle, Sue’s narrative directly links the epidemic mercantilism of the period to prostitution. He mocks those who gage the State’s wealth by the amount of money individuals invest in prostitutes. Sue denounces the belief that the more men support *lorettes*, the more the economy will grow. He frowns upon those who cry: “Vive l’argent et les lorettes!” and finds the conflation of capitalism and prostitution threatening. He writes:

Ce vivant et fatal exemple de l’inconduite opulente et triomphante; cet outrageux défi jeté sans cesse en tous lieux aux sentimens honnêtes, n’ont-ils pas toujours été des preuves flagrantes de l’avilissement des esprits, de la corruption des moeurs? Cette *sanie* morale demande un remède héroïque. Le fer et le feu sont seuls efficaces contre la gangrène. Essayons, dans ce récit, de cautériser la plaie, au risqué de faire crier le malade. (242-243)

Society must be purged of capitalism, which Sue considers a type of illness. By linking this system to the *lorette* and the rhetoric of contagion, Sue equates

mercantilism with prostitution, a threat already familiar with a public increasingly wary of venereal disease and the growing number of women walking the streets. Through his choice of the word “gangrène,” Sue appeals to emotion of those worried about the spread of contagion Parent linked to prostitutes some 15 years before Sue penned this narrative. Sue thus holds that capitalism, like the unethical practice of prostitution, must be contained for the good of society – for both represent hasty, impersonal interactions that weaken the traditional bonds in communities.¹⁴¹ Whereas in pre-capitalist France, personal relations (which held individuals accountable for their actions) took precedent over distant business transactions, the new capitalist system prioritized money over meaningful exchanges between individuals. To discourage the spread of this harmful new way of conduct, Sue puts scathing words into the doctor’s mouth that are meant to be so acidic they seal off the festering wound of capitalism.

Sue’s containment project consists of contrasting the angelic selflessness of Madame Ducantal and her daughters with the diabolical egotism of Emilia and the *lorette*. He juxtaposes the thrifty economy of the Ducantal women suffering through during the winter with the wasteful, lazy habits of the *lorette* who exclaims her *raison d’être*: “Je satisfais toutes mes fantaisies; je jette l’argent par la fenêtre, j’éclipse les femmes du monde et surtout nos autres dames” (244). Try

¹⁴¹ Comparing prostitution to industrial capitalism, Peter Brooks cites Georg Simmel’s belief that: “prostitution and money are counterparts in terms of the social relations each engenders.” Peter Brooks, “The Mark of the Beast: Prostitution, Melodrama and Narrative,” *New York Literary Forum* 7 (1980): 132. According to Simmel, “The indifference with which [money] lends itself to any use, the infidelity with which it leaves everyone, its lack of ties to anyone, its complete objectification that excludes any attachment and makes it suitable as a pure means – all this suggests a portentous analogy between it and prostitution.” Donald N. Levine, ed. *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) 122.

as they may to defy bourgeois convention, Ducantal and his mistress cannot escape the omnipresent *Diable médecin* scolding them for their transgressions, whether it entails him preaching “la morale conjugale,” or their shameless waste. (256).

Though Sue’s black and white morality tale in which the rich are punished and the honorable avenged is at times banal for its didacticism and lack of nuance, it nonetheless benefits scholarship on prostitution because it is one of the earliest examples of the backlash against the *lorette*. Indeed the desire of Sue and the Goncourts to cauterize the social wound of prostitution calls to mind the notion of “sealing up” the prostitute’s story that appears in Barbey d’Aurevilly’s dandy narratives, specifically “La vengeance d’une femme” and “À un dîner d’athées.” In psychoanalytical terms, Bernheimer addresses the reasons that drive Barbey to contain the prostitute. Her sexuality becomes threatening, Bernheimer argues, for

She is somehow impenetrable even as she gives herself to be penetrated, opaque just when she should be most readable. She asserts her independence of the male plot at the very moment when the male thinks he is inscribing her body into it. This assertion, which stimulates narratively productive castration fears, becomes the object of complex strategies designed to put those fears to rest and achieve narrative closure. (88)

There is little in Sue and Goncourts’ stories that would support a psychoanalytical reading of the fear of castration as it exists in Barbey; nonetheless, the narrative strategies that Bernheimer locates apply to these two works on the *lorette* because they have the same aim: to control the image of the unruly prostitute in a way that allays anxieties projected onto her. For Barbey, the fear of the emasculating

vagina drives the plot to dominate the prostitute, whereas for the Goncourts and Sue, worries about capitalism and female emancipation as embodied in the prostitute instill the need to regulate her image.

In a sense, the Goncourts' protests against the *lorette's* "assumption" and Sue's objection to the *lorette* and the bourgeois idealization of money with which she is associated are efforts to "seal off" the *lorette's* influence and hence achieve "narrative closure." Though perhaps eclipsed by more famous texts like Alexandre Dumas *fil's*'s *La Dame aux camélias* and Émile Zola's *Nana*, the Goncourts' *La Lorette* and Sue's tale of the same name nevertheless epitomize the writers' tendency to project their fears of contagion and social instability onto the figure of the prostitute in works written in the second half of the nineteenth-century. When the Goncourts protest the *lorette's* glamorization, they not only signal her demise, but also announce the arrival of the *demi-mondaine*, the deviant *mangeuse d'hommes* who will replace her.



— J'ai cancané que j'en ai pus de jambes, j'ai mal au cou d'avoir crié... et bu que le
palais m'en ratisse..
Tu n'es donc pas un homme?

Par GAVARNI.

Gravé par LAGRANGE.

Fig 1. Gavarni, "J'ai cancané que j'en ai pus de jambes," from "Le Carnaval de Paris, *Oeuvres choisies de Gavarni* (J. Hetzel: Paris, 1864)

LES VÉSUVIENNES.



— Plus souvent!.....

— Pécasio..... recoude-moi rien que ce bouton là, je n'peux pas sentir sans ça!.....

Fig. 2. Edmond de Beaumont. From the series *Les Vésuviennes*. Originally printed chez Aubert; reprinted in *Le Charivar*, June 20, 1848. Coll de Vinck 112, no. 14.149.

GAVARNI.
ŒUVRES CHOISIES
LE
CARNAVAL A PARIS.



J. HETZEL
1846

Fig. 3. Gavarni, "Le Carnaval à Paris," *Oeuvre choisies de Gavarni* (J. Hetzel: Paris, 1846)



Valet de trèfle et valet de coeur. — Détaillé

Fig. 4. Gavarni, "Valet de trèfle et valet de coeur," from "Les Lorettes," *Oeuvres choisies de Gavarni, édition spéciale* (J. Hetzel: Paris, 1864).



C'est demain matin qu' mon tendre époux va beugler... Ah! mais... ruf!
ce soir j'suis Simonienne, enfoncé l'cojugat!

Fig. 5. Gavarni, "C'est demain matin qu' mon tendre époux va beugler," *Oeuvres choisies de Gavarni, édition spéciale* (J. Hetzel: Paris, 1864).

CHAPTER THREE:

THE DEMONIC ANGEL: RE-INVENTING THE COURTESAN IN THE JULY MONARCHY

L'aristocratie serait venue s'amuser chez notre Ninon, où nous aurions appelé les artistes sous peine d'articles mortifères. Ninon He aurait été magnifique d'impertinence, écrasante de luxe. Elle aurait eu des opinions. On aurait lu chez elle quelque chef d'oeuvre dramatique défendu qu'on aurait au besoin fait faire exprès. Elle n'aurait pas été libérale, une courtisane est essentiellement monarchique. Ah! Quelle perte! Elle devait embrasser tout son siècle, elle aime un petit jeune homme.

Balzac, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*

INTRODUCTION

Discourse centered on the prostitute is rich, multi-layered and often paradoxical. How nineteenth-century French writers used “her” varied according to the artist and his outlook on the world. Despite the many different forms the figure of the prostitute takes in the works analyzed in this chapter, one common denominator may be noted – the reoccurring way in which writers were simultaneously fascinated and sickened by “her.” Whereas the male writer romanticized the ancient courtesan, celebrating her intelligence and beauty, he refused to examine her contemporary counterpart through the same idealizing filter, because she summoned anxieties about female sexuality and women’s encroachment on the public sphere.

In contrast with the modern woman’s public forays and political and revolutionary activism, the courtesan in Ancient Greece evoked for Dumas and Neuville a utopian society in which patriarchal domination went unchallenged. Ancient Greek views on women corresponded to the nineteenth-century

patriarchal fantasy, as ancient Greek culture shut women out of politics or any other public engagement. In the same way, post-revolutionary French critics, historians, and politicians sought to suppress rebellion in French women. Further, Ancient Greece enforced a double standard that denied education and freedom to wives, but granted them to the hetaera in the same way that French men isolated their bourgeois wives, but provided courtesans with the money they needed to live independently. According to Simone de Beauvoir, only the savviest courtesan knew how to exaggerate her passivity and womanliness in order to enchant the male who would, in turn, provide her the money she needed to enjoy autonomy. In sum, for nineteenth-century writers, the Ancient Greek courtesan symbolized a society that enforced the doctrine of separate spheres. Conversely, the modern courtesan was punished with death or humiliation in texts for having violated the bourgeois ideal of the woman as domestic angel.

Bourdieu's social theories shed light on how and why writers used the figure of the ancient Greek courtesan to posit themselves as possessing what he calls "legitimate culture."¹⁴² This "legitimacy" stemmed from the general valorization of Hellenic excellence and cultural superiority. However, since the Greek courtesan herself remained safely ensconced in a far distant past, she posed no direct threat to male dominance.

In contrast to their Greek counterpart, modern French courtesans offered no cultural "capital." Also, French contemporary courtesans summoned anxieties about female sexuality and women's ventures into the public sphere. Nineteenth-

¹⁴² Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984) 56-57.

century writing about courtesans volleyed back and forth between the Greek ideal and the contemporary threat. As such, feminist historical research conceptualizes the ways in which writers employed the modern courtesan as a character through whom they worked through their own ambivalence about female sexuality and women's foray into the public sphere.

“Mêlées à la religion, à l’art, à la politique, elles font parler les dieux”: The courtesan’s privileged status vs. the average woman’s oppression

During the July Monarchy, writers wavered between the idealized ancient hetaera (whom they considered culturally refined and whose contributions to civilization they cherished) -- and the problematized contemporary courtesan (whom they viewed as vulgar and whose intrusion in the public sphere they considered a threat). Hence, in *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes*, though Dumas celebrates the *courtisane*'s extraordinary influence on Greek civilization and praises the brilliance of Marion de Lorme and Ninon de l'Enclos in his 1843 work, he vilifies the modern courtesan's defiance of the prescribed roles of female domesticity and docility. In regard to the Greek courtesan, Dumas pays homage to the influence ancient courtesans had on civic affairs. He writes: “Mêlées à la religion, à l’art, à la politique, elles font parler les dieux, elles inspirent Phidias et Praxitèle, elles conseillent Périclès” (113). Perhaps, as Mathilde Cortey has suggested, relegating the mythical courtesan to Ancient Greece stopped people from making allusions too close to the present.¹⁴³ In Dumas's case, he admired women's contribution to art and society as long as their sway did not threaten

¹⁴³ Mathilde Cortey, *L'Invention de la courtisane au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Éditions Arguments, 2001) 73.

male mastery in any way. According to Dumas, Marion de Lorme, Ninon de L'enclos, and Madame de Montespan were the last courtesans to have an impact on French culture -- for the era that followed was decadent. He writes: "Il y avait peut-être plus d'esprit, il y avait de moins de hautes manières, l'aristocratie succédait à la grande seigneurie: le règne des filles d'opéra commençait" (121). Actresses such as Sophie Arnould and dancers such as "la célèbre Clot..." enjoyed fame in their time, Dumas argues, but made no lasting impact on French cultural heritage because they lacked intellect and the ability to write.

It must be noted that the more contemporary the courtesan, the farther she moved away from that romanticized distant past. In sum, Dumas and his contemporaries were completely ambivalent about the courtesan: she reminded them of women's encroachment on the public sphere, whether it was as revolutionary, actress, or prostitute. As such, nineteenth-century writers such as Dumas refashioned the figure of the courtesan in an unflattering light in order to lessen the challenge she represented to the doctrine of the domestic sphere.

While writers associated the figure of the modern courtesan with challenges to male hegemony, for Dumas and Louis Lermercier de Neuville (*Courtisanes célèbres*, 1864), ancient Greece represented a fantasy of complete patriarchal domination. In their escapist reinvention of Ancient Greece, the boundaries between the public sphere of influence and the private sphere of domestic duty were clearly delineated; all women (except a few privileged courtesans) were denied any influence on politics or social order. In sum, women in Athens were "passive," "esclave" an essentially "une marchandise vivante

qu'on prenait avec sa dot, à laquelle on demandait de la fidélité et de la soumission, mais à laquelle on ne se croyait pas obligé de donner d'amour" (Neuville, 6-7).

In contrast with the patriarchal fantasy Ancient Greece represented to mid-nineteenth-century French writers, "l'image de la femme jouant un rôle traditionnellement masculin est ressentie comme une horreur et un scandale."¹⁴⁴ Though Badinter is describing the negative reaction revolutionary men experienced when contemplating women's participation in political clubs and their demands to bear arms and to divorce as they so desired, women's challenges to gender roles and their forays into public still irked writers over half a century later. In fact, the vocabulary Neuville uses when describing female docility in Ancient Greece includes many of the same images and terminology evoked by Rousseau and Jacobin journalist L. M. Prudhomme. In the same manner that Rousseau and Prudhomme discourage women's involvement in politics and revolutionary activism by insisting on the subservient nature of women, Neuville emphasizes the average Greek woman's submission. In a similar vein, Prudhomme proclaims that women are:

Destinées à passer toute leur vie renfermées sous le toit paternel ou dans la maison maritale; nées pour une dépendance perpétuelle depuis le premier instant de leur existence jusqu'à celui de leur trépas, elles n'ont été douées que de vertus privées: le tumulte des camps, les orages de la place publique, les agitations des tribunaux ne conviennent point du tout au second sexe.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Elisabeth Badinter, "Préface," *Paroles d'hommes* (Paris: POL., 1989) 33.

¹⁴⁵ Prudhomme as cited by Badinter in *Paroles d'hommes*, 72.

Words like “enclosed” and “perpetual dependency” underscore women’s enslavement, while “private virtues” and “second sex” emphasize women’s otherness and ordained confinement in the patriarchal home. Further, it is important to note that the containment project we have seen in relation to regulatory measures against the prostitute has its origins in the eighteenth century.

According to Badinter, the notion of separate spheres traces back to Rousseau’s insistence on the “enfermement des femmes” (24). Citing his *Fragments pour Émile*, Badinter underscores Rousseau’s statement that “La femme doit commander seule dans la maison [...] Mais elle doit se borner au gouvernement domestique, ne point mêler du dehors, se tenir enfermée chez elle” (24-25). Rousseau and Prudhomme’s declarations, as well as Neuville’s emphasis on the Athenian woman’s passivity and submissiveness, reflect the doctrine of separate spheres, which was exaggerated, according to James McMillan, in response to female political participation during the Revolution.¹⁴⁶ Thus, leaders and ideologues harshly criticized the political clubs women formed -- such as the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women -- because of the virulence their “bonnet rouge” suggested. Further, their participation in violent acts against enemies of the Republic undermined male authority.

Consequently, the Jacobin administration ordered the ban of all women’s clubs on 30 October 1793. Officials also repressed the frustrated and starving women in 1795 that rallied on the 12 germinal outside the Convention, pleading for bread. When these women’s “pleas went unheeded, and as the famine

¹⁴⁶ James McMillan, *France and Women 1789-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000) 42.

deepened, women went on the rampage, sacking shops, seizing grain and kidnapping officials, before launching the essentially female uprising of 1 prairial” (24-25). As a result, the protesting *sans-culotte* women were “rifle-butted by troops.” (25). Furthermore, though McMillan claims the women did not carry arms when they heckled politicians during Convention meetings, these women “readily identified with the political violence perpetrated in the name of the Revolution” (25). In other cases, leaders rebuked the women who were against the Revolution and who supposedly undermined the cause by collaborating with priests. To sum up, women’s political activism during the Revolution intimidated a general sense of manhood enough that writers, lawmakers, politicians and moralists in post-Revolutionary France insisted on women’s confinement to the domestic sphere.

As such, McMillan argues that politicians during the Revolution sought to curb female independence with “the doctrine of separate spheres, the ideological cornerstone of nineteenth-century antifeminism” rather than carve out a place for women in society that would be in accordance with the Enlightenment doctrine of “liberté, égalité, et fraternité” for all (31). In McMillan’s words:

Republicanism [...] was from the outset committed to a vision of democracy from which women had been excluded. The French Revolution was not a turning point in the history of French women in any positive sense but rather a defining moment where, in attempting to delineate the boundaries of both public and private life, the revolutionaries embarked upon a project in which women’s contribution to society could be made only through the private sphere of the home. (31)

If the project to curtail women's freedom began during the Revolution, it was "exaggerated" in McMillan's opinion in the century that followed: the memory of the women's activities during the Revolution still haunted post-revolutionary France. As McMillan has argued, stories about *sans-culotte* women during the Revolution were passed down through generations of mothers and daughters. These stories inspired new generations of women to protest and to launch the feminist movement in the Third Republic in the name of "a Madame Roland or a Germaine de Staël" (41).

As a result of women's political engagement, a "backlash" broke out in the form of harsh legislation known as the 1804 Civil Code -- which curtailed women's freedom to the extent that women became the property of men (at least in a legal sense) for nearly the entire nineteenth century. As such, the Civil Code aimed to wipe out the memory of "experiments" such as revolutionary laws granting divorce — "which threatened male authority in the family" (32). Thus, male politicians and writers called for women's activities to be limited to the home in order to prevent the showing women made in political clubs, demonstrations, public petitions, uprisings, and marches (including the famous 1789 one in which women initiated the move to bring the king back to Paris) during the Revolution from occurring again. Consequently, the measures taken against women's freedom that Neuville and Dumas underlined in their discussion of Ancient Greece mirrored those employed to curb women's activism in nineteenth-century France. In sum, the way the Greeks limited the average

woman's freedom to circulate resonated with writers like Neuville, because it reflected a system promoted in their own period.

In addition to identifying with the Ancient Greek's general denial of female sovereignty, Dumas and Neuville empathized with the double standard of the Greek system. In this double standard, husbands were allowed to cavort with hetaera, while their wives were expected to remain at home with their children. Post-revolutionary French society encouraged the same practice. McMillan has asserted:

Prostitutes, recruited essentially from the ranks of the urban poor, were the necessary guardians of the bourgeois woman's virtue. There is a good deal of evidence to support the supposition that consorting with prostitutes and visiting brothels formed a normal part of the lives of bourgeois men in the nineteenth century. (40)

In contrast with the French double system that celebrated the purity of the bourgeois daughter and spouse, in Neuville's depiction of Hellenic society, the average married woman was an uneducated servant and bearer of children whose lack of privilege or social recognition stood in stark contrast with her courtesan counterpart. While the patriarchal marriage arrangement denied the Greek wife access to education and luxury, the courtesan benefited from private tutorials and lived a privileged lifestyle in which she could not only dazzle men with her brilliance, but also use her intelligence to influence them politically.

In Neuville's idealized portrait of hetaera, the Greek courtesan Aspasia drew powerful men to her with her education and wisdom – most notably Pericles and Socrates, two admirers who sought to benefit from her erudition. Courtesans such as Lais, Sappho, Phryné, Thais, Lamia, and Messaline also enjoyed power,

privilege, notoriety, and respect – though some were noted for their intellect, others rose to power with their beauty. Indeed, these courtesans associated with monarchs, nobles, and powerful politicians and enjoyed special status as purveyors of pleasure and occasionally teachers, whereas wives and concubines were dismissed as procreators and servants and were banned from education and entertainment. In short, the double standard benefited the patriarchy and perhaps a few exceptional women; it also served to keep women divided and too uneducated to protest their inferior civic status and quality of life.

Yet, despite the general repression the double standard spelled out for the majority of women both in Ancient Greece and nineteenth-century France, a few savvy individuals managed to play the system to their advantage, according to Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir claims in the *Deuxième sexe* that the *hétaires* enjoyed the most liberty of any woman in Ancient Greece.¹⁴⁷ The courtesan's independence stemmed from her willingness to exaggerate her passivity and femininity in order to flatter the male who would provide her with the money she needed for “financial autonomy” (390-391). According to Beauvoir, the hetaera developed subjecthood by conducting her life as a man would—albeit under the guise of overstated femininity. Beauvoir writes:

Paradoxalement, ces femmes qui exploitent à l'extrême leur féminité se créent une situation presque équivalente à celle d'un homme; à partir de ce sexe qui les livre aux mâles comme objets, elles se retrouvent sujets. Non seulement elles gagnent leur vie comme les hommes, mais elles vivent dans une compagnie presque exclusivement masculine. (392)

¹⁴⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe: L'expérience vécue*, Vol II (Paris: Gallimard, 1949) 391-392.

The ancient courtesan thus earns her sovereignty by making men worship her; in turn, men worship her because she flatters their virility with her feigned submissiveness. Men adore the courtesan because she is the site in which their “mythes masculins” converge, for as Beauvoir states: “elle est plus qu’aucune autre chair et conscience, idole, inspiratrice, muse; peintres et sculpteurs la voudront pour modèle; elle nourrira les rêves des poètes; c’est en elle que l’intellectuel explorera les trésors de ‘l’intuition’ féminine” (392). In sum, she earns her special status by reflecting an idealized vision that the men have of themselves; through the courtesan, they see themselves as masculine, creative artists who can explore their feminine side without ever losing their virility in their “docile” mistress’s eyes.

If nineteenth-century writers admired the Ancient Greek courtesan, it was because she represented for them a society that enforced the doctrine of separate spheres and because she encouraged their ambitions and romantic visions of themselves. Writers were careful to not unite education, beauty, motherhood, and marriage in one figure because such a character could have brought into question their dominance or perhaps given subversive ideas to women readers. Indeed, the domestic ideology of the period held that women were to focus all their energy into marriage and motherhood – any other interests were considered aberrant. As such, male hegemony would not be challenged because women would be too busy at home to meddle in political and social affairs. Thus, if literary works featured female characters who successfully united a professional life with a conjugal one, then female readers would consider achieving the same feats in their own lives.

One need only remember the charges brought against Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, a work many critics feared made a mockery out of bourgeois marriages – for it was feared that Emma's ridiculous flights of fancy, scandalous affair, and sacrilegious suicide might encourage female readers to follow suit. Furthermore, it was in the patriarchal writer's best interest to keep women divided (at least in their fantasy or fiction), because uneducated women did not possess the means to protest injustice, and fortunate courtesans would not risk their elite status and wealth in order to help less fortunate women who lacked their privilege. In sum, for Neuville and Dumas, the great ancient societies represented an unambiguous division between the influential public sphere of men and the isolated domestic sphere of women. Indeed the two gendered realms never threatened to merge except in the writers' safe, fantasized visions of Ancient Greece.

Factoring culture into the patterns of demonization and seduction

In the last twenty years, several influential critics have theorized patterns of attraction and repulsion in regard to the prostitute.¹⁴⁸ Using Pierre Bourdieu's theories of the hierarchies of culture and taste in *The Field of Cultural Production* and *Distinction*, I build on these psychological, historical, and political critiques by factoring in the cultural stakes at play in the writers' representations of prostitutes. Whereas I argued in chapter two that when this pattern of attraction and repulsion centered on the *lorette*, it stemmed from the writers' response to modernity, in this chapter, I claim that the writers' fashioned their representations

¹⁴⁸ See chapter one for a brief overview of the theories by Charles Bernheimer, Hollis Clayson, and Jann Matlock.

of the courtesans as a way of competing for recognition in the literary field.¹⁴⁹ A brief recapitulation of Bourdieu's theoretical model of the field of cultural production will better situate my analysis.

Bourdieu devised the concept of "field" to account for "situations or contexts" in which agents act in "concrete social situations governed by a set of objective social relations."¹⁵⁰ As Randal Johnson has argued, Bourdieu theoretically conceived the social formations as:

structured by way of a hierarchally organized series of fields (the economic field, the educational field, the political field, the cultural field), each defined as a structured space with its own laws of functioning and its own relations of force independent of those of politics and the economy, except, obviously, the cases of economic and political fields. (6)

In other words, each field in society possesses its own set of rules that shapes the way players vie to exert influence over other agents and to govern the "resources" within the given field's arena (7). Paraphrasing Bourdieu, Johnson insists that agents do not always consciously strategize the way they compete for the "interests and resources at stake" in any given field (7). Specifically, Johnson has argued that players in "the cultural (e.g. literary field) do not wrestle for material goods" but rather for "the authority inherent in recognition, consecration and prestige" (7). This sort of cultural production is "not aimed at a large-scale

¹⁴⁹ According to the *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe siècle*, a temporal distinction exists between the terms *lorette* and *courtisane*. It states: "Comme on le voit, le type de la courtisane a singulièrement dégénéré depuis les temps de la Grèce; les femmes galantes modernes ont même perdu ce nom. Sous Louis XIV, nous voyons les comédiennes et les maîtresses des grands seigneurs s'appeler des créatures, et nous les voyons devenir des *impures* sous le règne de Louis XV, des *phrynés* sous le Directoire, et des *lorettes* sous Louis-Philippe." Pierre Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Administration du Grand Universel, 1869) Tome V.

¹⁵⁰ Randal Johnson, "Editor's introduction: Pierre Bourdieu on Art, Literature and Culture," *The Field of Cultural Production*, By Pierre Bourdieu (New York: Columbia UP, 1993) 6.

market” (7). According to Johnson, Bourdieu conceived this struggle for “authority based on consecration or prestige” as being “purely symbolic;” it “may or may not” entail the pursuit of wealth (7).

I argue that the figure of the courtesan appealed to writers because she symbolized for them the sophistication and superiority of the Ancient Greek civilization which they viewed as the highest example of culture. Writers thus seized this emblem in their exposés on courtesans as a strategy to win prestige in the literary field. They hoped to achieve this esteem through their demonstration of “cultural capital”¹⁵¹ and their capacity to distinguish themselves as “taste-makers.”¹⁵² In order to win the symbolic capital¹⁵³ that would prove their dominance, the writers had to demonstrate their erudition, or superior “cultural capital.” Thus, in their bid for recognition by their colleagues, writers used the figure of the courtesan to exhibit their knowledge about the Greeks and to align themselves with this influential group.

“Ces grandes et belles courtisanes”: The idealized Ancient courtesan

In an overt display of their indebtedness to the great Greek aesthetic tradition, writers such as Taxile Delord (“La femme sans nom,” 1840), Louis Lermancier de Neuville (*Courtisanes célèbres*, 1864), and Alexandre Dumas (*Filles, lorettes et courtisanes*, 1843) emphasized the courtesan’s beauty, charm, *esprit*, and unrivaled intelligence. Hence all these writers inevitably cited Aspasia,

¹⁵¹ According to Johnson, “Bourdieu defines cultural capital as a form of knowledge, an internalized code or cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artifacts” (7).

¹⁵² Bourdieu, *Distinction* 255.

¹⁵³ Johnson defines this term as “the degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration of honor,” that is “founded on a dialectic of knowledge (*connaissance*) and recognition (*reconnaissance*)” (7).

Lais, Sapho, Phyrné, Thais, Lamia, and Messaline as inimitable models of femininity whose cultivation, *esprit* and penchant for philosophy and self-reflection were unparalleled.¹⁵⁴ The courtesan's physical beauty was synonymous with the greatness of the civilization she represented.¹⁵⁵ Dumas invites the reader to contemplate not only the courtesan's superiority, but also the superiority of the Ancient Greeks. He writes:

Les Grecs, ces types les plus beaux de la plus belle race, c'est-à-dire de la race caucasique, aimaient le beau par-dessus toute chose, doués qu'ils étaient par la nature, d'une organisation fine, élégante, supérieure, essentiellement apte à percevoir toutes les nuances de la beauté.

Aussi les Grecs avaient-ils en quelque sorte établi la beauté sur des règles mathématiques. (114)

In short, the Greeks set the standard for the aestheticism that nineteenth-century writers upheld as a credo.

In addition to beauty and greatness, the ancient courtesans fascinated the nineteenth-century writers who were unsure about their own social standing; these writers respected the courtesan because she belonged to a cultural elite that represented, for them, a coveted membership bestowing renown. As such, they admired the ancient courtesan because she had penetrated "la vie de salon, la vie du monde," a world that she did not enter "sans une longue initiation, une éducation première aussi sérieuse que celle par laquelle on prépare de nos jours

¹⁵⁴ In many of the works, seventeenth-century French educated beauties Ninon de l'Enclos and Marion de Lorme complement their ancient sisters and figure among the league of idealized courtesans for they, too, represent the gold age of classicism.

¹⁵⁵ In essence, Aspasia, Phyrné, or Sapho were metonymies for Ancient Greece just as Nana was one for the Second Empire; Nana embodied complete corruption whereas her mythical Greek precursors stood for virtue.

les jeunes hommes à l'exercice des professions liberales."¹⁵⁶ Thus, her accomplishments resonated with these writers, as they were comparable to the strenuous academic exercises contemporary French men endured. Bourdieu's theory underscores why the courtesan's facile *savoir-faire* enchanted the writers. He writes: "The possessors of strong educational capital who have inherited strong cultural capital, and so enjoy a dual title to cultural nobility the self-assurance of legitimate membership and the ease given by familiarity" (*Distinction*, 81).

Ironically, these courtesans emblemized the cultural ennoblement to which the writers aspired during an era when so many of the writers' female contemporaries were discouraged from actively pursuing intellectual engagement. Indeed, this disparity is noted in the "courtisane" entry in the *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIX siècle*. It states:

Toutes ces choses peuvent aujourd'hui paraître étranges; mais les Grecs n'immolaient pas, comme l'ont fait depuis les générations chrétiennes, le corps à l'âme, en vue d'une existence future. Ils cherchaient sur la terre partout où ils espéraient les rencontrer, les dons que les dieux avaient faits aux hommes, et parmi ces dons nul n'était plus éclatant, à leur avis, nul n'était plus semblable à la divinité meme que la beauté. (393)

The dictionary entry indicates that although worshipping a courtesan in nineteenth-century France may seem strange, for the Greeks, such behavior was considered normal because a courtesan's beauty represented a gift from the gods. In a word, for some nineteenth-century French writers, the Ancient Greek courtesan's elite education and divine beauty endowed her with a superior status.

¹⁵⁶ *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe siècle* 393.

The writers who were insecure about their own status in the social and cultural hierarchy associated themselves (at least through recognition in their works) with a dominant group (the courtesans) as a way of boosting their position in the “cultural field.”

Thus, when Taxile Delord lauds the ancient courtesan’s passion, intelligence, education and *joie de vivre*, he is also praising within himself what makes him part of the dominant group. For Lemercier de Neuville, the courtesan’s beauty and education, which occasionally surpasses that of her protector (Aspasie taught Pericles political science and instructed Socrates in rhetoric), make her worthy of her politically powerful lovers. In the case of Aspasie, Neuville claims she possesses a natural flair for balancing her education, culture, and physical appearance. He writes:

Elle n’avait pas arrêté son esprit aux connaissances superficielles de la femme aimable, elle avait au contraire cherché à réunir dans sa personne une perfection qui ne s’est plus rencontrée depuis; et ses études toutes portées ver l’éloquence et la politique, ne nuisirent jamais à sa grâce ni à ses charmes.¹⁵⁷

Hence defining through the courtesan what constitutes intelligence, beauty, and refinement, these writers asserted themselves as what Bourdieu calls “taste-makers” (255). This “maker of higher rules” set new trends (in this case idealization of the ancient courtesan) and defined himself as “standing outside rules fit only for pedants or grammarians” (255). Thus these writers started a new fashion that distinguished themselves from the grinds (whom Bourdieu has

¹⁵⁷ Louis Lemercier de Neuville, *Les Courtisanes célèbres* (Paris: Arnauld de Vresse, editor, 1864) 9-10.

defined as pedants and grammarians) that had to struggle to acquire their education and culture.

Bourdieu has asserted in *Distinction* that taste is a scheme of perceiving consumer goods, cultural practices, individuals, works of art, etc that are recognized as legitimate proof of refinement (indicative of social, cultural, economic, and political dominance). As Bourdieu has observed, “Taste classifies and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position is expressed or betrayed” (6). When applied to Neuville and Dumas’s treatment of the courtesan, this theory illustrates how the two writers strive to set themselves apart from the other commoners by recognizing the beauty of Greek courtesans. Indeed, their ability to identify the splendor of Ancient Greece and its courtesans demonstrates the very mastery of the arts that has enabled them to distinguish sophisticated individuals and objects. Thus, not only do they single out significant aspects of culture to which the average individual is incapable of valuing, they demonstrate their knowledge by expressing it in elevated writing.

**“Autrefois le monde des courtisanes ne s’ouvrait qu’à l’élite de la société”:
The modern courtesan, her critics, and class distinction**

The desire to distinguish themselves as purveyors of taste is one way of reading the repulsion Neuville, Delord, and Dumas displayed to the figure of the modern courtesan. As Bourdieu affirms, an essential part of the ability to recognize what is beautiful and worthy of attention entails the capability to

identify what is hideous and unsightly: that is what drove the writers to articulate the ancient Greek courtesan's superiority and to underscore the modern one's loathsomeness. For Neuville, Delord, and Dumas, the modern courtesan, with her dreams of climbing the social ladder and her ties to parvenus, was the exact opposite of the classical *courtisane*, who represented for these writers a time when the elite was well-defined and rigid social structures prevented any social mobility.

In order to establish themselves as superior, Neuville and Dumas had to not only recognize the Ancient Greek courtesans (demonstrating their competence in reading beauty), but also deny the legitimacy of the modern one (demonstrating their ability to recognize the crassness their sensibilities tell them to avoid). According to Bourdieu, the social hierarchy demands that differentiations be made between social classes in order for one group to define itself; likewise, judgments must be made about what is estimable culturally by defining what is excellent in relation to its opposite. Bourdieu thus explicitly links "cultural consumption" to validating social stratification:

The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile – in a word, natural – enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasure forever closed to the profane. That is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences. (7)

I argue that the antagonism toward the modern courtesan is linked in part to what Johnson calls "the social ground of aesthetic taste" that tends to recognize

as the universal aesthetic the “taste of distinction.”¹⁵⁸ This taste “which implies freedom from economic necessity” is valued over the “taste for necessity” which connotes an economic pragmatism that grounds itself in the common, everyday experience (24). Thus, those possessing the “taste of distinction” enjoy the time and reflection required to contemplate and/or create art that those with “taste for necessity” will never have because they are too fixed on quotidian concerns. Johnson explains Bourdieu’s distinction between the two: “Bourdieu argues that the aesthetics of “pure” taste are based on a refusal of “impure” taste, or taste reduced to the pleasure of the senses, as well as on a refusal of the facile” (24).

For writers such as Delord, Dumas, and Balzac, the ancient courtesan represents the “aesthetics of pure taste” in their phantasmagoric rewriting of the past. Delord, in his “La femme sans nom,” aptly sums up this fantasy of an elite corps of *courtisanes* who, with their intellect, cultivation, and manners, possess the “taste of distinction.” He writes:

Autrefois le monde des courtisanes ne s’ouvrait qu’à l’élite de la société: aujourd’hui toutes les classes y sont admises; il ne faut donc pas trop s’étonner de la banalité de manières, de l’insuffisance d’esprit qui caractérisent les femmes galantes à notre époque. Dans l’antiquité, Phyrné, Laïs, Aspasia, si elles avaient la corruption, possédaient au moins l’intelligence; mais Louise, mais Athénais, mais Laure, mais Adèle, toute la galanterie moderne, par quel côté ne touchent-elles pas à la matière, par quel point se rattachent-elles à l’humanité? (250)

Naturally the courtesan’s eminence rests in her exclusive clientele. Her intellectual prowess -- demonstrated through her mastery of the arts, literature, music, and philosophy -- reflects the brilliance of the distinguished nobles to

¹⁵⁸ Johnson, “Editor’s Introduction” 24.

whom she caters. When read in Bourdieusian terms, the courtesan's education is in fact her "cultural capital" which required "a long investment of time" to acquire. Such an investment, in Bourdieu's estimation, reveals one's superiority and "appears as the surest indications of the quality of the person."¹⁵⁹ Her cultivation therefore indicates her supremacy and thereby flatters the company she keeps.

"The refusal of other tastes": Denigrating the modern courtesan

While writers such as Delord, Dumas, and Balzac congratulated the classical courtesan on her exclusivity, her intellectual prowess, and her general *savoir-faire*, they scorned the figure of the contemporary courtesan. Unlike the assuagement the writers associated with the ancient courtesan, the modern harlot's links to contemporary problems to which solutions were not entirely evident incited anguish; as a result, writers created ambivalent portraits of the modern fictional courtesans. In sum, the writers approached the modern courtesan in several ways. First, they used her as a negative pole against which they could define "refined" taste. Second, they posited her as a character who evoked jealousy. Third, they identified with her desire for success and notoriety. Finally, they used the courtesan as a screen upon which they could project their own discomfort with social climbing, as well as ambivalence about increasing pace of life. They were concerned about the lack of reflection about this rapid change. As for the unrefined modern courtesan, the writers had to identify what was wrong with her in order to establish themselves as "taste-makers." In regard to social

¹⁵⁹ Bourdieu, *Distinction* 281.

climbing, the writers used the modern courtesan as a character through whom they could work through their ambivalence about this trend.

Using the courtesan in their struggle for status meant that the writers had to not only applaud the ancient courtesan as admirable, but also to denounce the modern one as an anathema. In other words, recognizing the good in one figure entails defining it against what is inadequate or unacceptable. Bourdieu suggests in *Distinction* that part of a group's struggle for hegemony entails proving their superiority through evidence of "legitimate culture." However, in order to establish that the culture they possess is exceptional, the dominant group must refuse the taste of others. As Bourdieu has asserted, "Tastes (i.e. manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference. It is no accident, that, when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes" (56). In sum, Bourdieu's theory, when applied to the writers' rejection of the modern courtesan's tastes, underlines the writer's effort to prove his legitimacy and superiority.

In the case of Dumas, in order to establish the Greek's artistic superiority, he had to disparage the Roman's inferior attempt at replicating this standard of beauty. While Dumas praises the Greeks for their dedication and devotion to beauty, he considers the Romans too uncouth to uphold the same standard. Dumas writes: "Les Romains, peuple de laboureurs, peuple grossier, sans imagination, n'ont jamais eu un véritable amour de l'art" (115). Indeed, in contrast with the elevated and sophisticated Greek aesthetic tradition, the Roman tradition was undeveloped according to Dumas because its people were "fort ignorants en

voluptés” (115). Dumas claims that even the Roman courtesans were inferior: “Cherchons quelque grande courtisane romaine à opposer aux dix courtisanes grecques dont nous avons esquissé l’histoire; nous n’en trouverons pas” (115). Hence in order to establish the superiority of the Greek aestheticism and the courtesan that embodied it, Dumas had to define it against the inferior Roman tradition.

In contrast to serving as a foil for the status-seeking writers, the figure of the contemporary courtesan stirred up anxieties about the lack of time and the sense of disconnectedness that disturbed mid-nineteenth-century writers such as Dumas, Delord, Balzac and Théophile Gautier.¹⁶⁰ To paraphrase Linda Nochlin, writers and artists in post-Revolutionary France were haunted by feelings of loss and despair at modernity’s lack of wholeness. These writers felt nostalgia for a

¹⁶⁰ Though Gautier did not address courtesans *per se* in his *Contes fantastiques*, it is important to mention him, if only briefly, for he, too, lamented fragmentation and fantasized about idealized Greek and Roman women in some of his fantastical tales the same way his peers did through the figure of the courtesan. Specifically two of his tales -- *Le Pied de Momie* (1840) and *Arria Marcella* (1852) -- feature heroes so discontent with the instability of the present that they revert to illusions of more harmonious periods in history such as Ancient Greece and pagan Pompeii. In *Le Pied de Momie*, the narrator summons an Egyptian princess the night after he purchases her mummified foot at a *bric-à-brac* store, and then travels back 4,000 years to Egypt and encounters the illustrious, perfectly preserved mummy kings; in *Arria Marcella*, the protagonist, while on vacation in Southern Italy, falls in love with the bust of a beautiful woman who had perished during the eruption of Vesuvius, and is magically transported back to the Pompeii of 79AD. There he courts the woman as she was before the destruction of the city. In these tales, Gautier’s romantic heroes hope to find both permanence and beauty and are disappointed that they cannot find both on earth simultaneously. Although the fantastic allows Gautier’s heroes -- Octavien and the narrator in *Le Pied de Momie* -- to temporarily find stability and beauty in an ancient civilization, their inability to remain there permanently affirms the romantic’s lament that it is impossible to experience the same enduring ideals on earth. In an era fraught with disintegration and volatility, Gautier’s protagonists find the past so attractive, according to Natalie David-Weill, because it can remain complete and undamaged. She explains: “Le passé apparaît comme un retour à l’ordre” (96). The dream of a “femme inaccessible” only available in a previous era dovetails the fantasy of the idealized past (97). Natalie David-Weill, *Rêve de Pierre: La Quête de la femme chez Théophile Gautier* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1989).

“lost totality.”¹⁶¹ Moreover, these writers were disgusted by a modernity that they considered to be fragmented.¹⁶² As a result, they fashioned the contemporary courtesan in response to their fears about lack of durability and cohesion. More specifically, Dumas, Delord, and Balzac believed the numerous changes in political regimes, the shift from an agrarian-based economy to an industrial one, the growing emphasis on acquiring wealth, and technological innovations in factories created a fast-paced approach to life. This hasty approach spawned a society of uncultured individuals with respect for neither the arts, nor education, nor erudition.

For writers such as Delord, the *femme galante*,¹⁶³ exemplified not only a rushed lifestyle and recklessness, but also insecurity about modernity. In “La femme sans nom,” Delord frowns upon the courtesan’s refusal to make sense out of her life; he claims that she essentially lives as a prostitute as a way of “tuer le temps” (249). For this reason, he defines the *courtisane* as “une créature n’ayant ni la conscience de la veille, ni celle du lendemain; vivant dans cette espèce d’ivresse que donnent le luxe, les plaisirs, et par-dessus tout l’incessante flatterie de l’homme auquel la civilisation fait un devoir d’acheter la satisfaction de ses sens au prix d’un eternal mensonge” (248).

¹⁶¹ Though she is writing about Henry Fuseli’s *Artist Overwhelmed by the Grandeur of Antique Ruins*, Nochlin’s definition of modernity, as figured in the image as “irrevocable loss, poignant regret for lost totality, a vanished wholeness,” sheds light on the loss romantic writers felt and subsequently transferred on to the figure of the courtesan. Linda Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994) 7.

¹⁶² These writers considered “fragmentation” to be a troubling break with the stability and entirety that characterized past institutions.

¹⁶³ The term *femme galante* is a variation of the *courtisane*.

Delord insists that the modern courtesan owes her lack of self-reflection to her “caractère fatal et incompréhensible” (249). The adjective “fatal” suggests that the courtesan’s refusal to think beyond the pleasures and the flattery of the present will lead to her own demise; the label “incompréhensible” refers to her opaque behavior and unpredictability. Through such a portrayal, Delord expresses his anxiety about not being able to predict the direction society is taking in the future in the same manner that writers and artists communicated their ambivalence about modernity through the *lorette*.

In “La femme sans nom,” Delord not only disapproves of the courtesan’s amorality and indifference, but dismisses this group of women as “automates en chair” for whom “le vice ou la vertu ne sont pour elle qu’une habitude” (249). The designation of “automates” implies that the courtesans are more brainless machines than they are erudite individuals. Delord posits the modern courtesan as offensive: her refusal to think beyond immediate fulfillment of sensual pleasures epitomizes her “facile” approach to life. This violates Delord’s code of pure aesthetics.

In addition to his disapproval of the modern courtesan’s rushed, heedless approach to life, Delord also objects to her promiscuity. His dismay at the fact that the courtesan caters to “toutes les classes” underscores his anxiety about the social order: he is no longer positive about which group represents the new ruling class. While he associates the distinguished courtesan with rigid class delineations, he links the contemporary harlot to the upwardly mobile bourgeois.

These upwardly mobile males gained entry into courtesans' apartments and salons previously reserved for only the aristocrats.

Dumas takes the criticism of the modern courtesan's promiscuity even further in the anecdote with which he ends *Filles, lorettes et courtisanes*. In this tale (that he borrowed from Nestor Roqueplan), "Clot...", a famous dancer and courtesan, is as beautiful as a demi-goddess and beloved by several noblemen; however, she squanders so much money that even the "1 200 000 fr" the prince Pignatelli provides her with is not enough to support her luxurious lifestyle. As a result, she supplements her income from the aristocratic Pignatelli with revenue from "l'amiral espagnol Mazaredo" and "M. Pu..." (124-125). In a crude anecdote about the corporal imperfection of Clot..., Dumas implies that her body reeks from sexual lewdness. He writes:

Clot... eût été une demi-déesse si elle avait posé immobile sur un piédestal d'agate ou de malaquite; mais il fallait danser, et la malheureuse bayadère ne pouvait se dissimuler que l'ébranlement causé par cet exercice diabolique portait un trouble dans l'économie de ses emanations corporelles. Henri IV, dans sa rudesse béarnaise, se serait servi, comme il le fit jadis, de l'expression propre pour qualifier cet inconvénient; plus polis, les gens de l'Opéra se disaient tout bas que Clot... laissait après elle la trace d'un parfum mal corrigé par le musc dont elle faisait abus. (126-127)

In stark contrast with the lapidary descriptions of the ancient courtesans whose bodies seem removed from sexual activity, Dumas's description of Clot... and the foul odor emanating from her sexual body insist on her degraded "fille" behavior. The frequently cited figures indicating her revenue -- "1 200 000 fr," "1 700 000 fr" and "deux millions de rentes"-- indicate her crass obsession with money that causes her to engage in indecent acts with the highest bidder. In sum,

Clo's obscene behavior and her obsession with money falls under the category of the "profane" that Bourdieu claims must be denied in those individuals who want to prove their "superiority" (7). Thus Dumas, like Delord, denies the modern courtesan any cultural validation; his artistic reputation depends on defining the exclusive ancient courtesan against the common modern courtesan.

**“Elle devait embrasser tout son siècle, elle aime avec un petit jeune homme”:
Nostalgia for the stability of the hierarchal Ancien Régime**

The resentment of social ascension expressed in Delord's quip about the courtesan serving members from all the classes also surfaces in Balzac's initial chapter on Esther in *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. At the beginning of the novel, Lucien circulates around the Bal de l'Opéra with the beautiful Esther, prompting his rivals to mock his many career changes; in fact, their jeers are a protest against his good fortune. They believe that the company of such a coveted courtesan should only be reserved for the most privileged members of society. The journalist Blondet considers Lucien's unlikely advancement as signaling a loss for the elite. Blondet states: "Quelle perte irréparable fait l'élite de la littérature, de la science, de l'art et de la politique! La Torpille est la seule fille de joie en qui s'est rencontrée l'étoffe d'une belle courtisane."¹⁶⁴ Fantasizing about a well-ordered and stable past, Blondet proclaims: "Nous aurions doté notre époque d'une de ces magnifiques figures aspasiennes sans lesquelles il n'y a pas de grand

¹⁶⁴ Honoré de Balzac, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1964) 19.

siècle” (19). He essentially ponders what could have been in the late 1830s/early 1840s had there been enough wealth and stability to create a glorious courtesan.¹⁶⁵

Blondet’s musings about the aristocracy and classical courtesans reflect both his desire to flaunt his cultivation and his nostalgia for the rigid hierarchy of the Ancien Régime. He claims that Esther would have been as great as her classical predecessors, Ninon de L’enclos and Marion de Lorme, and he continues his diatribe by imagining how men could fashion her into a queen. In his fanciful vision of the social world, he not only figures among the elite males, but also works together with his colleagues to shape a woman according to his desires.

With an oration designed to impress his friends, Blondet tries to distinguish himself by showing off his erudition about the great Greek, Roman, and French courtesans throughout history. Bixiou, another journalist in the crowd, detects Blondet’s pretentiousness and says that such a speech in the Opera seems “un peu trop *Débats*”¹⁶⁶ (20). In addition, Blondet longs for the comfort of a monarchical society in which the elite is clearly marked. He continues: “L’aristocratie serait venue s’amuser chez notre Ninon, où nous aurions appelé les artistes sous peine d’articles mortifères...Elle n’aurait pas été libérale, une courtisane est essentiellement monarchique” (20). His fantasy about a “courtisane monarchique” underscores his yearning for an idealized pre-revolutionary past in which one could predict who would partake in privileges (such as engaging a

¹⁶⁵ Esther, according to the note accompanying the passage, would have been “la plus grande courtisane des temps modernes,” Balzac writes in *La Rabouilleuse*, “s’il y avait des fortunes en France.” See “Introduction,” *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, note 2, page 19.

¹⁶⁶ The *Journal des Débats* featured a pedantic tone that Balzac is parodying through Blondet’s “étalage d’érudition facile.” See note 1, page 20.

courtesan as a mistress) and who would be excluded. In other words, there would be no surprises about people like Lucien climbing the social ladder.

Blondet laments the new social order in which any upstart may assume a place previously reserved for the aristocrats and thereby degrade it with his common habits. He resents Esther's relations with a commoner when he declares: "Ah! Quelle perte! Elle devait embrasser tout son siècle, elle aime avec un petit jeune homme! Lucien en fera quelque chien de chasse!" (20-21). For Blondet, Esther's failure to choose a more distinguished lover than Lucien indicates his jealousy at Lucien's success and signals his disappointment with the hazy social order of the present. A century earlier, a courtesan's choice would have been clearly based on the pedigree, prestige, and wealth of a potential lover -- in other words, a rich aristocrat with connections at court or a famous artist or writer, appreciated more for his talent and knowledge than for his wealth. Neither wealthy, nor famous, nor particularly well-connected, Lucien possesses none of these qualities, with the exception to his tenuous reclaiming of his aristocratic lineage, a fact which irritates the journalists, for they take it as a sign of the changing rules.

Bourdieu's discussion of the differences between the "old school" and the "new school" systems in France sheds light on the anxieties expressed by the journalists and dandies in the Opéra scene in Balzac's novel regarding the change in social systems in post-Revolutionary France. Though Bourdieu is analyzing school systems and I am deciphering "social transformations" as recorded by Balzac in *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, parallels can be drawn between

the different school systems and the different social orders (Ancien Régime/post-Revolutionary). Writing about the reassurance the rigid hierarchal school system provided, Bourdieu asserts:

Whereas the old system tended to produce clearly demarcated social identities which left little room for social fantasy but were comfortable and reassuring even in the unconditional renunciation which they demanded, the new system of structural instability in the representation of social identity and its legitimate aspirations tends to shift agents from the terrain of social crisis and critique to the terrain of personal critique and crisis. (156)

In contrast with the severe “old school” system that eliminated students who did not pass national exams, the new system contains what Bourdieu calls “the blurring of hierarchies” which permits students to acquire inflated qualifications (155). As a result, Bourdieu claims that students in the new system are “banking on possible futures which do not really exist for them” (155).

What links Bourdieu’s description of the “old school” system with the journalists’ idealization of the Ancien Régime are the clearly marked hierarchies that eliminate any hope for social ascension. Individuals under the Ancien Régime who were not of the most privileged classes knew the limitations of their social mobility just as students who did not pass the most distinguished exams -- such as the “aggregation” -- knew their professional paths were stunted by their lack of diploma (a title of sorts). As a result, neither population conjured up “unrealistic expectations” for themselves, as students within the new system had done, or the characters in Balzac’s novel for that matter (156).

In a sense, the post-Revolutionary society Balzac paints in his novel reflects the “new school” mentality outlined by Bourdieu in that individuals such

as Lucien de Rubempré -- or Rastignac and his dandy cronies -- believe fame and riches are possible to everyone now that the old hierarchies have been razed. According to Bourdieu's theory, members of the Ancien Régime viewed the existing limitations and social inequities as belonging to "the terrain of social crisis and critique" and protested through revolutionary activity (156). In other words, they railed against an impersonal system and blamed the injustice on external forces. Conversely, Rastignac and his friends view Lucien's newly recuperated title and beautiful lover with not only a tinge of envy, but also as a sign of what Bourdieu has called "personal critique and crisis" (156). The "structural instability"¹⁶⁷ of the new social order leads them to believe that they can succeed in areas previously shut off to them under the Ancien Régime, when in fact their social trajectories are more limited than they appear. In a word, their social status and their failure to prosper under the new system trigger their personal crises.

At their simplest level, the numerous anecdotes recounted by Dumas, Delord and Neuville about the Greek hetaerae serve to demonstrate their culture and learnedness. They display their expertise in order to achieve status in the literary field; however, at a deeper level, these anecdotes illustrate why the writers romanticize the courtesans of the past and critique the ones in the present. Indeed the cushion of "mille cinq cents ans de distance" between the apogee of Greek civilization Dumas evokes -- and the tumult in nineteenth-century France he hopes to avoid -- provides a means to escape the troubling changes in the present

¹⁶⁷ Bourdieu 156

the modern *courtisane* represents (95). Because the idealized courtesan's ties to ancient nobility or to the French monarchy evoked a golden age when social hierarchies, cultural hegemony, and political spheres of influence -- as well as gender differences -- were stable and well-defined, writers baffled by contemporary class instability found comfort in fantasizing about the solid era the courtesan represented. Indeed praising the courtesan served in part as a pretext for lauding the Ancien Régime era that was unscathed by revolution and political turmoil.

“O Dieu! l'Ange était un démon”: Disgust at the modern courtesan's past

While in their fictional works the writers projected desires and fantasies about love, beauty, power and dominance on the ancient courtesan, in their plots about modern courtesans, they punished her fantasized initiative and independence. This is best illustrated by the emphasis on dying young, lonely, impoverished, and remorseful that was so common in the characterizations of nineteenth-century courtesan; such plot twists are not present in the hagiographies of the ancient courtesans. While writers such as Balzac and Hugo, in their depictions of modern courtesans, praise their superior beauty, wit, elegance, cultivation, and wealth as they had in the ancient hetaerae, their panegyric tone quickly shifts focus. Specifically, in *Marion de Lorme* and *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, Hugo and Balzac's ambivalence toward the modern courtesan shines through in their insistence on her promiscuous past, her internalized

inferiority, her self-sacrifice for a higher cause, and her saintly suffering for a lover.

Though Victor Hugo's hero Didier is smitten by Marion de Lorme throughout the majority of the plot, when he learns of his beloved's tainted past, his illusion of her shattered. He laments: "O Dieu, l'ange était un demon."¹⁶⁸ The reality of her tarnished past betrayed the heavenly vision Didier had of Marion the same way the journalists' fantasy of Esther as a "déesse" is weakened when Finot reminds the group of journalists that "ce joli rat a roulé dans la fange" (21). Both examples illustrate cynicism about the courtesan's sincerity and capacity for devotion. Though the courtesan appears to be angelic and completely dedicated to her lover, her promiscuous history casts doubt on whether she will ultimately betray him.

Writers deliberately shape the contemporary courtesan in their texts in a way that corresponds to their fantasies of dominance. As such, this fictional figure's acknowledgement of her moral weakness means that she never protests her demonization; rather, she accepts her outsider status although she knows that it will lead to her imminent fall and/or tragic death. As for her self-sacrifice and suffering, the romantic scheme of the harlot with the heart of gold is a fantastical way in which the fictional courtesan will acknowledge her guilty past and seek redemption through self-abnegation and heartache. Such a scheme stems from the male writer's dream of hegemony without challenges. In this fantasy, the courtesan never opposes her mistreatment because she believes she is unworthy of

¹⁶⁸ Victor Hugo, *Marion de Lorme* (Paris: Imprimerie National, 1908) 70.

the man for whom she is sacrificing herself. Thus the authors consciously formulate the literary courtesan in such a way that she faces a sort of *huis-clos*. That is to say, once the fictional courtesan declares her weakness, no matter what she does to make up for her troubled past, her lover, stewing in his jealousy, will remind her that she will once again fall into moral vicissitude. As a result, in their plots, the writers insist on the modern courtesan's punishment for having transgressed social mores by emphasizing her ruin, disfigurement, psychological damage, or death. In contrast, writers spare the ancient courtesan of criticism or punishment because she is their symbol of cultivation, as well as a fantasized woman who will unquestionably submit to their whims as well as flatter their virility and literary skills. More importantly, this imagined figure is too far removed from the present to remind the writers of social instability and mutating gender roles the way the modern courtesan does.

Victor Hugo's courtesan heroine in his 1829 *Marion de Lorme* (staged in 1831) is a transitional figure, for she is romanticized in the sense that she exists in the classical past and has the reputation of enjoying superior education, cultivation, and social standing due to the patronage of her aristocratic lovers. That said, she does exhibit some of the negative traits of the modern courtesan present in Balzac's *Esther* and Dumas *fil's* *Marguerite*. Rather than privilege her intellect, refinement, and influence over powerful men as Neuville and Dumas did, Hugo accentuates her popularity among aristocratic males from whom she has fled at the beginning of the play. In the romantic tradition of the courtesan with a heart of gold, she regrets her depraved past and hopes to redeem herself

through her pure dedication to Didier, her one true love. Consequently, when Didier risks death as punishment by having participated in an illegal duel, Marion takes it upon herself to save him. She approaches the lecherous Laffemas hoping that he will help Didier. When Laffemas tells Marion that she will have to sleep with him if she wants any help, she initially refuses his request—for she claims that her love for Didier has cleansed her past. She exclaims:

--Après avoir aimé
Un homme, le plus pur que le ciel ait formé,
Après s'être refait une âme avec cette âme,
Du haut de cet amour si sublime et si doux,
Peut retomber si bas qu'elle aille jusqu'à vous. (120)

Though she begs Laffemas to “leave her pure,” he insists that she sleep with him if he is to free Didier.

Despite Marion’s sacrifice, Didier wants to die not only because her infidelities pain him, but also because he wants to prove his superior status. Though Didier is an orphan, he believes that by aligning himself with Saverny and by heroically accepting his death, he will establish himself as a legitimate nobleman. As a result, the envious Didier rebukes Marion for her “sacrifice,” and asks her coldly: “À qui vous êtes-vous prostituée ici?” (135). Marion reproaches his cruelty and justifies her behavior. She declares: “Didier! J’en jure ici par la bonté divine/ c’était pour vous sauver, vous arracher d’ici!” (135). In contrast with the literary courtesans that follow, Marion confronts Didier. Nonetheless, she eventually caves into his insults about her past, admits her inferiority, and even invites him to punish her. She exclaims: “Frappe moi, laisse-moi dans l’opprobre

où je suis/ Repousse-moi du pied, marche sur moi, -- mais fuis!” (137). Thus she abnegates herself doubly in order to help save him. Despite her pleas, Didier refuses to flee because he wants to punish her for her infidelities (and because he wants to die like a nobleman).

In the end, Didier finally admits that he loves her. He kisses her and begs for her pardon. He blames her prostitution on the fact that her mother abandoned her and dismisses her unfaithfulness as a character flaw. He says: “Va, si tu m’as trompé, c’est par l’excès d’amour!” (141). As Dider forgives her, he shifts the blame for her promiscuity on to her family – an absolution that does not make its way into scenes with Balzac’s Esther or Dumas’s Marguerite.

While Hugo’s play is more forgiving of the courtesan than subsequent texts that will insist on the courtesan’s death, ultimately *Marion de Lorme* is not about a courtesan transformed by love, but rather about the relations between men. According to Jann Matlock, “It [*Marion de Lorme*] is the story of men who follow in the tracks of a prostitute, who name her for what they say she is, who trace her passage between men, and who pass her portrait between themselves as proof of her unmistakable identity. It is far less a story of what a woman might do for love, than a story of what transpires between men” (69). Indeed, despite what Marion has done for love, Didier refuses to participate in the escape she has arranged, for he privileges his relation with Saverny (choosing to face death to prove his nobility) over Marion.

To paraphrase Charles Bernheimer, the harlot with the heart of gold is merely an object of exchange between men. Bernheimer states: “In Rousseau’s

and Hugo's texts, the triumph of male order is all the more striking in that bonds between men – Edward and St. Preux – Didier and his dueling opponent and aristocratic double, Saverny – prove stronger than the love of the never sufficiently reformed prostitute."¹⁶⁹ Hence, the plot that revolves around the prostitute's life is an impetus for male protagonists to form bonds.

Briefly, Marion de Lorme bridges the gap between the ancient courtesan and the modern one. Like her classical predecessor, she evokes prestige and cultivation and her sexual transgressions are ultimately forgiven in the name of her "noble" soul and abundant love; however, like the modern courtesan to follow, she internalizes her inferiority and literally submits to patriarchal authority when she kneels down to Didier and begs him for his mercy. Though she is not punished with death like Esther, Hugo insists that her soiled past prevents her from enjoying a socially sanctioned marriage to Didier.

“Je suis la créature la plus méprisable de mon sexe”: The modern courtesan's remorse, repentance, and punishment

While her apparent submission, remorsefulness, and repentance figure prominently in the Romantic vision of Hugo's Marion de Lorme and Taxile Delord's "La femme sans nom," authors depicting the modern courtesan demand two further requirements of their subject: punishment and containment. In contrast to the reckless modern courtesans who refuse to contemplate their actions, Delord applauds the contrition and regret of the courtesans of the past. He writes:

¹⁶⁹ Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997) 52.

Autrefois, une courtisane, c'étaient Marion Delorme et Ninon de l'Enclos, c'est-à-dire des femmes sages par raison, libertines par temperament ou par faiblesse, se désolant le lendemain de la sottise de la veille, passant toute leur vie à aller du plaisir au remords, du remords au plaisir, sans que l'un parvînt à détruire l'autre, et n'échappant qu'à leurs derniers instants à ces deux grands ennemis. (249)

As the emphasis on markers such as “sages,” “se désolant,” and “remords” suggests, the *courtisane*'s child-like helplessness to resist actions that are bad for her and her submission to patriarchal law and order make her appealing because she does not seek to exploit her lovers or challenge the way society is run. Just as Janin's *grisette* (explored in the previous chapter) -- who is the the courtesan's lower-class counterpart -- submits herself entirely to her artist lover, always putting his interests above her own well-being and pleasure, the romantic courtesan loses herself in her lover and never questions why she must be sacrificed for his advancement. In a word, Delord praises Delorme and de l'Enclos because they represent intelligent individuals who contemplate their actions and express regret at their moral transgressions.

In contrast, the modern courtesan as represented by Esther not only agrees with male condemnation of her as dishonest, amoral, and downtrodden -- but also internalizes the insult as a part of her identity and punishment. Balzac represents Esther as demoralized after her brief glory at the ball. Indeed, he describes her as “abbatue” by Bixiou's comment at the ball, then “la fille brisée par un mot au bal de l'Opera,” in the two chapters following the ball scene (25, 29). Balzac presents Esther as so consumed by her worthlessness and debasement that she attempts suicide by asphyxiation. One of the first statements Esther makes in the novel to

Herrera (who is in fact Vautrin disguised as a Spanish priest) reinforces this hopelessness and self-hate. She declares: “J’étais la dernière des créatures et la plus infâme, maintenant je suis seulement la plus malheureuse de toutes” (34). In the same manner that Marion de Lorme believes that her love will redeem her, Esther thinks her love for Lucien has brought her a “veil of innocence” (37). However, instead of granting her any pity as Didier does Marion, the faux-priest wholeheartedly rejects the notion of her reclaiming some sort of purity through adoration, and drops any inclination toward forgiveness of her past. Rather, he chastises her and insists on her indignity and unworthiness throughout the rest of the two parts of the novel that feature Esther in the plot. Herrera asks her: “Est-ce cette créature avilie, dégradée, et qui connaissait sa dégradation... (ignorante et moins aimante, vous eussiez été plus excusable...), est-ce la proie future du suicide et de l’enfer, qui pouvait être la femme de Lucien de Rubempré?” (38).

Indeed, Herrera announces Esther’s inferiority and continues to remind her of her outlaw status until she kills herself. Although Vautrin’s criticism visibly upsets Esther, she does not contradict his condemnation and rather wonders why she did not die. In contrast to Marion de Lorme, who initially contradicts Didier’s pitiless remarks about her past and who continues to implore him to escape with her help, Esther takes Herrera’s words to heart and begins to believe that she must die for Lucien. Her wish for death—which she announces several times, especially when the subject of Lucien marrying someone is mentioned¹⁷⁰—is one of many such statements that announce her suicide at the end of book two. When

¹⁷⁰ “Son mariage serait ma mort, dit-elle” (80).

Herrera suggests that Lucien was sad because he loved a prostitute, Esther humbly claims that he is right and announces: “Je suis la créature la plus méprisable de mon sexe...” (48). Consequently, Herrera’s haranguing works, for Esther agrees to not only give Lucien up, but also to undergo re-education at a convent.

Though Esther’s penance in the convent leads to her successful rehabilitation, the faux-priest has less than noble plans for her. Always the master manipulator, Herrera tells Lucien that he has reinvented Esther as a “femme chaste, pure, bien élevée, religieuse, une femme comme il faut” whom he believes could become “une Ninon, une Marion de Lorme, une Dubarry” (70). Her transformation into a wholesome lady of standing not only demonstrates Vautrin’s ability to master a venal woman’s sexuality (which figures into his fantasy of male dominance), but also his skill of manipulating social codes. Indeed, Vautrin knows how to shape Esther’s appearance and mannerisms to make her look like a “femme comme il faut,” and understands that she must be removed from view so that her notorious past will not eclipse Lucien’s reputation in the elite world he is trying to penetrate. As such, Vautrin admits that he invested in Esther’s reeducation in order to better exploit her one day as an object that brings in tremendous revenue (70). Herrera takes Esther out of circulation so he can dramatically reinsert her into the world of “galanterie” when the opportunity presents itself. He allows Esther to live with Lucien, but only if she remains hidden from the public so that Lucien’s secret liaison with her will never jeopardize his future career. As Charles Bernheimer indicates, Esther serves as an

object of exchange between Herrera and Lucien,¹⁷¹ which explains why Herrera refuses to accept Esther's gratefulness at being transformed into a "femme comme il faut." He tells her: "Vous ne me devez rien [...] j'ai tout fait pour lui...Vous êtes fille, vous resterez fille, vous mourrez fille" (80). Her blind devotion to Lucien compels her to obey the harsh restrictions imposed by Herrera to which Lucien refuses to object. For four years, she lives to serve Lucien and does not dare defy Herrera or his plans.

Fatal submission: "J'obéis avec cette fatale soumission canine dont je fais profession"

The figure of the docile modern courtesan blindly devoted to her lover and to his social and professional advancement developed out of fantasies of male mastery on the part of Balzac and his colleagues. In the case of *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, Esther must cede her exclusive hold on her lover, for Lucien is to marry Clothilde de Grandlieu, as well as control of her body, for Herrera orders her to sell herself to Nucingen in order to provide Lucien with the money he needs to marry. Though she warns Lucien that his marriage will spell her death, he refuses to disobey Herrera, and she in turn agrees to submit blindly to Herrera's will. When Herrera's plan dictates that Esther moves to an isolated location in the Saint-Germain forest, she tells Lucien: "S'il en est ainsi, j'obéis avec cette soumission canine dont je fais profession" (120). Shortly after her move, Herrera takes Lucien to visit Esther in her exile, only to announce to the lovers that their relation is over. Once again Esther speaks of death, but she

¹⁷¹ *Figures of Ill Repute*, 54 -59.

submits to Herrera's will even though it means resuscitating la Torpille, the debased courtesan she tried so hard to bury. Despite his investment in Esther's rehabilitation, when Herrera realizes that he can sell her as an object to Nucingen in order to earn the money Lucien needs for his advancement -- he unhesitatingly strips away her "femme comme il faut" façade. Though Herrera had criticized Esther's debauched life as a courtesan when he thought she would ruin Lucien's reputation, when his needs shift, he orders her to "rester belle [...] Enfin, redevenez surtout la Torpille. Soyez espiègle, dépensière, rusée, sans pitié pour le millionnaire que je vous livre" (190). In short, Herrera fashions Esther as both an instrument to make money and as a weapon with which he may incur "Vengeance" on the *arriviste* Nucingen for using the stock market for stealing the fortunes of "widows and orphans" (190).

Balzac's statement about class oppression prefigures Zola's vision of Nana as the "mouche d'or" who will avenge her class. However, though the narrative possibility of Esther as class avenger is an interesting one, it does not correspond to Balzac's fantasy of the submissive courtesan who represents what Bernheimer calls "capital to be invested in the marketplace" (54). Esther is completely at Vautrin's mercy, for his ability to manipulate others surpasses her talent to make others sway her way. Balzac writes: "La volonté d'un homme doué du génie de la corruption avait donc replongé dans la boue Esther avec la même force dont il avait usé pour l'en retirer" (225). In Balzac's novel, the once powerful courtesan has been stripped of her charms and reduced to being a crying child. Her hopes are shattered when Vautrin sells her to Nucingen, and though

she cries and refuses to sleep with Nucingen the first night he takes her home, she cannot work her way out of Vautrin's grasp and gives into him because it will grant her more time with Lucien. Though she considers trying to kill herself again as the one act of rebellion open to her, she decides against it when the maid reminds her about Lucien.

Despite Balzac's insistence on Esther's docility throughout the narrative, he does allow the reader a glimpse of Esther as an independent-minded courtesan who protests her fate. La Torpille reappears in two instances: 1) when she caresses Nucingen so effectively that he promises to remain like a father to her until she moves into her own *hôtel particulier*, and 2) when she expresses disgust at Nucingen's impatience. The "Esther redevenue courtisane" scoffs at Nucingen's letter protesting the fact that she is deliberately withholding sex. The vernacular expression she employs not only underscores her annoyance, but also illustrates that the courtesan's cynicism still exists despite her reeducation at the convent. She exclaims: "—Eh! Il m'ennuie, ce pot à millions!" (232). The only instances in the novel where she complains about her position occur in letters she writes to Nucingen and Lucien. She hopes to repel Nucingen's advances when she writes: "Je n'ai jamais mieux senti la bassesse de ma condition que depuis le jour où je vous fus livrée [...]. Je veux payer dans une seule nuit toutes les sommes qui sont hypothéquées sur ce fatal moment [...] Après, je serai quitte, et pourrai sortir de la vie" (233). Both letters announce her suicide, though neither trigger any events that will prevent it, for Nucingen still presses on with his conquest, and Lucien does not read the letter until Esther has killed herself and he is in jail. In

short, her protestations win over neither Nucingen, nor Lucien, nor Vautrin, for the chief concern is exploiting her while she still has the courage to obey them. In fact, Vautrin affirms her worthlessness when he offers to assist her jump into the Seine once she has secured the money Lucien needs by sleeping with Nucingen.

Once Esther finally decides to commit suicide and asks a friend to procure for her the poison she needs to complete the job, she takes on an angelic appearance – for she exhibits the sublime beauty of a saint at peace with her on impending death so common in hagiographies. The night she is to consummate her relationship with Nucingen, Esther dons a wedding dress, fixes her hair like a virgin would, announces to Lucien that she is no longer worthy of him, and asks for his blessing. Though she mentions her suicide one last time, Lucien weakly protests it, but leaves when she requests his absence. The brief scene that describes her final public appearance at her house-warming party mentions her beautiful appearance, but does not dramatize her arrival as one of the most privileged courtesans in Paris. In fact, the novel even denies her a theatrical suicide scene because it would highlight an act of independence. In Balzac's imaginative portrayal of the courtesan, her docility is so acute that she kills herself when she realizes she no longer has any reason to live once her lover has left her. Balzac does not afford her a future as an independent courtesan because it would indicate a sort of victory over the patriarchal order as represented by Vautrin. Thus, the news that she could have purchased the life she dreamed of with her inheritance from Gobseck, thereby defying social convention by succeeding despite her past, does not arrive until after her death.

“Cet appartement sera votre prison”: Containing the courtesan

Though Blondet and Lousteau at the Bal de l’Opera celebrate Esther’s superiority and dream about the great heights she could have reached as a courtesan, their colleagues will not let them forget Esther’s promiscuous sexual history for which she will be punished throughout the first two books of *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. For example, Finot reminds his friends that none of the famous courtesans they have mentioned “a barboté dans la rue” (21). In a similar manner, Bixiou evokes her troubling wantonness, saying: “Vous avez tous été plus ou moins ses amants, nul de vous ne peut dire qu’elle a été sa maîtresse; elle peut toujours vous avoir, vous ne l’aurez jamais” (22). Bixiou’s assertion not only cuts short Esther’s idealization (Blondet complains about her indifference and extravagance), but also signals the quest for her containment and punishment on the part of both the journalists and Herrera (the disguised Vautrin). The fact that they can never completely master her troubles the men, for Esther has a public reputation that they cannot easily squelch. As a result, when Esther approaches the group of journalists, Bixiou cries out her name as a way of proving both to his friends her identity (not all of them are convinced that Esther is the one hiding behind the *domino* next to Lucien) and his power to humiliate her about her past. Though they cannot dictate whom she takes as a lover, they do feel empowered by controlling one aspect of her -- her reputation -- something she cannot completely manipulate herself. Balzac writes:

Quand cette femme, qui oubliait tout, fut à un pas du groupe, Bixiou cria: 'Esther?' L'infortunée tourna vivement la tête comme une personne qui s'entend appeler, reconnut le malicieux personnage, et baissa la tête comme un agonisant qui a rendu le dernier soupir. Un rire strident partit, et le groupe fondit au milieu de la foule comme une troupe de mulots effrayés [...] (25)

Though for a while Esther's pure love for Lucien has enabled her to put her troubled past behind her and has transformed her into "une admirable création, l'éclair des rêves heureux," Bixiou's evocation of her name destroys her anonymity and the group's cruel laugh simultaneously reminds her of her sins and taunts her about her sexual history (24).

This is the first point in the novel that her will is broken, for she understands that someone will always be present to remind her of her past and is therefore contained in that sense that she will always have to look out for others like Herrera who are capable of revealing her transgressions to her lover and to the police. As the novel continues, Herrera acts as her chief persecutor, first separating her from Lucien, getting her to admit her depravation, and locking her away in a convent, then constantly reminding her of her inferiority and her inescapable condemnation of being a harlot. In a fantasy akin to Restif de la Bretonne and Parent-Duchâtelet's projects to lock way prostitutes in non-descript houses, Vautrin orders her complete removal from the public eye. Should she continue to appear in public with Lucien, her reputation could eclipse his and spell disaster for his career. Hence Vautrin demands her imprisonment in which she serves only one man. Balzac writes:

Cet appartement sera votre prison, ma petite. Si vous voulez sortir, et votre santé l'exigera, vous vous promènerez pendant la nuit, aux heures où vous

ne pourrez point être vue; car votre beauté, votre jeunesse et la distinction que vous avez acquise au couvent seraient trop promptement remarquées dans Paris. Le jour où qui que ce soit au monde, dit-il avec un terrible accent accompagné d'un plus terrible regard, saurait que Lucien est votre amant ou que vous êtes sa maîtresse, ce jour serait l'avant-dernier de vos jours. (73-74)

Thus, at first Herrera insists that Esther's containment be physically enforced in prison-like conditions – in the convent and then in the enclosed apartment. He not only menaces her with death, but he also reinforces her depravation by constantly reminding her of her doomed status as a prostitute, saying “Vous êtes fille, vous resterez fille, vous mourrez fille” (80). When he eventually learns of the rich banker's Nucingen's obsession with Esther, Herrera decides to use Esther as “un gibier” with which he will catch the millions his protégé Lucien needs to marry well. In the end, he decides that she is of more use to him as a publicly celebrated courtesan with free reign than she would be locked away from the world. Though at this point, Esther is in theory free to circulate and do as she pleases because she is no longer confined to a restricted space, she dares not defy Herrera's orders. His constant reminder of her inadequacy and debasement convinces her that she is indeed not worthy of being Lucien's wife and that she should surrender herself to Nucingen for the good of Lucien. The perverse name-calling and humiliating commands have broken her will. Thus, physical confinement is no longer necessary because Esther has internalized her perceived dominance by Herrera (alias Vautrin) as “une misérable femelle” that he no longer needs to restrain her. In the end, her suicide is her ultimate act of self-regulation – for she conveniently removes herself from Lucien's life when she realizes she has no future once she has succumbed to Nucingen.

Beyond the July Monarchy: *Les Courtisanes de l'église*

As a final remark on the representations of *courtisanes*, it should be noted that the question of the courtesan and the saint-harlot split continued well into the Second Empire. Though most writers in the mid 1850s and 1860s (for historical, sociological and economic reasons) opted for more chic terms like *demi-mondaine* and *cocodette* when addressing the subject of high-class prostitutes, a few works continued to employ the term “courtesan.” Indeed, the dialectic of “fascination and disgust” persisted even when the majority of the authors writing about prostitutes during this period were focused on denigrating the *demi-mondaine*.

In the same manner that Dumas, Delord, and Neuville fantasized about the idealized ancient courtesan, Charles Marchal imagined the possibility of the courtesan as saint. He thus argues in his 1859 *Les Courtisanes devenues saintes, étude historique* that the saintly courtesan could renounce her licentious habits, redeem herself through self-sacrifice, and in turn inspire other fallen creatures to follow her example. Marchal writes: “Nous avons pensé que l’histoire de ces pécheresses, qui sont devenues des Marie-Magdeleine, c’est-à-dire des pénitentes, et que l’Église a beatifiés ou canonisées, serait une publication utile aux meours et un grand enseignement pour tous.”¹⁷² He cites Marie-Madgeleine, Jesus’s contemporary and companion, as the primary example. He follows her story with historical accounts of the fourth-century martyrs Saint Afre and Saint Théodote – as well as fifth-century penitents Saint Marie l’Égyptienne and Saint Pélagie,

¹⁷² Charles Marchal, *Les Courtisanes devenues saintes, étude historique* (Paris: Lebigre-Dusquesne frères, 1859) 8-9.

whose contrition and self-abnegation won them sainthood. Though the focus shifted from ancient Greek courtesans to the saints of the early Church, the need to idealize women in the past carried on.

Benjamin Gastineau's scapegoating of the powerful women in the Catholic Church demonstrates that the patterns of disgust also continue to persist. Gastineau loathes the idea of women exerting influence on others, especially men in power -- that is why in his 1870 *Les Courtisanes de l'Église*, he denounces the women who use their guile, charm, and sex to usurp power from important Church figures. Likewise, he resents the women who staked out their own positions of influence by manipulating men. What bothers him the most, Gastineau asserts: "Ce sont donc surtout les rapports de la femme avec la papauté, le rôle curieux et parfois étrange du vice-pape ou de la papesse, de la courtisane de l'Église, en un mot l'influence des femmes sur les souverains pontifés."¹⁷³ In his book, he cites all instances in the Church's history in which women slept with popes as a way of manipulating them and asserting their influence. He derides the women who bore the popes children and then later saw them appointed the head of the Church, and considers the case of the woman who disguised her gender and served as pope especially damaging. The fact that that he depicts some of the *papesse*s as making the popes their toys undoubtedly reflects the popular image of Marguerite Bellanger as puppet master. Images depicted Bellanger, the purported mistress of Napoleon III, as controlling his movements the way one would a puppet. Speaking about Bellanger's influence through the guise of Church history

¹⁷³ Benjamin Gastineau, *Les Courtisanes de l'Église* (Paris: Collection Georges Barba, 1870) XVI.

was a subversive way for Gastineau to criticize her power without directly insulting the emperor ruling the country.

Whether the courtesan is cast as a harlot or a saint depended on whether the writer aligned himself with the school that considered women naturally good and angelic, or whether he identified with the one that considered her essentially demonic and perverse. In either case, each label serves as a means to control the courtesan's threat. In labeling the courtesan a saint, one familiar with the typical trajectory of saints¹⁷⁴ is assured that though she may temporarily enjoy some power and freedom, she will eventually regret her actions to such an extent that she punishes herself as so many other saints have done. Her assured submission is meant to comfort anxious men that her actions will undermine the patriarchy. The opposite holds true for branding the Church courtesan as harlot, for the label prevents men from falling sway to her spell because the charged term underscores her depravity. Also, branding her behavior as deviant is a way of justifying the harsh restrictions dedicated to the prostitute's regulation.

Conclusion

Essentially these differences in approach to the nineteenth-century courtesan—whether it is a fantasized return to the past or a fantasized control over the present—depended largely on the literary school to which the writer adhered. On the one hand, the Romantics, disgusted by modernity, which they considered to be fragmented, depicted the ancient courtesan as the emblem of durability and cohesion and used her as a symbol of cultural legitimacy with which they hoped

¹⁷⁴ One attains sainthood through repentance and the sacrifice of status and worldly possessions for the higher cause of a life devoted to God.

to gain prestige. On the other hand, writers leaning toward realism viewed the modern courtesan as ambivalent because she emblemized the sexual politics that they perceived as a threat to male domination. In the Romantic version of the *courtisane*, her self-sacrifice in the name of her lover, her unquestioning subjugation to the patriarchy and her internalized inferiority complex lead her to regulate her own behavior and ultimately accept her punishment as death. In the realistic vision of her, which I outline in the next chapter in my discussion of the *demi-mondaine* in the Second Empire, realism and censorship forbid any flattering characterizations of the *demi-mondaine* or any hints at the redeeming qualities associated with in the *courtisane* a few years earlier. Writers unleashed a backlash against the figure of the *demi-mondaine* because she embodied for them ruthless capitalism, crass social climbing, and troubling changes in sex roles as she ventured into the public sphere as actress, writer, and celebrity.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE DEBUT OF THE DEMI-MONDE AND THE BACKLASH THAT ENSUES AGAINST IT

In this chapter, I map out the *demi-mondaine*'s career in three phases: 1) the initial fascination stage that begins with her glamorous debut in *La Dame aux camélias*; 2) the backlash stage that develops out the need to contain fears about her notoriety, most significantly in *Le Demi-Monde*; and 3) the final repulsion phase in which Émile Zola transforms the *demi-mondaine* into a scapegoat for Second Empire corruption. I argue that these phases developed in relation to women's demands for enfranchisement and independence.

In the seven years passed between the time when Alexandre Dumas *filis* penned *La Dame aux camélias* and the period when he drafted *Le Demi-Monde*, women made a significant showing in the political, social, and economic domains. In his "À propos de *La Dame aux camélias*," Dumas *filis* states that the *demi-mondaine* had grown too powerful and wielded a harmful influence on "les femmes du monde."¹⁷⁵ He writes that the *demi-mondaines* "devinrent une classe, elles s'érigèrent puissance; ce qu'elles auraient dû cacher comme un ulcère, elles l'arborèrent comme un plumet. Elles prirent le pas sur les honnêtes femmes [...]. Moreover, the femmes du monde decide to compete with them and in doing so, prostitute themselves as well" (27-28). As he grew more moralistic with each passing year, Dumas *filis* began to argue in his social dramas that married women

¹⁷⁵ Alexandre Dumas *filis*, "À propos de *La Dame aux camélias*," *Théâtre complet*. Vol 1 (Paris: Calmann Levy, 1890) 27.

should be confined to the domestic sphere and that women who defied or defiled the bourgeois ideal of the married woman should be punished. Thus, the following section highlights the important historical events that implicated women's challenges to their political, economic and social/civic inferiority.

History

As the nineteenth century progressed, the bourgeoisie grew in power, thereby exerting with its growth an important influence on social customs in French society.¹⁷⁶ Central to its belief system was the importance of family, an institution grounded in female domesticity. James McMillan sheds light on this view of women and family that so permeated French society:

The family was at the very heart of the bourgeois conception of the social order, and the model family was headed by its lord and master, the *paterfamilias*, husband, father and representative of patriarchal authority, upon whom wife and children alike depended. Women, if they followed their 'natural' destiny, fulfilled their social role above all as wives and mothers. They should also be ladies of leisure, far removed from the world of work, in order to underline the wealth and status of their husbands. (47-48)

Prohibited from working, women were to remain at home, tending to the needs of their husbands and children. Upper-class women, according to McMillan, hosted salons, and women of all classes (at least according to the etiquette manuals of the era), strove to "make themselves pleasing to men" (48). Cocooned in their homes, bourgeois women were protected from the public world of competition, strife, work, and politics. McMillan aptly sums up the bourgeois

¹⁷⁶ On bourgeois hegemony, James McMillan writes: "Indeed, to the extent that bourgeois values were consciously embraced by other social groups, they may be thought of as constituting a hegemonic culture." James McMillan, *France and Women* (London: Routledge, 2000) 47.

women's ideal role in the nineteenth century: "In the cult of domesticity, the home was a sanctuary and refuge from the turbulent world outside: a woman's role was to be the guardian angel of the domestic shrine" (48).

As I argued in chapter three, the strict doctrine of the separation of spheres emerged out of the chaos of the Revolution of 1789 in order to prevent women from actively participating in the public sphere as they did during the Revolution. Nonetheless, throughout the nineteenth-century, many women sought to penetrate what Jürgen Habermas calls "the bourgeois public sphere" which "can be understood as the sphere of private persons assembled to form a public."¹⁷⁷ Yet, despite the widespread ideology of the woman as "angel of the hearth,"¹⁷⁸ women increasingly ventured into the public sphere as journalists, feminist organizers, political insurgents (1830, 1848, 1871), actresses, dancers, and even *demi-mondaines*. According to Habermas, private persons (such as domestic bourgeois women),

soon began to make use of the public sphere of informational newspapers, which was officially regulated, against the public power itself, using those papers, along with the morally and critically oriented weeklies, to engage in debate about the general rules governing relations in their own essentially privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and labor. (233)

Indeed, throughout the century, women used newspapers (*La Tribune des Femmes*, *La Voix des Femmes*, *Le Droit des Femmes*, and *La Fronde* to name a few) as a forum through which they questioned their roles in society, debated

¹⁷⁷ Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere," *On Society and Politics*. ed. Steven Seidman. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) 233.

¹⁷⁸ McMillan 48.

divorce and marriage, and argued for political and economic enfranchisement. With newspapers, women rallied for their emancipation and organized political campaigns. According to Claire Goldberg Moses, the *Gazette des femmes* employed the petition as a “strategy for feminist reform.”¹⁷⁹ As such, they ventured outside the domestic sphere and upset the proponents of the patriarchy who viewed these activities as blurring gender roles, which they considered tantamount to the revolutionary turmoil of the 1789 uprising.

Not all women, however, expressed their views publicly. The wealthiest women in French society participated informally in the “political establishment,” and managed to exert a notable influence on civic affairs by contributing to heated discussion with the influential leaders and intellectuals who frequented their salons.¹⁸⁰ Thus, in remaining behind the scenes and behaving within the confines of their prescribed gender role, upper-class women exercised what McMillan calls “a real degree of influence on public life and they continued to do so under the Second Republic and the early Third Republic in the Republican salons of the likes of Juliette Adam and Mme Kestner” (58). Because they abided by the rules of the patriarchy by not publicly challenging gender roles or demanding women’s rights, their behavior passed as inoffensive, even honorable.

However, on the contrary, middle- and lower-class women, in the spirit of the 89 Revolution, openly protested women’s restrictive roles. Because they were not only denied access to political leaders, but also to education (which prevented

¹⁷⁹ Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the 19th Century* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984) 104.

¹⁸⁰ McMillan 58.

them from working) and to participation in civic affairs, they publicly lobbied for a “right to citizenship” (they should be included in universal suffrage) and “to a decent standard of living” (79). As such, the women who fought for change and reform “in the romantic era in the tradition of the sans-culotte” participated in what McMillan class “a second wave of feminism” (79). He explains: “The word may not have existed, but the thing did, conjured into being by a contemporary language which tended to speak of ‘rights’ and ‘liberty’ rather than ‘equality’” (79).

How did women overtly contest their oppression and lack of civil rights? Women such as Anne Poutret de Mauchamps, along with her common-law husband, championed women’s rights in their newspaper, *La Gazette des Femmes*. Articles in the *Gazette* encouraged women to appeal to the legislature for their right to vote, to divorce, and to exercise sexual freedom. In an era when women were not allowed to publicly interfere in politics, the feminist rhetoric of the *Gazette* not only alarmed the censors, but also persuaded them to shut down the newspaper (80). In turn, what McMillan calls the “repressive state” made an example out of Mme Poutret and her partner by sentencing them to severe jail sentences on “trumped up charges of corrupting the nation’s morals” (80). This event, McMillan claims, ended the significant progress of French feminism in the 1830s.

Though the paper’s closing signaled a demoralizing blow to French feminism, several women with socialist sympathies rallied again in the 1848 revolution to demand their civil liberties. Eugène Niboyet founded *La Voix des*

Femmes and Jean Deroin established the Club de l'Emancipation des Femmes in 1848. In an attempt to win the vote for women, Deroin and Pauline Roland met with representatives from the Provisional Government in 1848 who were touting universal suffrage. Although Deroin and Roland argued that women constituted half of humanity and therefore deserved the right to represent themselves in official government institutions, the establishment refused to allow any women as candidates. Furthermore, few of the Republicans who had been sympathetic to the feminist cause were re-elected in the April elections in 1848.

Initially, it appeared as though a socialist victory in 1848 would help advance the feminist cause; however, the government soon denied women the right to divorce that they had been campaigning for, and even closed their political clubs. Undeterred by these repressive measures, Deroin pressed on with demands for female representation in the government. She even presented herself as a candidate for the Legislative Assembly, but was ultimately refused support by socialist men who were afraid they were “wasting” their vote on a woman. Faced with yet another setback to her cherished cause, Deroin turned her attention to educational reform. She achieved great success with her project that combined educational, socialist, and feminist goals. However, when her Association of Socialist Primary Teachers demonstrated too much accomplishment, some officials viewed it as a sign of the socialists regaining power. Consequently, police arrested Deroin and Roland in conjunction with the association and imprisoned them as part of a larger move by leaders “fearful that the victory of démoc-soc deputies in by-elections held in Paris in the spring of 1850 portended a

revival of the ‘reds’” (89). Thus, a move to dampen socialist enthusiasm also deterred the feminist movement which officials viewed as a threat to the establishment.

Unfazed by the unwelcoming political climate, Deroin and Roland continued their political activism upon their release from prison. However, the coup d'état of 1851 ushered in a conservative government that finally put an end to their civic endeavors. Roland was deported to Algeria (she returned to France, but died shortly thereafter) and Deroin, after much harassment by police, eventually left France for political asylum in London. During the Second Empire, the exiled Deroin still crusaded for “women’s rights as the basis for the organization for labor” (117). Though her exile made her a “marginal figure,” McMillan claims that Julie Daubié, the first woman to take the baccalauréat, contributed immensely to the campaign for women to work and receive equal wages (117-118). According to McMillan, the feminist movement was re-charged again in the late Second Empire, thanks to efforts of Maria Deraismes and Léon Richer, the “joint founder of liberal feminism in France” (130).

Middle-class women were not the only ones to publicly campaign for social and political rights: working-class descendants of the 1790s *sans-culottes* also protested against their disenfranchisement and made socialist demands. According to McMillan, they played a significant part in defending “community values” (79).

He writes:

By the time of the last substantial female uprising in 1795, a new tradition of female political protest had been invented. The French Revolution had

bequeathed to the nineteenth-century a revolutionary tradition in which women of the *faubourgs* or working-class suburbs, acting alongside their menfolk, had asserted their right to rebel in the name of the defence of the neighborhoods and their aspiration for a more just social and political order [...] (75)

Thus, working-class women in 1830 helped build barricades, pried paving stones out of the streets, searched for ammunition, and supplied the male insurgents with food, and tended to the wounded, but did little fighting themselves according to McMillan. Nonetheless, some female warriors fought and perished. McMillan claims: “Isolated cases of female combatants can also be found, which was doubtless one reason why Delacroix commemorated the “Three Glorious Days” of July 1830 in the shape of a woman in a Phrygian cap urging on male revolutionaries at the barricades of his famous painting *Liberty Guiding the People*” (79). Working-class women also participated in the February and June uprisings of 1848. Again McMillan insists that few women actually participated in combat, “though the ideal corpses of women served among the insurgents as powerful symbols of the martyred common people” (76).

Some 292 women¹⁸¹ were arrested for their participation in the June days insurrection; Veuve Anne-Marie Henry, a “76-year-old retired dressmaker,” actually fought in the Belleville uprising, while Elisa Parmentier, “was arrested at the barricades dressed in the garb of a male worker and brandishing a red flag” (77). These images of cross-dressing and violence challenged the role of woman as passive domestic creature. One strategy of the “antifeminist backlash” that writers and artists employed after the 1848 revolution was to link female political

¹⁸¹ According to McMillan, this figure was “by no means the total number of participants” (77).

activism to prostitution so as to further discount female revolutionary activity. As discussed in chapter two, Gavarni and Alhoy in the early 1840s had already featured images and fantasies of the *lorette* in her *débardeur* costume as the woman on top. However, they largely limited images of domineering prostitutes to the Carnival period, not to social uprisings. Indeed, Alhoy mocked the *lorettes* who had applied for cross-dressing permits because they enjoyed the mobility of pants; however, when accounts of actual trouser-wearing women revolutions surfaced during the 1848 uprisings, writers and artists countered them with fictional accounts aimed at undermining the menace of these non-traditional women by associating them with prostitutes. McMillan cites as an example Edouard de Beaumont's cartoons satirizing the *Vésuviennes*. McMillan claims that police invented this feminist organization drafting a fake constitution and claiming prostitutes as its members in order to deride, misrepresent, and repress women's political efforts (93). McMillan writes: "For the state, ridicule and distortion were as much weapons of sexual harassment as repressing and physical violence: and through de Beaumont's cartoons the police succeeded so well in their play that until recently historians regarded the *Vésuviennes* constitution as genuine" (93).

In the same way that government officials and artists strove to counteract stories about women's participation in violent social protests and political clubs, I argue in this chapter that novelists, playwrights, and moralists also struggled to offset the *demi-mondaine's* influence. As such, they fashioned their narratives to contain her links to female emancipation. Although no literary works in the late

July Monarchy or the early Second Empire featured the *demi-mondaine* fighting in the streets or attending rallies sponsored by feminist clubs, writers believed that she set a bad example for bourgeois women because she embodied female emancipation. In sum, her lifestyle directly defied the patriarchal ideal of the woman as “guardian of the hearth” for she insisted on independence, control over her finances and her choice of lovers, as well as public appearances on stage, in elaborate carriages, or at the opera.

While she may not have campaigned for the right to vote or to divorce, moralists viewed her as dangerous: her promiscuity and her refusal to remain in the domestic sphere dedicating herself to one man and children undermined the patriarchal order that demanded women be subjugated to male authority. Hence, at least in the fantasies of the moralists and writers, the *demi-mondaine*'s rebellious spirit, her “depraved” sexuality, and her generally anti-family stance could conceivably persuade bourgeois women to follow suit in her unruly conduct. Convinced that social order was founded on family and female domesticity, critics and novelists dreaded the idea of women challenging gender roles and marauding in public as the *demi-mondaine* did, for they believed such behavior could result in the tumult experienced during the Terror of the 1790s. Thus, they sought to repress any behavior that signaled a return to women's political and social enfranchisement.

The *demi-monde* defined with *Distinction*: A socio-historical critique of the *demi-monde*

Since an analysis of the *demi-monde* would not be complete without a socio-economic overview to complement the brief outline of major historical

events (1848-1871) as they relate to it, I will define the *demi-monde* and analyze it in terms of class mobility with theory outlined in *Distinction*. The term *demi-monde* describes a class of Second Empire men and women who imitated the lifestyles of the nobility. These women looked aristocratic, lived in luxury, and were supported by *nouveaux riches* men looking to demonstrate their own recent increase in social standing and hegemony. Though most contemporary literary and historical critics conceptualize the *demi-monde* as a society of flashy, status-seeking prostitutes,¹⁸² critics in the 1870s conceived it as a group of male and female *arrivistes* on the margins of society who sought to imitate the very *haut monde* that would not admit them into their elite circle. According to Léopold Stapleaux, the *demi-monde* emerged out of the excesses and the “cult” of pleasure that followed the coup d’État of 1851.¹⁸³ To paraphrase Stapleaux, this period was marked by illusory prosperity in which previously destitute individuals grew suddenly rich over a short period of time.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² To paraphrase Marcel Le Clère, the phenomenon of the *demi-monde* as “le royaume et les mœurs de femmes entretenues,” was typical of the Second Empire. According to Le Clère, the *demi-monde* consisted of a “classe de femmes ayant appartement, domestiques et voiture qui ne s’accordaient qu’un seul protecteur – à la fois – mais jouaient alors à ‘la grande dame’ en recevant dans leur salon et parfois même à leur ‘jour,’ les grands homes de la politique, de la finance et des lettres. Finalement, il s’agissait pour les hétaires de haut luxe de s’installer dans la classe sociale supérieure et d’en vivre” (414). The “jeunesse dorée” of the Second Empire facilitated the demi-mondaine’s “ascension,” Le Clère insists, by ruining themselves dining with the demi-mondaines in the “cabinets particuliers” of the Café Anglais, inviting them to the Jockey Club balls, and providing them with elegant carriages which they took to the Bois de Boulogne to flaunt their wealth to other kept women as well as the bourgeoises with official standing (414). Marcel Le Clère, “Demi-Mondaines,” *Dictionnaire du Second Empire* (Paris: Fayard, 1995).

¹⁸³ Léopold Stapleaux, *Les Courtisanes Du Second Empire. Marguerite Bellanger* (Bruxelles: Office de Publicite, 1871) 23.

¹⁸⁴ Historian Gordon Wright supports Stapleaux’s description of unforeseen wealth at the beginning of the Second Empire when he states: “It was Louis-Napoleon’s good fortune that the business slump was coming to an end at the moment when he seized power in 1851, and that the

Out of this financial good fortune, Stapleaux claims that individuals developed “un besoin de satisfaction sans bornes, un culte de plaisir effréné, une envie folle de tâter de toutes les jouissances humaines, une soif d’ivresses inextinguible!” (13). As a result of this newly gained wealth, Stapleaux insists that what was once superfluous became a necessity, and that a new social order replaced the old. He states: “La concurrence s’établit entre le vrai monde et le demi” (13). The *nouveaux riches* were too *arriviste* to gain entry into the “*vrai monde*,” so they turned to their own “half world” to frolic and squander their fortunes on courtesans filled with social and financial ambitions. Stapleaux writes:

Tandis que le demi-monde se formait et devenait une classe dans l’État, les spéculations de toute espèce remplissaient les poches des pauvres de la veille, d’un argent si facilement acquis, que la plupart d’entre eux le jetèrent au vent de tous leurs caprices aussi facilement qu’ils le ramassaient dans la corbeille des agents de change ou dans la cohue des coulissiers. (16)

Thus, for critics writing in the late Second Empire or even after its demise-- the *demi-monde* not only evoked images of prostitutes in the splendid dresses, wearing scintillating jewels and sipping champagne (as contemporary audiences imagine today), but also social *parvenus* with newly acquired bills spilling out of their pockets.

first decade of his rule coincided with one of the two most remarkable periods of economic growth and change in modern French history. Although the boom was to be checked somewhat in the 1860’s, the Second Empire stands out in the nineteenth century as a time of exceptional economic vigor.”Gordon Wright, *France in Modern* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987) 158.

In addition to social upstarts, aristocrats also circulated in the marginal *demi-monde*, though for reasons that largely differed from those of the *nouveau riche*. Whereas the opportunists hoped to achieve status by conducting liaisons with notorious *demi-mondaines*, the jaded blue-blooded Lotharios frequented them because they considered these women a new source of amusement. In turn, the *demi-mondaines*, like their opportunistic bourgeois companions, sought out relations with nobles in order to also increase their status. According to Dumas *filis*, this curious “love” triangle illustrates the link between social climbing and prostitution. Dumas *filis* explains:

Des hommes du monde, blasés, épuisés, usés, pour se distraire un moment, se firent des contrôleurs de ce metal impur. La corruption eut ses jurés assermentés. Ces malheureuses sollicitaient l’honneur de leur couche froide, afin de pouvoir dire le lendemain: J’ai vécu avec un tel,” ce qui haussait leur prix pour les parvenus de la veille, tout fiers de posséder une creature sortant non pas des bras, mais des mains du conte X*** ou du Marquis Z***.¹⁸⁵

Thus, in the *demi-monde*, the world-weary aristocrats purchased the *demi-mondaines* the same way they would a novelty object. In turn, this enabled the *demi-mondaines* to increase the price they charged a parvenu, who considered sleeping with the woman who had just serviced a member of the social elite as proof of his “arrival,” or increase in status.¹⁸⁶ If he could afford to keep a woman

¹⁸⁵ Alexandre Dumas *filis*, “À propos de *La Dame aux camélias*,” *La Dame aux camélias* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981) 513.

¹⁸⁶ Though Dumas *filis* contends that aristocrats fancied *demi-mondaines* because they represented something fresh for a man already familiar with all the pleasures his privileged status affords him, he elides the possibility of some individuals, such as Céleste Mogador’s lover, Lionel de Chabrilan, rebelling against their families and aristocratic convention by associating with infamous women.

who also slept with a count, the parvenu thought, then surely he had entered what Bourdieu has deemed the “cultural game.”¹⁸⁷

It follows that the upstart’s foray into the *demi-monde* is a strategy to distinguish himself, for if he succeeds in obtaining the favors of a *demi-mondaine* – a creature that a dominant agent such as a count or duke considers a rarity¹⁸⁸ – then he possesses, in terms of Bourdieusian theory, what he believes to be “one of the distinctive signs which make ‘natural distinction.’” (250). Indeed, as Marguerite remarks in *La Dame aux camélias*, *demi-mondaines* like herself are merely symbols (she even refers to herself as an object) her lovers use to display and thereby assert their wealth and social standing. She laments:

Nous avons des amants égoïstes qui dépensent leur fortune non pour nous, comme ils le disent, mais pour leur vanité. Pour ces gens-là, il faut que nous soyons gaies quand ils sont joyeux, bien portantes quand ils veulent souper, sceptiques comme ils le sont. Il nous est défendu d’avoir du coeur sous peine d’être huées et de ruiner notre crédit. Nous ne nous appartenons plus. Nous ne sommes plus des êtres, mais des choses. Nous sommes les premiers dans leur amour-propre, les dernières dans leur estime. (162)

According to Marguerite, *demi-mondaines* are no longer beings, but things – objects purchased with significant economic capital by the *nouveaux riches* gentlemen trying to demonstrate their social capital through their relations.

¹⁸⁷ The cultural game, according to Bourdieu, “simultaneously presupposes and demands that one take part in the game and be taken in by it; and interest in culture, without which there is no race, no competition, is produced by the very race and competition which it produces.” *Distinction* 250.

¹⁸⁸ Bourdieu links rarity to status when he writes: “The dynamic of the field in which these goods are produced and reproduced and circulate while yielding profits of distinction lies in the strategies which give rise to their rarity and to belief in their value, and which combine – in their very opposition – to bring about these objective effects.” 250.

Moreover, the *demi-mondaine* is desirable as long as she is coveted by the parvenu's aristocratic rival. As René Girard has noted, "A *vaniteux* will desire any object so long as he is convinced that it is already desired by another person whom he admires."¹⁸⁹ Thus, the longing of the *vaniteux*, or *nouveau riche*, for the *demi-mondaine*, increases with each aristocrat she seduces. Also, the *arriviste*'s identification with the noble reveals his efforts to empower himself — a reading suggested by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's opening up of Girard's "ahistorical, Platonic" theory of triangulation through psychoanalytical, feminist, and structuralist criticism.¹⁹⁰ She suggests the erotic triangle can underscore not only "relationships of power and meaning," but also reveal "the play of desire and identification by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment" (27). Given Sedgwick's reading, the aristocrat-*demi-mondaine*-bourgeois triangle does not so much "involve bonds of 'rivalry' between males 'over' a woman,"¹⁹¹ as it does incorporate an *arriviste*'s identification with a more powerful individual with social status.

Ultimately though, by entering the game, the parvenus and their socially ambitious partners merely confirm the true culture and socially validated distinction that the aristocrat possesses. For the blasé blue-blood, the *demi-monde* represents a place where he can amuse himself without social consequence (away

¹⁸⁹ René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel. Self and Other in Literary Structure*, Translated by Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965) 7.

¹⁹⁰ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Men and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 27.

¹⁹¹ Kosofsky Sedgwick 23.

from the off-limit virginal women of his own elite class). In contrast, the bourgeois and his *demi-mondaine* counterpart believe that they can play the game and increase their status, although their efforts merely confirm that their artificial “half-world” is merely an inferior reproduction of the *grand monde*.

As Bourdieu has suggested, cultural validation consists of a game in which the dominated agents compete with the dominant players. These dominant players have already won the match before it even began, because they are the ones who created the rules destined to exclude social climbers. Bourdieu characterizes the game as such when he writes:

The opposition between the ‘authentic’ and the ‘imitation,’ ‘true’ culture and ‘popularization,’ which maintains the game by maintaining belief in the absolute value of the stake, conceals a collusion that is no less indispensable to the production and reproduction of the *illusio*, the fundamental recognition of the cultural game and its stakes. Distinction and pretension, high culture and middle-brow culture—like, elsewhere, high fashion and fashion, haute coiffure and coiffure, and so on – only exist through each other, and it is the relation, or rather, the objective collaboration of their respective production apparatuses and clients which produces the value of culture and the need to possess it. (*Distinction* 250)

Moreover, Bourdieu’s theory sheds light on the term *demi-monde*, for it is a society which is only half of the culturally validated *monde* -- its players (the bourgeois and the *demi-mondaines*) may imitate the aristocracy by performing their manners, drinking their wine, wearing their clothes, and attending the same opera performances, without actually possessing their true culture. However, in the process, they validate the aristocracy’s superiority; in their efforts to reproduce the *monde*, they express a belief that it is so excellent that they must try to recreate one themselves.

PHASE ONE: FASCINATION

“Ce mélange de gaiété, de tristesse, de candeur, de prostitution”: Idealizing the *demi-mondaine*

In the initial phase of the *demi-mondaine*'s existence, Marguerite and the *demi-monde* that she represented enjoyed the same popularity with readers as her predecessor, the *lorette*. Just as Gavarni's caricatures of the *lorettes* had captured the imaginations of an audience fascinated by the *lorette*'s sexy débardeur costume and vivacious Carnival spirit, Dumas's depiction of Marguerite evoked visions of glamour, revelry, and luxury. Marguerite captivated audiences because she possessed both the familiar traits of the romantic harlot with a heart of gold -- angelic sweetness, sadness, suffering, humility and self-defeat -- as well as novel characteristics that broke with the romantic tradition, such as exuberant gaiety, exciting seductiveness, and frank wit.¹⁹² Dumas *filis*'s successful combination of gaiety, sadness, candor, and prostitution not only won him fame, but launched a trend among readers fascinated by this new world of wealth and luxury.

Indeed, audiences loved the melodramatic tale of doomed love¹⁹³ and identified with her failing health, for in Susan Sontag's estimation, Marguerite's

¹⁹² Because Dumas *filis*' *La Dame aux camélias* straddles the romantic and realistic periods in nineteenth-century French literature, it follows that the character of Marguerite demonstrates traits from both eras. Hence, Marguerite is a transitional figure who shares both romantic traits akin to her idealized predecessor, Esther, the harlot in Balzac's *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, and marks of realism characteristic of Nana, her repulsive *demi-mondaine* successor. While readers initially admire and even identify with Marguerite's positive characteristics, critics hoping to denigrate the *demi-mondaine* and put a damper on her popularity in the mid-1850s amplify Marguerite's love of money and luxury, her spendthrift habits, her dishonesty and promiscuity, as well as her callous manipulation of her lovers.

¹⁹³ Stapleaux writes: “Celui-ci reconnu, idéalisé, ayant pour loi supreme: l'amour, et par conséquent, offrant à toute la jeunesse un irresistible attrait” (15).

suffering and death from consumption only made her more intriguing to readers.¹⁹⁴ Secondly, Marguerite's self-sacrifice (which allows Armand to return to his rightful place in society), her own recognition of her inferiority to the bourgeois,¹⁹⁵ as well as her yearning for approval from them¹⁹⁶ further ingratiates her character with the class she lauds. Lastly, her death at the beginning of the novel is reassuring because readers learn immediately of her tragic fate – for Marguerite, like Marie Duplessis, the young beautiful woman on whom the novel is based, is also consumed by consumption. Indeed, the risk of exaggerated sexuality, adultery, and prostitution is contained with Marguerite's corpse in her grave.¹⁹⁷

At the outset, Dumas's creation stimulated, according to Stapleaux, alluring fantasies about the *demi-monde* in both sexes. Stapleaux states: "L'éclat du succès de Dumas fils fit que toute fille de portière eût de devenir une Marguerite Gautier, et qu'il n'y eût pas une jeune homme de vingt ans, à Paris, qui ne caressât comme la plus douce chimère, d'être Armand Duval, un jour ou l'autre" (14). Women, with fantasies of lucrative liaisons with counts, patiently waited for their bourgeois Prince Charming to appear to sweep them away. According to Stapleaux, these women imbibed vinegar to not only lose weight, but to also acquire the ideal paleness, as well as to cough "de façon à fendre le

¹⁹⁴ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 30.

¹⁹⁵ Stapleaux explains that audiences sympathized with the distress Armand's illicit affair caused his family. He writes: "Il [*La Dame aux camélias*] montrait un père venant supplier une fille de plaisir de lui rendre son fils, c'est-à-dire la famille luttant contre le concubinage" (15).

¹⁹⁶ Roland Barthes, "*La Dame aux camélias*," *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957).

¹⁹⁷ In order to support her claim that *La Dame aux camélias* explicitly refuses Marguerite's deviance, Jann Matlock elaborates on Peter Brooks' description of the "melodramatic 'logic of the excluded middle.'" She states: "Its 'outlaw,' the prostitute, is already dead by the time the story begins." Jann Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 109.

coeur aux fils de famille” (15-16). In this Romantic conception of woman, this figure passively waits for a powerful male to give her life meaning. Moreover, she exaggerates her weakness – she is thin and suffers from “une bronchite,” which Stapleaux claims “était un vrai trésor” – in order to please her suitors (16). Briefly, she manifests her subordination through her physical infirmity, thereby playing into the male fantasy of domination over the feeble female.

The fantasies of mystique and escapism the *La Dame aux camélias* promotes

Dumas *fils*'s novel and drama elicited much praise from his bourgeois audiences. He introduced what one critic has called an element of “escapism” into “le monde utilitaire et bien rangé du bourgeois.”¹⁹⁸ Dumas not only exposed his audience to the mysterious lives of the *demi-mondianes*, but according to H. Stanley Schwarz, also broke with the tradition of treating a “courtesan of historical legend” when he wrote about a famous “kept woman of contemporary life” he had actually loved.¹⁹⁹ Dramatizing his own failed affair with a well-known *demi-mondaine* was innovative because it allowed Dumas *fils* to titillate his bourgeois readers with a true and shocking story without seriously condemning their values. As Neuschäfer states: “Marguerite respecte Duval père et fait de grands sacrifices à la morale bourgeoise” (21-22).

¹⁹⁸ Hans-Jorg Neuschäfer, “De *La Dame aux camélias* à *la Traviata*: l'Évolution d'une image bourgeoise de la femme,” *La Dame aux camélias* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981) 21.

¹⁹⁹ According to H. Stanley Schwarz, Dumas *fils* broke with the tradition of treating a “courtesan of historical legend” when created the modern Marguerite. H. Stanley Schwarz, *Alexandre Dumas fils: Dramatist* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1971) 33. For more on Dumas *fils*'s affair with Marie Duplessis, see Micheline Boudet, “La fleur du camélia,” *La Véritable histoire de la Dame aux camélias* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993).

In sharp contrast with the bourgeois ethic of efficacy, economy, and social restraint, the *demi-monde* in all its frivolity, luxury, and hilarity, captivates bourgeois readers with its exoticism. The *demi-monde* is a society ruled by excess, according to Dumas *fils*'s portrayal of it in *La Dame aux camélias*. Dumas *fils* describes the dinner party Arnaud attends:

On rit, on but et l'on mangea beaucoup à ce souper. Au bout de quelques instants, la gaiété était descendu aux dernières limites, et ces mot qu'un certain monde trouve plaisants et qui salissent toujours la bouche qui les dit éclataient de temps à autre...j'étais devenu presque triste en voyant cette belle creature de vingt ans, boire, parler comme un portefaix, et faire autant plus que ce que l'on disait était plus scandaleux.²⁰⁰

The abundance of laughter, food, drink, lewd jokes within Marguerite's world initially scandalize the bourgeois Armand as does the constant need for festivity and amusement. Even when Marguerite has died and her "robes, cachemires, bijoux se vendaient avec une rapidité incroyable" at the auction, the fête continues, for the *demi-monde* shuns tears, mourning, and sickness. Marguerite learns as much during her convalescence the first time she nearly perishes. At the auction, the crowd (which includes Marguerite's former colleagues), seems to have forgotten Marguerite's death, "était d'une gaiété folle" (62-63). Dumas's narrator states: "On riait fort; [...] Jamais réunion ne fut plus variée, plus bruyante" (63).

This emphasis on immediate pleasure offers a safe escape route for the hard-working male readers in need of a vacation and female readers who are perhaps curious about the wider world: it allows the readers to fantasize about an

²⁰⁰ Alexandre Dumas *fils*, *La Dame aux Camélias* (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1981) 113.

alternative lifestyle without challenging their values. Indeed, with Marguerite's death, Dumas *fils* sends the message that a life of vice, no matter how attractive it may appear, will kill creatures as charming and as angelic as Marguerite. Further, it will ruin the bourgeois man who tries to save her from her self-destructive vice.

Inspired by his own affair with Marie Duplessis, Dumas *fils* pens his tale as a warning to those who believe that they can successfully rehabilitate a prostitute, "even if she has regenerating love."²⁰¹ In André Maurois's estimation, the twenty-year-old Dumas, inspired by Victor Hugo's successful rehabilitation of Juliette Drouet, thought he would be able to "wrest Marie from the wicked rich men who had made her a de luxe article."²⁰² Because Marie "was incorrigible," Dumas's quest failed and he found himself in debt "to the tune of fifty thousand francs [...] For young Dumas, after a few weeks of happiness, it was a life of worries, suspicion, and ruin. By 1845 he had decided to break with his mistress" (viii).

In the same way that Marguerite's depraved lifestyle inspired redemption fantasies in Dumas *fils*, her world of wealth, extravagance, and autonomy set off the imagination of the *femmes du monde* who wanted a safe glimpse into the life of their rival. Because Marguerite's ill-repute and dishonesty expired with her corpse, women could visit her apartment without endangering their reputations, for as Dumas *fils* states: "La mort avait purifié l'air de ce cloaque splendide" (52). Dumas *fils* writes that the "femmes du monde," curious about how the other half

²⁰¹ Stephen S. Stanton, "Introduction," *Camille and Other Plays* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1957) xxxi.

²⁰² André Maurois, "Introduction," *Camille*. Trans. Edmund Gosse (New York: Heritage Press, 1955) viii.

lived, wanted to see the “intérieur de ces femmes (the *demi-mondaines*) dont les équipages éclaboussent chaque jour le leur, qui ont, comme elles et à côté d’elles, leur loge à l’Opéra et aux Italiens, et qui étalent, à Paris, l’insolente opulence de leur beauté, de leurs bijoux et de leurs scandales” (52). Dumas suggests that the bourgeois penetrated Marguerite’s apartment with a mission: to find clues about the courtesans “dont on leur avait fait, sans doute, de si étranges récits” (52). Though Dumas claims that the “mysteries” surrounding Marguerite disappeared when she died, he overlooked the possibility of the fantasies these women entertained about the independent life Marguerite led. Her sumptuous apartment attests to what Neuschäfer labels her “personal” and “professional” autonomy (26). Neuschäfer affirms: “Il est curieux de constater que c’est sur une femme entretenue et déshonorée que sont projetés des idées d’indépendance qui restaient dans une large mesure interdites aux femmes de la ‘bonne société’” (26). It follows, then, that the bourgeois women not only visited Marguerite’s apartment to leer jealously at her possessions, but to cast a glimpse into a forbidden world of female emancipation.²⁰³ As I will develop in the next section of the chapter, critics viewed the *demi-mondaine*’s individualistic behavior as a dangerous influence on bourgeois women.

Just as Marguerite’s life of independence spurs reverie in bourgeois women curious about the taboo subject of female emancipation,²⁰⁴ Marguerite’s *joie de vivre* and efforts to please her lovers ignites the erotic imagination of male

²⁰³ It should be noted that her liberty is paradoxical since the *demi-mondaines* are entirely dependent on men for their support.

²⁰⁴ To paraphrase Neuschäfer, the bourgeois morality had succeeded so well in repressing the notion of female emancipation that it could only be addressed within the context of “illégalité” (26).

readers who, according to Neuschäfer, want to be entertained.²⁰⁵ Marguerite knows that the ideal woman for her bourgeois clients is one who makes it her mission to charm her lover and to gratify his wishes. Accordingly, Marguerite beguiles her male admirers with not only her physical beauty and fashionable dresses, but also her combination of saucy wit, happiness, and with a hint of suffering (so as to not overwhelm her potential suitors with too much self-assuredness). Marguerite successfully fuses melancholy (as illustrated by her sparkling tears that offset the bubbly champagne) and mirth (as illustrated by her hearty laugh). A master entertainer, she knows how to employ sassy retorts to chastise her disrespectful guests or to lighten the mood when the conversation topics become too serious. Marguerite primps and dresses exquisitely to flatter her lover in order to give him the illusion that she is his exclusively. For example, in order to distract Armand from his jealousy over Marguerite's dealings with the duke, she dresses seductively so he will not resist her. Dumas describes the first time Marguerite sets out to seduce Armand. He writes: "En ce moment Marguerite sortit de son cabinet de toilette, coquettement coiffée de son bonnet de nuit orné de touffes de rubans jaunes, appelées techniquement des choux. Elle était ravissante ainsi" (131).

Armand's belief that all the *demi-mondaine's* effort to enchant him justifies his squandering an entire fortune on her constitutes a large part of the bourgeois's fantasy of loving a *demi-mondaine*. Dumas writes:

²⁰⁵ Neuschäfer insists that Dumas fils explores "le domaine de l'érotisme" with the intention of amusing his male readers in a way that does not threaten the bourgeois women who want to see "son ordre respecté" (22).

On blâme ce qui se ruinent pour des actrices et des femmes entretenues; ce qui m'étonne, c'est qu'ils ne fassent pas pour elles vingt fois plus de folies. Il faut avoir vécu, comme moi, de cette vie-là pour savoir combien les petites variétés de tous les jours qu'elle donnent à leur amant soudent fortement dans le coeur puisque nous n'avons pas d'autre mot, l'amour qu'il a pour elle. (138)

Thus, when Dumas *films* writes about Armand's willing participation in his own financial ruin, he could very well be justifying his own profligate approach to finances during his 1845 liaison with Marie Duplessis.

“Est-ce qu'on se gêne avec une fille comme moi?” The dominated *demi-mondaine*'s subservience and desire for recognition

Marguerite's self-abnegation and her search for approval from the bourgeois class she considers superior ensure that she will not try to integrate herself into their society.²⁰⁶ Marguerite declares her worthlessness at the beginning of the novel, when she dismisses Armand's amorous overtures as a waste of time on his part. She remains incredulous at his declaration of love and asks: “Est-ce qu'on se gêne avec une fille comme moi?”²⁰⁷ When she categorizes herself as a *fille*, she affirms the belief that she is not worthy of bourgeois status and therefore accepts that she cannot marry Armand.

Marguerite's acceptance of her social ostracism in Parisian society exemplifies Bourdieu's theory about the sociological phenomenon of individuals unconsciously internalizing the social order. He explains why people set objective limits for themselves when he claims: “Objective limits become a sense of limits, a practical anticipation of objective limits acquired by experience of objective

²⁰⁶ Though Neuschäfer insists that Marguerite successfully ingratiated herself with the bourgeois in the first half of the novel, Armand's father appears in the second half to ensure that Marguerite does not undermine “la morale bourgeoise” (24).

²⁰⁷ Dumas *films* 116.

limits, a 'sense of one's place,' which leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, places, and so forth from which one is excluded" (471).

Marguerite externalizes her internalized sense of unworthiness at the beginning of her relationship with Armand, when she asks: "Et puis des filles comme moi, une de plus ou de moins, qu'est-ce que cela fait?" (115). Once again, she confirms her inconsequential existence as well as that of other prostitutes who are equally inadequate. As such, without any protest, she acknowledges her alienated status in society. Her docility in an era agitated by revolution and civil unrest guarantees her non-violence and confirms bourgeois class dominance. Since Marguerite's inferior status affords her no means to challenge her domination, she holds onto the dream that her ceding to the bourgeois patriarch's wishes made her the "noble fille" that he said she was (235).

Even at the end of the novel, when the dying, lonely Marguerite pines away for Armand, she still does not regret her sacrifice of Armand at his bourgeois father's request. In a self-denigrating fashion, she says: "je n'étais après tout qu'une fille entretenue [...] ma vie passée ne me laissait aucun droit de rêver un pareil amour [Armand's sister's impending marriage]" (234). She does not protest her unhappy fate. Rather, she takes pride in Armand's father's gratitude; she insists on her own redemption through love and sacrifice. She says: "Je rayonnai d'orgueil en songeant à ce que je rachetais par cette nouvelle faute" (236).

Although Marguerite considers her sacrifice ennobling, Bourdieu would argue that, as a dominated agent, she is simply accepting the "objective limits" of

the social order. Bourdieu claims:

Dominated agents, who assess the value of their position and their characteristics by applying a system of schemes of perception and appreciation which is the embodiment of the objective laws whereby their value is objectively constituted, tend to attribute to themselves what the distribution attributes to them, refusing what they are refused ('That's not for the likes of us'), adjusting their expectations to their chances, defining themselves as the established order defines them, reproducing in their verdict on themselves the verdict the economy pronounces on them, in a word, condemning themselves to what is in any case their lot, *ta heautou*, as Plato put it, consenting to be what they have to be, 'modest,' 'humble,' and 'obscure.' (471)

Thus, Marguerite's agreement to give up Armand illustrates how a dominated individual declines something that has already been declined by society. Rather than protesting her inferiority or alienation (as real-life *demi-mondaine* Céleste Mogador does in her 1854 *Mémoires*), by demanding that he marry her, Marguerite stays in her place.

Marguerite not only accepts her inferiority, but further flatters the bourgeois by demanding their appreciation of her sacrifice for their class. In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes attributes the play's success to its privileging of the bourgeois myth of "Reconnaissance" (179). Though the play appears to be a work about the "une mythologie de l'Amour," Barthes insists that the "alienated" heroine's quest to gain recognition from her bourgeois "masters" is at the heart of the bourgeois's appreciation of the play (179). Barthes claims: "Marguerite aime pour se faire reconnaître, et à ce titre sa passion (au sens plus étymologique que sentimental) vient tout entière d'autui" (179). Despite her awareness of her

alienation, Barthes argues that Marguerite does not protest her social estrangement, but rather “se sait son objet mais ne se pense pas d’autre destination que de meubler le muse des maîtres” (181).

In exchange for her sacrificing Armand to his father, Barthes says that Marguerite is able to “se faire reconnaître par le monde des maîtres” (180). According to Barthes, if the bourgeois class (the bourgeois reader or audience) is grateful to Marguerite, it is because she not only affirms the worth of the bourgeois class, but she also refuses to challenge its values by demanding her place among them. In emphasizing her “positive side,” (Barthes claims that tuberculosis and her lofty speech make her “touching”), Barthes insists that the character of Marguerite “ne fait que les [les petits bourgeois] endormir” (182). In sum, Marguerite’s tacit embracement of the bourgeois as her “master” confirms a fact that the bourgeois already know – that their value system and order are superior to that of the lower class – and thus lulls them to sleep as a bedtime storybook complete with pretty colors and a comforting plot would a child.

“Si je me soignais, je mourrais”: What Marguerite’s death permits

If Marguerite’s acknowledged inferiority reassures the bourgeois of their dominant social status, then her imminent death affirms their moral beliefs: it assures them that she is punished for her transgressions. As if to check her power, Dumas *fils* demonstrates that Marguerite’s luxurious but depraved lifestyle comes at a high price. Indeed, Marguerite plunges herself into sybaritic behavior and overindulgence in order to escape the harsh reality of her social alienation. While she knows that dressing well empowers her, it also cause her undoing, for

Marguerite explains: “La vanité d’avoir des robes, des voitures, des diamants nous entraîne; on croit à ce que l’on entend, car la prostitution a sa foi, et l’on use peu à peu son coeur, son corps, sa beauté; on est redoutée comme une bête fauve, méprisée comme un paria [...]” (129).

She also pays for her hedonism with her health. However, when Armand implores her to take better care of herself, Marguerite replies: “Je ne puis pas dormir, il faut bien que je me distraie un peu...Si je me soignais, je mourrais. Ce qui me soutient, c’est la vie fiévreuse que je mène” (115). Though he expresses concern for her health, Armand also admits that Marguerite’s forced revelry and jollity excites him. He says: “Cette vie douloureuse que j’entrevois sous le voile doré qui la couvrait, et dont la pauvre fille fuyait la réalité dans la débauche, l’ivresse et l’insomnie, tout cela m’impressionnait tellement que je ne trouvais pas une seule parole” (117). Marguerite’s paleness and coughing attest to her physical suffering, which the romantic tradition valorized in its heroines, for physical suffering expressed the torment of the soul. At its simplest level, Dumas *fils*’s novel uses Marguerite’s consumption to make her a more interesting character²⁰⁸ and to end the play on a tragic and “lyrical”²⁰⁹ note. Nonetheless, when read in conjunction with the romantic tradition in which Dumas is writing, Marguerite’s illness, according to Sontag’s theory, serves as “the romanticized disease which cuts off a young life [...] A disease of the lungs is metaphorically, a disease of the soul” (17).

²⁰⁸ In *Illness as Metaphor*, Sontag claims: “The romantic treatment of death asserts that people were made singular, made more interesting by their illness.” 30.

²⁰⁹ Sontag writes: “TB was thought of – as a decorative, often lyrical death” (19).

It follows, then, that Marguerite's sadness and fatal consumption make her irresistible to Armand, because they serve as proof of her torment and grief over her "fall from virtue."²¹⁰ Dumas writes:

Ce mélange de gaiété, de tristesse, de candeur, de prostitution, cette maladie même qui devait développer chez elle la sensibilité des impressions comme l'irrabilité des nerfs, tout me faisait comprendre que si, dès la première fois, je ne prenais pas d'empire sur cette nature oublieuse et légère, elle était perdue pour moi. (118-119)

On the one hand, Marguerite's impending death accelerates and intensifies the plot, because both Armand and Marguerite realize that they must act on their feeling quickly before Marguerite perishes. Without a doubt, Marguerite accepts Armand as her lover so rapidly because she has little to lose. She declares: "Devant vivre moins longtemps que les autres, je me suis promis de vivre plus vite" (123). On the other hand, while Armand views Marguerite's declaration about her impending death as a challenge to win the favors of a jaded *demi-mondaine*, her assured mortality permits him to love her.

The fact that Armand knows his beloved is doomed to die frees him to enter an illicit liaison with her; he knows he will not be attached to her forever. Upon her death, society will forget his misstep and permit him to enter a socially sanctioned marriage with a bourgeois woman. In a nutshell, he will briefly taste illicit adventure without seriously jeopardizing his future.

Just as Marguerite's assured death permits Armand to briefly dabble in the lascivious *demi-monde* and temporarily idealize a harlot, the courtesan's death at

²¹⁰According to Maurois, Romantics such as Dumas *fils* idealized their mistresses by imagining that they were secretly sorry for their fall and miserable about the corruption at the hands of rich débauchés.

the beginning of the novel guarantees that any threat of her influence has been contained in her hermetically sealed coffin. There can be no doubt that Marguerite is dead or any fantasy about her sneaking away from Paris as Marion de Lorme does in Hugo's play. The novel horrifies with a graphic description of her decaying corpse. Thus, anyone who may have fancied her lifestyle or entertained ideas about her survival will be repelled.

Though Dumas represents Marguerite's wealth, luxury, and relative independence as appealing in the first half of the novel, the second half of Dumas *fil's* text counteracts this glamorization with its insistence on Marguerite's suffering and remorse over her life of vice. In Jann Matlock's estimation, bourgeois morality demands Marguerite's punishment. She writes: "Marguerite must therefore be shown to pay for her immorality with the wages of sin – her death by slow and painful disease" (110). Though Marguerite's influence supposedly dissipated with her death, Matlock insists that moralists feared the opposite. Matlock states:

Whether she was imagined as a seductress, as a redeemed Magdalene, or simply as a poor girl sacrificed to the desires of those around her, Marguerite's story was read as potentially endangering to its audience. Even represented within the strict network of tolerance, which exacts punishment as well as repentance, this prostitute aroused anxiety. Behind her story seemed to lie other stories that her critics feared might, because of her, be told. (112)

To sum up, in the initial phase of the *demi-mondaine's* existence, fascination with this intriguing creature best describes the largely positive response she inspired in both audience and author. She stimulated escapist

fantasies in readers as well as intrigue about her romanticized disease. Moreover, the *demi-mondaine* flattered the bourgeois by declaring her inferiority to them and by begging for recognition from them. Lastly, her death and the dramatic sight of her decaying corpse ensured that her lasciviousness had both been punished and sealed off in a way that allowed the bourgeois to fantasize about her life without risking the possibility of being contaminated by it.

PHASE 2: THE BACKLASH AGAINST THE *DEMI-MONDAINE*
“*La Dame aux Camélias* marqua le commencement du règne des filles”

Though the *demi-mondaine* as represented by Marguerite Gautier enjoyed a brief period of fame, in phase two of her career, a backlash broke out in the form of plays and novels that sought to cancel out all that had been celebrated in the figure. The key to interpreting the backlash that followed her brief reign is to examine what Dumas *filis* initially admired about her; for in understanding what he romanticized in the *demi-mondaine*, the reader discovers why he, Barrière, Augier, Stapleaux, and Zola later counteracted her notoriety with their harsh depictions of her.

As a result of Dumas *filis*'s popular novel, play, and all the literary works it spurred, the image of the *demi-mondaine* was everywhere.²¹¹ However, during the

²¹¹ The *lorette* and the *demi-mondaine* consequently co-existed in the early 1850s, though by this point in the century, the increasing personal wealth of bourgeois business men and stock market speculators allowed them to support both a bourgeois household with wife and children and a flashy abode with a lavish mistress who demanded millions. In other words, the *lorette* had to engage the aid of more than one lover to live well, while the *demi-mondaine* could depend on the wealth of one favored individual. If the elite class was more ostentatious about its fortune than it had been in the past, it was because France was wealthier than ever during the Second Empire. Urban Paris was being transformed by Hausmann, hence wider boulevards and convenient public transportation, coupled with new department stores, theaters and cafés, compelled more and more individuals to venture out into public. The *demi-mondaines* joined in the public parade and embraced the increasing commercialism, dashing around the city and the Bois de Boulogne in

period of the *demi-mondaine*'s ascension in the early 1850s, anxieties plagued French writers about capitalism and the shifts in class that it triggered, feminist activism and the discourse on female emancipation it generated, and corrupt politicians and the social instability their neglectful behavior threatened. In the same way that Dumas, the Goncourt brothers, and Sue made the *lorette* a "collective screen"²¹² onto which they projected their misgivings about capitalism, feminism, and social upheaval, Dumas *filis*, Theodore de Barrière, Émile Augier, and Emile Zola employed the *demi-mondaine* to the same end. Hence they used the *demi-mondaine* as the individual who concretized the historical processes troubling them during the Second Empire.²¹³ In sum, stage two of the *demi-mondaine*'s career entails writers penning unflattering works about her in an effort to contain her purported influence on upper-class women – for her fashion chic and her liberated lifestyle could undermine the patriarchy if the *grandes dames* followed her example.

As Matlock has suggested, moralists feared that "behind her [Marguerite's] story seemed to lie other stories" that might be told because of her (112). Indeed, critics feared that stories about Marguerite's mercantilist preference for wealth over people, her promiscuity and deceit, and her

their lavish carriages, showing off their latest dresses, hats and furs at the theater and opera. Thus social and economic factors accorded the *demi-mondaine* more access to wealth, power and fame than her fore sister, the *lorette*, whose fortune, according to Dumas, waxed and waned with the stock market. Thus the *demi-mondaine*'s lifestyle coincides with the increasing industrialization and wealth in France.

²¹² Rita Felski, "Modernity and Feminism," *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995) 1.

²¹³ Felski states: "Accounts of the modern age, whether academic or popular, typically achieve some kind of formal coherence by dramatizing or personifying historical processes; individual or collective human subjects are endowed with symbolic importance as exemplary bearers of temporal meaning."

independent and domineering ways would leak out of her tomb. Worse yet, some critics and moralists feared that these stories would encourage bourgeois women and even *grandes dames* to admire and even imitate the notorious life-style of Dumas's alluring heroine. Along these lines, Second Empire critics such as Stapleaux and Ernest Feydeau acknowledged the influence the *demi-mondaine* wielded in society, an influence they blamed on her frequent appearance in works of popular culture such as songs, Vaudeville plays, newspaper columns, and serialized *nouvelles*. Though Stapleaux and Feydeau faulted many organizations and individuals for encouraging the debauchery and the waste the *demi-mondaine* represented during the Second Empire, they blamed literature for giving rise to the *demi-mondaine*, and thus facilitating her influence on social habits. In 1866, Ernest Feydeau lamented: "Et, du théâtre, le demi-monde a envahi LE GRAND MONDE."²¹⁴ Stapleaux concurred seven years later when he proclaimed: '*La Dame aux Camélias*, qu'avait précédé *La Vie de Bohème*, marqua le commencement du règne des filles. Elles s'appelaient encore, à cette époque, des *lorettes*. *La littérature les consacra* (emphasis mine) (14). Dumas's work not only paved the way for other successful plays such as *Les Filles de marbre* and *Le Mariage d'Olympe* according to Stapleaux, it also influenced greatly all genres of literature (14). Such success meant that even "scandalous" works such as Arsène Houssaye's *Les Courtisanes du Grand Monde* failed to stir up controversy or protest, for as Stapleaux argues, "La courtisane s'était infiltrée partout, ou plutôt toutes les classes de la société avaient vu naître les leurs" (14).

²¹⁴ Ernest Feydeau, *Du luxe, des femmes, des moeurs, de la littérature et de la vertu* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1866) 85.

The *demi-mondaine*'s ties to anxieties about capitalism and the blurring of class boundaries

Through the figure of Marguerite, Dumas expresses anxiety about the increased insatiability and consumption encouraged by the capitalist system. Indeed, Susan Sontag's theorizing of consumption (which she calls tuberculosis) and cancer is instructive in analyzing the way in which Dumas *fills* employs Marguerite's disease as a way of concretizing mid-nineteenth century fears about capitalism and the social transformations it causes. Dumas *fills* uses the metaphor of TB as a vehicle to discuss the way capitalism was transforming the way individuals were conducting their lives in mid-nineteenth-century France.²¹⁵ According to Sontag, TB was viewed in the Victorian era as "a disease of low energy (and heightened sensitivity) [...] in an era in which there seemed to be no inhibitions on being productive, people were anxious about not having enough energy" (61). As outlined in chapter two, the modern era stirred up anxieties among writers worried about how the fast pace of life (accelerated by industrialization and technology) was destroying the traditional rhythm of a country habituated to following the cadence of nature as dictated by an agrarian economy. Linking mercantilism to consumption, Sontag argues that individuals worried about whether or not they possessed the stamina to keep up with the challenge of the hectic pace dictated by a capitalist economy. She asserts: "Early capitalism assumes the necessity of regulated spending, saving, accounting, discipline – an economy that depends on the rational limitation of desire. TB is

²¹⁵ Sontag 60-62.

described in images that sum up the negative behavior of nineteenth-century *homo-economicus*: consumption; wasting; squandering of vitality” (62).

When applied to *La Dame aux camélias*, Sontag’s theory sheds light on Dumas’s endorsement of bourgeois economy and his condemnation of the *demi-mondaine*’s dissipation of wealth. In both the novel and the play, Marguerite’s insistence on spending 100,000 francs a year to maintain her lifestyle drains the life out of her, and it risks causing Armand the same affliction (until his father intervenes). Duval, with his patriarchal intent of seeing his good name continue, insists that his son stop wasting his fortune on a *demi-mondaine*. Instead, Duval believed that Armand should save for a legitimate relationship in which he supports a wife and children.

Though attracted to her unbridled *joie de vivre*, Armand laments the fact that Marguerite is as great a spendthrift as her cohorts. Dumas writes: “Marguerite était d’une nature fort capricieuse, et faisait partie de ces femmes qui n’ont jamais regardé comme une dépense sérieuse les mille distractions dont leur existence se compose” (165). In his whirlwind affair with Marguerite, Armand showers her with the requisite flowers, theater seats, dinners, and excursions to the countryside that a courtesan demands (164). Although he realizes that these expenses are plunging him into debt, the fact that Armand decides to spend everything on Marguerite precipitates his rupture with her because his father will not allow him to squander all of his inheritance on a courtesan.

Indeed, Duval demands that the liaison between Marguerite and Armand end because it causes dangerous blurring of class boundaries. As the bourgeois,

Armand should rank above Marguerite in terms of class and power, though Marguerite's increasing wealth has called Armand's superiority into question. For example, despite Armand's willingness to cater to her whims, he is jealous of the other lovers Marguerite takes on to support her 100,000-franc-a-year lifestyle. When Armand complains about Marguerite's infidelities to Prudence, Marguerite's "friend" scoffs at his naivety, and explains to him the rules of the game. She states: "Mais comment voudriez-vous que les femmes entretenues de Paris fissent pour soutenir le train qu'elles mènent si elles n'avaient pas trois ou quatre amants à la fois! Il n'y a pas de fortune si considerable qu'elle soit, qui puisse subvenir seule aux dépenses d'une femme comme Marguerite" (142).

Even if at its simplest level, Armand's envy reads as a case of injured male pride or even shame about his shaky financial status, it also could be interpreted in terms of worry about class role reversals. Indeed, as a prostitute, Marguerite ranks below Armand on the social ladder because she has no official standing and technically should be subjugated to Armand (since she relies on him to pay her). However, the wealth Marguerite accrues from her dealings with other lovers could cause a power shift in the relationship according to Prudence, who warns Armand not to invest too much in his relationship with Marguerite. She says: "Ne donnez pas à une fille entretenue le droit de se dire votre créancière en quoi que ce soit" (143). In other words, Armand could eventually be overpowered by Marguerite, his inferior in terms of class, if he ever needed to borrow money from his lover he supposedly outranks in terms of social standing.

“Une lutte véritable s’établit entre les femmes honnêtes et les drôlesses”

Just as Marguerite’s capitalistic privileging of money over relationships risks unbalancing the power between men and women of different classes, it also threatens to blur class boundaries between women. Thus, yet another cause of anxiety about capitalism arises from the fear that prostitutes were actively influencing upper-class women. Indeed, Stapleaux claims that female aristocrats were beginning to regard *demi-mondaines* as role models. As the *demi-mondaines* gained visibility, Stapleaux holds that competition developed between women of acceptable social standing and members of the *demi-monde* who sought to imitate the world of privilege, luxury, and riches (16-17). Stapleaux writes: “L’établissement et la reconnaissance publique du demi-monde, d’un côté, l’abondance de l’argent, de l’autre, élargirent le cercle interlope d’une façon si grande, qu’une lutte véritable s’établit entre les femmes honnêtes et les drôlesses” (16).

The possibility of a *demi-mondaine*, a *persona non grata* in the official social world of the bourgeois, influencing women of a higher class, cast doubt upon the upper class’s ability to set an example for the lower orders in the opinion of Procureur General Dupin.²¹⁶ Specifically, he chastised the upper class’s ineffectiveness and general moral laxness in a 1865 address to the Senate. He exclaims:

On parle des courtisanes qui s’étalent dans les lieux publics. Oui, telle sera dans un équipage brillant, capable d’attirer les regards. Que fait la grande

²¹⁶ Le Procureur General Dupin, “Opinion de M. Le Procureur General Dupin sur le LUXE EFFRÉNÉ DES FEMMES,” cited in Ernest Feydeau, *Du Luxe, des femmes, des moeurs, de la littérature* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1866) 200.

société? Elle regarde, elle prend modèle, et ce sont ces demoiselles qui donnent les modes même aux dames du monde; ce sont elles qu'on copie; voilà l'exemple que donne la haute société. (200)

Hence, a fear of the lower orders shaping the morals and lifestyles of the *grand monde* plagued the very class habituated to dictating social mores and norms. Though Feydeau does not agree with Dupin that the *demi-mondaines* truly persuaded “honest” women to dress or act in a certain manner (indeed he believes that the “femmes honnêtes are too well educated and possess too much taste to fall prey to the sway of the *demi-mondaine*),²¹⁷ he shares the same fantasy about class boundaries being blurred. The fact that Feydeau spends an entire chapter discussing why the *demi-mondaines* will never gain parity with upper-class women (they do not have enough social distinction or education to be a truly moralizing force) indicates his anxiety about dissipating class boundaries.²¹⁸ Indeed, if he had not worried that signs that had once clearly marked honest women and prostitutes were being obscured, he would not have taken such pains to exaggerate the differences that separated the two types of women.

In addition to signaling a loss of clearly marked lines of demarcation between the once exemplary upper classes and the infamous lower classes, the *demi-mondaine*'s purported role model status stimulated fantasies about loss of patriarchal dominance. For example, Stapleaux imagined that *demi-mondaine* could inspire the *grandes dames* to commit adultery and thereby undermine the sanctified bourgeois marriage upon which social order was founded. Stapleaux

²¹⁷ Feydeau 101-102.

²¹⁸ See Chapter VII in Feydeau.

claims that even the wealthiest, most venerable “grandes dames” strove to imitate the courtesans, spending as much money as the courtesans “afin d’entretenir l’enthousiasme de leur gallants” (17). As a result, Stapleaux declares that one could no longer tell apart a distinguished socialite from a prostitute. Because husbands spent large amounts of time with their mistresses, they incidentally left their wives at home with a “dangerous amount of freedom” (18). In her efforts to compete with the *demi-mondaine*’s expensive sense of fashion, the *grande femme* overspent her budget, and asked a male friend to lend her money. When she spent even more money than the friend lent her, she slept with him to make up for her debt. In his “À propos de *La Dame aux camélias*,” Dumas concurs, saying that in her attempt to compete with the *demi-mondaine*’s fashionable appearance, she internalized “le même langage, les mêmes danses, les mêmes aventures, les mêmes amours, disons tout, les mêmes spécialités” (28). Thus, in her efforts to imitate the *demi-mondaine*, Dumas and Stapleaux claim that the *grande dame* became one herself.²¹⁹

The prospect of an honest woman turning into a *femme entretenue* horrified moralists not only because the wife’s adultery spelled dishonor for the cuckolded husband, but also because it seriously weakened the patriarchal structure on which social order was founded. Indeed, as argued in the historical section at the beginning of the chapter, bourgeois morality preached domesticity and the sanctity of marriage to women who were to remain confined to their homes. Bourgeois women were to serve their husbands and fathers and defer to

²¹⁹ Stapleaux calls these types of compromised wives “les courtisanes du vrai monde” (20).

them financial and legal responsibilities. Men believed that stable social order required the separation of sexes, for as McMillan explains, they still associated confusion of gender roles and women's public participation in revolution with the disastrous and blood chaos of the Terror. The fear that an honest woman in mid-nineteenth-century France would sell herself like a harlot obscured the criteria that separated virtuous women from prostitutes. In committing adultery, a wife not only soiled the domestic shrine, but also disobeyed the patriarch who commanded her to remain loyal to him. Given the Civil Code's institutionalization of female obedience, a woman's infidelity was considered punishable by law; whereas a wife could be incarcerated for adultery, her husband might "merely be fined."²²⁰ Indeed, the patriarchal ideology of the period deemed a woman's extramarital affairs as a threat to the social order -- for women's disobedience and wantonness could incite violent disorder in the same manner the efforts of the female *sans culottes* did in the 1790s.

The *demi-mondaine* as dangerous example of female enfranchisement

Critics not only abhorred the adulterous and wasteful habits they feared the *demi-mondaines* encouraged, but also dreaded their independence and desire to dominate. Eager to control her lover, Marguerite tells Armand that she envisioned a lover who was "confiant, soumis et discret" (122). In contrast with the social convention of subservient women serving men, in her quest to run the relationship, Marguerite frequently gave Armand orders, dictating when and where he should appear (137). Also, she asked him to obey her "aveuglement"

²²⁰ Goldberg Moses 19-20.

(133). In a society in which men ruled as women's masters, Armand proclaims himself utterly subjugated to Marguerite. He says: "Marguerite, fais de moi tout ce tu voudras, je suis ton esclave, ton chien" (163). Marguerite inverted gender roles in her relationship with Armand by asking him to live by her terms. For example, Armand agreed to consent to all her desires and tolerate her multiple lovers (164). Though he obeys her wishes, he expresses reticence about taking the subordinated role in the relationship. He states: "Comme je ne pouvais pas changer la vie de ma maîtresse, je changeais la mienne. Je voulais avant toute chose ne pas laisser à mon esprit le temps de réfléchir sur le rôle que je venais d'accepter" (164). In sum, Armand, in playing an unnatural role, plunges himself into a life of chaos that bourgeois morality has hoped to eradicate with the doctrine of separate spheres and clearly demarcated gender roles.

Marguerite further violated bourgeois convention by appearing regularly in public instead of tending to the hearth like her bourgeois counterparts. As such, she wielded influence and attracted the public notice that feminists were advocating. Moreover, members of *La Gazette des femmes* advocated women's rights to sexual freedom. Though it is unlikely that feminists advocated women selling themselves for sex, Marguerite exercised the right to decide herself who she would take as sexual partners, unlike the bourgeois girls who had to marry the man their parents chose for them.

In an era obsessed with disease and containment, Dumas *fils* employs Marguerite's consumption as a metaphor for her infectious immorality. Marguerite's wanton and lascivious spirit manifests itself in the form of physical

illness, externalizing her interior drives for independence and dominance. As Sontag explains: “Disease is what speaks through the body, a language for dramatizing the mental: a form of self expression” (43). Thus, Marguerite’s “unnatural” desire to live independently and to occasionally dominate her lovers surfaces as an ailment. In making her defiant behavior that went against the grain of patriarchy a tangible disease, Dumas *fils* communicates the danger such a debauched lifestyle could have on a bourgeois woman who might find the *demi-mondaine*’s pursuits attractive and thus take up careers and challenge the *status quo* in general.

As I examined in chapter two, Sue and the Goncourt brothers also evoked the metaphor of disease to denounce the *lorette*’s unruliness. Just as the Goncourt brothers and Sue condemned the *lorette* as a contagious wound, Jules Janin sees the non-traditional intellectual *bas-bleu* as an equally dangerous affliction to society. Though not sexually promiscuous like the *demi-mondaine*, the *bas-bleu*, as described by Jules Janin in the *Français peints par eux-mêmes*, represented a menacing figure who needed to publicly exercise her intellect in writing and in salons.²²¹ They claimed that such behavior made her a travesty of the female gender and a “plaie social.” Female intellectual and economic independence – whether demonstrated by a prostitute or a learned woman of society – was perceived by writers as emasculating, so the moralists and novelists employed morbid metaphors such as “consumption” and “plaie social” to dramatize the danger the deviant woman’s behavior posed to the social order. Thus, the

²²¹ Jules Janin, “Le Bas-Bleu,” *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes; encyclopédie morale du dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: L. Curtner, 1840-1842).

phenomenon of using the image of disease to discuss social problems, figured prominently in the nineteenth-century.

Dumas *fils* denounced Marguerite's unconventional lifestyle, her immoral sexual encounters, and her reckless spending habits as infectious evils that undermined the patriarchal order. In expressing his concerns about these trends through the metaphor of a deadly disease, Dumas *fils* made these habits tangible in order to better dramatize his message that deviant female behavior (as represented by the *demi-mondaine*), could destroy the social order. Thus, underneath the romantic image of Marguerite's poetic death by consumption lies Dumas *fils*'s conservative patriarchal agenda that seeks to frighten any woman interested in imitating the *demi-mondaine*'s dangerous pursuits.

“On devait donner à ce mot demi-monde une autre signification”: Dumas *fils* rewrites the *demi-monde*

Even though Dumas *fils* earned much success depicting the gay, but debauched lives of the *demi-monde* in *La Dame aux camélias*, he later regretted this hedonistic image not only because it was much maligned by critics, but also because he claimed prostitution was infiltrating all layers of society.²²² Whereas *femmes entretenues* in the past were reserved for small number of privileged individuals, he insisted that society was heading toward “une prostitution universelle” (28). Indeed, the nature of prostitution was changing as the wealth of the *nouveaux riches* increased in the Second Empire. Moreover, as he later noted

²²² Dumas *fils*, “À propos de *La Dame aux camélias*,” 28.

in his retrospective “À propos de *La Dame aux camélias*,” prostitutes, driven by greed, stopped loving or making noble sacrifices (28). He states:

Le coeur a donc complètement disparu de cette transaction entre l’homme libre et la femme libre, et cette transaction se réduit à ces termes: ‘J’ai de la beauté, tu as de l’argent, donne-moi ce que tu as, je te donnerai ce que j’ai. Tu n’as plus rien? Adieu! Je ne fais pas plus de crédit que le boulanger. (28)

To counteract what he considered the growing ranks of greedy, heartless *femmes entretenues*, Dumas fils rewrote *La Dame aux camélias*, specifically distancing the *Demi-Monde* from the image of the pleasure-seeking hetaera so as to not further glamorize a creature he claimed no longer existed (28-29). He states:

On devait donner à ce mot demi-monde une autre signification que celle qu’il a, et ce néologisme, que j’étais fier d’introduire dans la langue française, si hospitalière au XIXe siècle, sert à designer, par l’erreur ou par l’insouciance de ceux qui l’emploient la classe des femmes dont j’avais voulu séparer celles-là.²²³

Thus, to refute criticism concerning his idealization of the lives of prostitutes, he denies that the *demi-monde* refers to courtesans. Rather, he insists that in dictionaries in the future, the *demi-monde* “ne représente pas, comme on le croit, la cohue des courtisanes, mais la classe des *déclassées* [...] Il est séparé des honnêtes femmes par le scandale public, des courtisanes par l’argent: là, il est borné par un article du code; ici, par un rouleau d’or”(9). In contrast with the mysterious and often rural origins of the courtesans who have worked their way up the social ladder, Dumas insists that the true members of the *demi-monde* possess “ses preuves” and “ont eu des racines dans la société régulière” (11). He

²²³ Alexandre Dumas fils, Avant-Propos, *Le Demi-Monde. Théâtre complet*. Vol 2 (Paris: Calmann Levy, 1890) 9.

writes: “Ce monde se compose en effet, des femmes toutes de souches honorables, qui, jeunes filles, épouses, mères, ont été de plein droit accueillies et choyées dans les meilleures familles, et qui ont déjécté” (11).

Ironically enough, the very work he pens to play down what critics consider his glorification of the world of prostitutes gives rise to the very name that describe the world he celebrates in *La Dame aux camélias*. His efforts to reshape the *demi-monde* of prostitutes, artists, and parvenus as a society of deracinated society women who lost official status to a careless illicit affair fail, just as he predicts in his preface to the *Demi-Monde*. Given the “dernières oscillations de la planète sociale,” Dumas *fiils* says he fears the world of prostitutes will end up confused with what he considers the veritable *demi-monde* (12). He writes: “J’ai grand peur [...] que la bousculade ne devienne générale, que ma définition ne soit pour nos neveux un détail purement archéologique” (12). Indeed, his efforts to sanitize the *demi-monde* by refiguring it as a society of fallen aristocrats do not succeed, for few adopted the definition in Dumas *fiils*’s era and it continues to signify “courtesan” to this day.

In his *Demi-Monde* (1855), Dumas *fiils* excludes from the play the problematized figure of the prostitute and the shady world of bohemian artists, gamblers, and *revendeuses de toilettes* to which she belongs. In fact, he defines the “*demi-monde*,” or “half-world,” as a group of married women estranged from their husbands, who banded together after they have been repudiated and thus ejected from their marriages for their adulterous affairs.²²⁴ According to Olivier

²²⁴ Alexandre Dumas *fiils*, *Le Demi-Monde* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1884) 100-101.

de Jalin, the blasé *homme du monde* who frequents the four hapless women in the play (Suzanne, the status-seeking woman who invented a title – la Baronne d’Ange — and a fake marriage as well; Madame de Santis, a “widow” abandoned by her husband after she cheated on him; La Vicomtesse de Vernières, a widow; and her niece, Marcelle, an educated, but orphaned young woman being corrupted by the lascivious tales her companions recount to her), the *demi-monde* looks legitimate until one notices the absence of husbands (99). Olivier warns Raymond de Nanjac, his new friend, not to be fooled by the reasonable appearance of Suzanne and her friends. He says:

Les femmes qui vous entourent ont toutes une faute dans leur passé, une tâche sur leur nom; elles pressent les unes contre les autres pour qu’on le voie le moins possible; et, avec la même origine, le même extérieur et les mêmes préjugés que les femmes de la société, elles se trouvent ne plus en être, et composent ce que nous appelons le “Demi-monde,” qui vogue comme une île flottante sur l’océan parisien, et qui appelle, qui recueille, qui admet tout ce qui tombe, tout ce qui émigre, tout ce qui se sauve de la terre ferme, sans compter les naufragés de rencontre, et qui viennent on ne sait d’où. (99)

This new-fangled world, Olivier tells Raymond, reflects a new patriarchal morality in which women pay dearly for infidelity. He explains:

Depuis que les maris, armés du code, ont eu le droit d’écarter du sein de la famille la femme qui oubliait les engagements pris, il s’est opéré dans les moeurs conjugales une modification qui a créé un monde nouveau; car toutes ces femmes comprises, repudiées, que devenaient-elles? (100)

In spite of the shameful status of these women, on the surface this “bastard society” appears legitimate; however, beneath its sparkling, glamorous allure lies a history of scandalous tales of dishonored families, financial ruin, and mothers separated from their children (101).

Though Dumas *fils* dodges criticism by shying away from direct references to prostitutes, he does moralize about the evils of female sexual activity outside the sacred union of marriage, suggesting that women separated from their husbands are a more innocuous form of a harlot. He claims to illustrate the danger women without legitimate status exert on the lives of innocent girls such as Marcelle hoping to marry well. With all their illicit sexual activity outside marriage and their social climbing, the play implies that the *demi-mondaines* could ruin the marriage prospects of an "honest" girl who would suffer from guilt by association.

In his play, I argue that Dumas *fils* essentially rewrites Balzac's *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, presenting yet another variation of the woman as the object of exchange between two men. Specifically, Esther's objectification in *Splendeurs* is comparable to Suzanne's in Dumas *fils*'s work. In both works, the writers punish the woman who uses sex to climb the social ladder while the male characters forge bonds out of the prostitute's containment. The Baronne Suzanne d'Ange's scheme to redeem her tainted past by making a legitimate marriage with de Nanjac is thwarted when the aristocrat Olivier de Jalin and the officer Raymond de Nanjac expose her plans, sacrificing her in the name of male "honor" and friendship. At the end of the play, Suzanne's efforts to move up the social ladder are checked, she is revealed as a fraud, and is banished to Italy where no one knows about her past. In a similar manner, Esther's dreams of redemption are dashed – for she had hoped to purify herself with love for Lucien, but is instead sacrificed by Vautrin in the name of Lucien's ambition.

Indeed, Dumas *filis*'s *Demi-Monde* is in part an innocuous rewriting of *La Dame aux camélias* drafted to fend off criticism. As Mrs. E. Squier has asserted, Dumas caved into critics and wrote the *Demi-Monde* to save face. She declares: "It is said that the *Demi-Monde* was written as a counterpoise to the previous production; a weight thrown into the scale of public opinion, to restore the equilibrium of a sinking reputation."²²⁵

More importantly, however, the *Demi-Monde* sheds light on his response to women's involvement in political, economic, and social change that occurred between 1848 and 1855. These changes, according to Stephen S. Stanton, in his "Introduction" to *Camille and Other Plays*, altered Dumas *filis*'s purpose as a writer. Stanton explains:

Having himself been the intemperate lover of a spectacular and wealthy femme galante, he now began to take refuge in masochistic apology, in overcompensation for the guilt and insecurity that his recklessness had entailed. In later plays he became more and more the preacher, less and less the man of the theatre. (xxxi)

Thus, Dumas *filis* grew more moralistic with each passing year, and began to "preach" about women and their place by the hearth as well as the punishment they should endure should they violate their marriages with adulterous relations. In other words, the more female activists demanded female emancipation, the more in his plays Dumas *filis* campaigned against these cries for liberty. Specifically, Dumas *filis* excludes the frank remarks Marguerite makes about her "fille" status in the novel as well as the passages in which she demands Armand's

²²⁵Alexandre Dumas *filis*, *The Demi-Monde: A Satire on Society*, trans. Mrs. E. G. Squier (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co, 1858) 1.

subjugation from the dramatic version he wrote four years later. Indeed, he edits out any mention of strong, proletarian women whom readers associated with the violence of 1848. As such, he downplays the association between *demi-mondaines* and working-class women who violated the prescribed gender roles by mounting barricades and participating in street violence.

Even before Dumas *fils* retracted his glamorization of the *demi-mondaine* in *Le Demi-Monde*, Théodore de Barrière and Lambert Thisboust, sought to counteract the popularity of *La Dame aux camélias* in their *Filles de Marbre* of 1853.²²⁶ In the play, the ancient courtesans of the past, so glamorized by Dumas *fils*, are now denigrated as heartless creatures incapable of love. The beginning of the play takes place in Ancient Greece. Gorgias, the rich bourgeois, has commissioned Phidias to sculpt life-sized replicas of the courtesans Aspasia, Lais, and Phyrné. Enamored of the real-life courtesans, Phidias informs Gorgias that he no longer wants to sell the sculptures. Gorgias in turn threatens to sue Phidias, claiming that he has a right to the statues. Phidias, smitten with his creations, fancies himself to be a new Pygmalion who has the power to animate his works of genius. Ever the passionate artist, Phidias claims that the statues belong to him because no one can buy works of art, just as one does not purchase genius or love. His friend Diogène's warning that everything is for sale is an anachronistic protest against the virulent capitalism of the Second Empire which seemed to permit the bourgeois to purchase anything they desired. When Gorgias comes to seize the statues, Phidias refuses to give them up and Diogène says that he has a solution:

²²⁶ According to an article in the *Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe siècle*, *Les Filles de Marbre* “est la réfutation de *la Dame aux camélias*” 375.

"Il faut savoir qui les statues veulent suivre."²²⁷ Diogène shines his lantern of truth on rivals Gorgias and Phidias. The poor artist implores the "filles de marbre" to stay with the one who created them, and is devastated when they select the rich bourgeois who offers them gold. Diogène expresses his disgust when he says: "Je vous reconnais bien là, ô filles de marbre! Courtisanes du passé, courtisanes de l'avenir."

In the second half of the play, the courtesans are just as conniving and heartless in contemporary Paris. Marco (the modern embodiment of Aspasia), the most devious of the group, tears the honest artist away from his mother and the young girl who adores him. Overpowered by his attraction to Marco, he abandons his art to live with her. She grows tired of him and rejects him. His affair with her ultimately squelches his artistic promise, costs him his family, and in the end, his life. Although one may read this play as a rewriting of the Samson and Delilah myth in that Raphaël, the artist, surrenders his phallic chisel (le ciseau) to the overpowering Marco, thereby loses all his strength as an artist – its importance lies elsewhere. This work's significance lies in its break with the tradition of romanticizing the past. The doubling of the ancient courtesan with her modern equivalent reveals that each is reprehensible. Just as Dumas *fils* distances himself in the *Demi-Monde* from the glamorized courtesan Marguerite, Barrière and

²²⁷ Theodore de Barrière and L. Thiboust, *Les Filles de Marbre Drame en cinq actes Mêlé de Chant* (Représenté pour la première fois, à Paris, sur le théâtre du Vaudeville, le 17 mai 1853) Nouvelle Edition. (Calmann Lévy: Paris, 1883).

Thisboust, as part of the backlash project, reject the notion that ancient courtesans were ever worthy creatures.

Finally, Émile Augier and Edouard Foussier's *Les Lionnes pauvres* illustrates how the glamour, luxury and wealth of this privileged harlot lures an honest married bourgeois woman into debt. Seduced by the glimmer of the *demi-mondaine's* life-style, Séraphine, the spoiled young wife of Pommeau, a 60-year-old *maître clerc*, buys many expensive clothes and laces in hopes of procuring social status. Unable to pay off her debt, she prostitutes herself to her husband's friend in order to produce the outrageous sum demanded by the shady *revendeuse de toilettes*. Pommeau eventually realizes that his meager income could by no means purchase the luxury in which he and his wife live. When he realizes that his wife is a "femme entretenue," he abandons her and seeks out his wife's accomplice. When he asks to stay with his friends Léon and Thérèse, he discovers that Léon is the one who has been supporting his wife. In the end, Séraphine's sexual transgressions and her attempts to climb the social ladder lead to her downfall. Pommeau refuses to forgive her and throws her out of his home, leaving her no alternative but prostitution to survive.

To sum up, the second phase in the *demi-mondaine's* career is characterized by the backlash that broke out against her ubiquity and celebrated status. Indeed, anxieties about the *demi-mondaine* blurring class boundaries and spurring interest in female enfranchisement abounded and distressed writers and critics. Dumas *fils* regretted his sympathetic depiction of Marguerite and therefore drafted the *Demi-monde* in 1855 in an effort to downplay the notoriety of the

demi-mondaine. Playwrights Theodore de Barrière and Émile Augier shared Dumas *fils*'s concern that through literature, the *demi-mondaines* were influencing society, and wrote plays in an attempt to diminish her notoriety and counteract her purported influence. In short, the backlash against the *demi-mondaine* developed in response to the writer's anxieties about capitalism, female emancipation, and social upheaval.

PHASE THREE: DISGUST

The *demi-mondaine* as scapegoat for Second Empire corruption

In the last phase of the *demi-mondaine*'s career, writers are no longer simply trying to counter her influence – they want to eliminate her all together. I argue that the backlash against the *demi-mondaine* culminates in Émile Zola's *Nana* (1880), a work in which he blames the fall of the Second Empire on the fatal combination of capitalism and degenerate female sexuality as embodied by the *demi-mondaine*. Zola's enflamed rhetoric evokes images of rot and decay²²⁸ in a way not previously described in literary works denouncing the *demi-mondaine* and her predecessors the *lorette* and the *courtisane*. Whereas authors such as the Goncourts brothers and Sue employed metaphorical terms like “plaie sociale” as well as “gangrène” to describe the *lorette*'s harmful influence, Zola, in the graphic death scene that closes the novel, portrays Nana as a metonymy for the Second

²²⁸For further information concerning how Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet's *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris* (1837) influenced Zola's theories of decay and infection as presented in *Nana*, read Charles Bernheimer's riveting chapter on Parent's conflation of the prostitute's vagina and the sewers as sites of decomposition and receptacles of waste. According to Alain Corbin, Parent's comparison of a prostitute to a sewer is logical because “the moral bases of such a conviction are evident: in the author's mind, the virulence of the illness transmitted by female sewers, by the vaginal filth of fallen women, is naturally linked to the mire and to excremental effluvia.” In other words, prostitutes and sewers are both channels for human waste. Corbin quoted in Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989) 16.

Empire whose putrefying corpse signals the moral and social collapse of the establishment.

Stapleaux anticipates Zola's depiction of Nana by nine years when he declares that women—the *demi-mondaines* in particular—were responsible for the ruinous state of France's affairs (both financial and political) after the Second Empire's collapse, which was precipitated by the humiliating defeat France suffered at the hand of the Germans in 1870. Stapleaux blames the social collapse that followed the "orgie impériale" on the immoral women who pursued revelry, luxury, and entertainment instead of a life of monogamous marriage with children which forms the backbone of social stability. Stapleaux describes the reigning decadence and hedonism of the Second Empire as emasculating the virility "of the great nation of France," and accuses women – prostitutes in particular – of hastening the demoralizing chaos that leads to France's downfall (26-27). Stapleaux writes:

Quand la demoralization s'empare d'une nation, c'est la femme qui l'accomplit surtout, c'est la femme qui, n'étant plus ni épouse, ni mère, mais une creature-vénale, dévergondée, sans honte et sans pudeur, n'est plus tout cela, n'apporte plus dans la vie de tous une force véritable; c'est la femme qui retombe et entraîne tout avec elle. L'homme s'agite, la femme le mène! (27)

Appealing to the patriarchal ideology of the period which considers woman as a moralizing influence on husbands and children, Stapleaux considers woman the cornerstone of the social foundation. He claims: "Moraliser la femme, c'est créer la société – car moraliser la femme, c'est faire la mère, et les bonnes mères font

les vrais hommes, les patriots, les citoyens des peuples forts, les membres des sociétés bien constituées, que rien ne peut faire disparaître, dont rien ne peut compromettre le sort” (27). In other words, when women stray from their role as mother and wife, they become convenient scapegoats for social ills. Charging women with all the moral responsibility in society essentially frees up men to behave as they wish. Thus, if they make bad decisions and plunge the country into war, they can simply shift the blame to women.

“Avec elle, la pourriture qu’on laissait fermenter dans le peuple, remontait et pourrissait l’aristocratie” : Capitalism, class conflict, and sex in Zola’s *Nana*

In *Nana*, Zola argues that capitalism and deviant sexuality converge on the figure of the *demi-mondaine* and spell disaster for the Second Empire. According to Zola, capitalism and prostitution are two interlinking forces that compound one another – for capitalism not only generates social levelers such as Nana determined to use the wealth they gain under the capitalist system to inflict revenge on the upper classes that had oppressed them – but also weakens the upper-classes and *nouveaux riches*. In other words, the aristocracy – normally the ones to set an example for their social inferiors – are so distracted by money and the prospects of pleasure that accompany prosperous times, that they do not recognize the danger Nana poses until it is too late. By then, their families have been destroyed and their authority has been undermined to the point that the Second Empire has collapsed and France has suffered a humiliating defeat by the Germans. Throughout the novel, Zola emphasizes her association with decay; he not only evokes the depraved squalor of her social milieu, but also suggests that

mingling of social classes will cause the hegemony of the upper-class to rot away -- for contact with the degenerate, infectious proletariat will corrode the stable structure of the dominant class.²²⁹

Just as money and the power, privilege, and pleasure it purchases mesmerize the aristocrats in the novel, so too does Nana's unyielding, animalistic sexuality with her overpowering odor that attracts normally straight, upstanding aristocrats like Muffat. According to Zola, Nana's sex organ and smell will not only infect and trigger rot in the men she sleeps with, but will also spoil society.²³⁰

Two key scenes in *Nana* illustrate the way Zola expresses his reservations about capitalism and female sexuality through the figure of the *demi-mondaine*: the scene in which Nana is described as the "Mouche d'or" that has sprung out of the rottenness of poverty to seek vengeance on the aristocracy, and the one a few paragraphs later in which she is an animal that terrifies her lover with her overpowering sexuality.

²²⁹ Zola, who sought credibility as a scientist by outlining his beliefs in his *Roman Expérimental* (1880), supported the theory of degenerate heredity in his *Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire*, the twenty-novel study of the fictional Rougon-Macquart families. In the *Roman Expérimental*, Zola applies scientist Claude Bernard's experimental method, as described in *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, to literature, by simply substituting the word "author" for "doctor." Just as Bernard was trying to persuade the public that medicine was a science, not an art, Zola hoped to achieve the same with literature, stating that the experimental method could lead to a "connaissance de la vie physique et intellectuelle." *Le Roman Expérimental*, 1175. Zola views himself as an anthropologist, who, aided by his experimental methodology, can demonstrate how heredity and social milieu determine how men behave in society. The images of rot and decay coupled with the fear of contagion that fascinated Zola permeate *Nana*. Under the guise of scientist, Zola uses these images to describe Nana, a victim of degenerate heredity, as both a child and agent of social deterioration who wreaks havoc on the upper classes out of revenge. Yet in the end, any of Zola's attempts at scientific objectivity are discredited when one considers how Nana's decomposing body becomes a metonymy for the corrupt Second Empire that will be demolished during the Franco-Prussian war.

²³⁰ Jill Warren, "Zola's View of Prostitution in *Nana*." *The Image of the Prostitute in Modern Literature*, ed. Pierre L. Horn and Mary Beth Pringle (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1984) 34.

In the first scene, Nana is narcissistically undressing in front of the mirror while her lover, the Comte Muffat, is reading an article by a theater critic named Fauchery about Nana entitled “La Mouche d’Or.” Fauchery recounts the story of a girl descended from four or five generations of alcoholics whose blood has been tainted by alcohol and poverty which has taken the form of “un détraquement nerveux de son sexe de femme.”²³¹ Nana has sprung out of the rotteness that fermented among the lower classes as a fly that has come to infect the aristocracy (189). The scene that describes Nana’s rise out of the slums takes place during the Second Empire, a period when goods are being bought and sold, and the sale of sex is no exception. As a prostitute, Nana is the ultimate figure of capitalism because she sells the only thing she possesses – her body – for money. Thus, Nana’s body becomes a sexual commodity – she uses it out of economic necessity, taking lovers not for sexual pleasure but to pay her bills.²³² According to Jill Warren, Nana and her courtesan friends are “merchants of sex” while their lovers, usually rich bourgeois men or aristocrats, are the “consumers.”²³³

Yet Nana’s story is not only an example of bad genes and a poor environment – it is also a tale of the class struggle between the proletariat and the upper class. Nana’s situation illustrates Marx’s theory of the continuous “history of class struggles,” a battle between the “oppressor and oppressed” that will end “either in a revolutionary reconstitution of the society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes.”²³⁴ Thus, the oppression of the proletariat,

²³¹ Émile Zola, *Nana* (Paris: Bookking International, 1993) 189.

²³² Warren 34.

²³³ Warren 37.

²³⁴ Frederick Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981) 20.

comprised of Nana and her fellow *demi-mondaines*, will continue as long as an economic structure like capitalism permits a propertied class, which consists of people like Muffat and his peers, to exploit a lower class in the name of profit.

But the proletariat, a class struggling against its oppression, seeks vengeance on the upper class, as is evidenced in the words and images that describe Nana in Fauchery's article which is a *mise en abîme* of the novel. In the article, Zola explicitly links Nana to rotteness and decay, images that tie in with Parent's own vision of prostitution,²³⁵ when he names her both "a child and agent of social degeneration."²³⁶ Simulacrum of rotteness and decay illustrate the debased class to which she belongs. Zola first explicates her inferior origins: "La Mouche d'or était l'histoire d'une jeune fille, née de quatre ou cinq générations d'ivrognes, le sang gâté par une longue hérédité de misère et de boisson, qui se transformait chez elle en un détraquement nerveux de son sexe de femme."²³⁷ Words like "ivrognes," "le sang gâté," and "hérédité de misère et de boisson" suggest that the degeneration of her genes that is caused by an inheritance of poverty and alcoholism. These uncomfortable conditions are the result of years of capitalistic oppression of the proletariat, which is ultimately responsible for the nervous derangement of her sexual instinct. Zola writes: "Elle avait poussé dans

²³⁵ Parent's vision of decay permeates *Nana*, notably in scenes that feature Nana in the theater, another form of the bordello, if we are to believe Bordenave. In one scene that foreshadows Nana's decomposing body at the end of the novel, Muffat, in Nana's dressing room, smells her "odeur de femme" and think of a "bouquet of tubéreuses" that once wilted in his room (126). The two smells evoke a vivid image of putrefaction which occurs again when Muffat waits for Nana in a "cour, étroite, humide comme un fond de puits" in chapter seven (182). The damp, dark courtyard is a metaphor for Nana's vagina, which is in turn a continuation of Parent's conception of the prostitute as a sewer, a dark, hidden, human pit that both fascinated and terrified Parent. Zola's description of the wet theater gutter symbolizes Nana's depraved, lowly origins (182).

²³⁶ Frederick Brown, "Zola and the making of *Nana*," *Hudson Review* 45.2 (1992): 196.

²³⁷ Zola 189.

le faubourg, sur le pavé parisien” (189). The slums and gutter conjure up images of the decay that plagued her neglected class. Nana emerges out of her oppressed environment “grande, belle, de chair superbe ainsi qu’une plante de plein fumier” (189). Thus, the dung heap she rises out of represents the horrific conditions inflicted upon her class. Despite her lowly origin, the article states that Nana will avenge the paupers and outcasts from which she came (189). The article continues: “Avec elle, la pourriture qu’on laissait fermenter dans le peuple, remontait et pourrissait l’aristocratie” (189). Hence the aristocracy, which has permitted the rotteness that pervaded the proletariat to ferment, is itself disintegrating. The decaying aristocracy suggests that the powerful class is being overturned.

At odds with the oppressive capitalistic system that attempted to keep Nana confined to a life of squalor and poverty, she becomes a force of nature that will corrupt and disorganize Paris “entre ses cuisses de neige” (189-190). Consequently, what exists between her legs has the power to ruin the aristocracy whose economic dominance has permitted the lower classes to deteriorate. The snow-white color of her thighs implies a certain amount of purity, newness and cleanliness, three qualities that are directly contrasted with the decaying, the over-used worn-out dirtiness that exists among the rabble.

In the last part of the article, Nana emerges as an insect that has flown out of dung (“envolée d’ordure”), another metaphor for the foul proletariat (190). Nana is the fly that will spread infection, the uncontrollable prostitute Parent fears will contaminate the aristocracy with syphilis. In short, Zola, through Fauchery’s

article, demonstrates how Nana's tainted genes and degenerate social environment cause Nana to become a prostitute and how she in turn will corrupt and infect all that she touches.

Nana's degenerate origin, inherent contagiousness,²³⁸ and social climbing are not the only troubling characteristics about her that are undermining social stability. Indeed, her overwhelming sexuality also plays a role in the downfall of Muffat and his aristocratic cronies. In the scene that follows "La Mouche d'or" article, Muffat examines Nana's naked body reflected in the mirror in front of her: "Il songeait à son ancienne horreur de la femme, au monstre de l'Écriture, lubrique, sentant le fauve" (191). Zola's description evokes the image of an apocalyptic Beast that appears in the Bible.²³⁹ While the Biblical allusion conjures up a vision of her as a monster that menaces mankind, his dread of woman recalls Eve, the mythical vice-ridden creature who causes man's downfall. The comparison to the Beast takes away Nana's status as a woman, as a human being capable of reason and feelings. Focusing on her animality and otherness, he describes her as a "bête" and a "fauve" as prostitutes were often referred to in the nineteenth century.²⁴⁰ Zola describes Nana: "Nana était tout velue, un duvet de rousse faisait de son corps un velours; tandis que dans sa croupe et ses cuisses de cavale, dans les renflements charnus creusés de plis profonds, qui donnaient au sexe le voile troublant de leur ombre, il y avait de la bête" (191). Nana's body hair reminds one of an animal's coat of fur, while her "croupe," which could mean a

²³⁸ The image of decay comes into play briefly in this scene when Muffat realizes that Nana has corrupted him and that everything would rot in him.

²³⁹ Brown 212.

²⁴⁰ Bernheimer 1-2.

crupper for an animal, or a rump for a person, as well as her “cuisses de cavale,” which could refer to the flanks of a horse, or the thighs of a mare. Either translation implies that Nana is like a horse. The fact that her sexual organ is hidden signifies that it is not only “unknowable and unrepresentable,” but inaccessible to the male as well.²⁴¹ Muffat sees Nana as “la bête d’or, inconsciente comme une force, et dont l’odeur seule gâtait le monde” (191). Hence “la mouche d’or” changes into “la bête d’or,” a more threatening beast capable of spoiling the world with her odor. The reference to the spoiling smell has its origins in Zola’s sketch of Nana: Nana, “simply by means of her sex and her strong female odor” will destroy “everything she approaches,” and turn “society sour just as women having a period turn milk sour.”²⁴² So Nana’s vagina possesses the power to sour Paris as illustrated in the story of the “Golden Fly” just as her smell is able to spoil the world. While Muffat continues to stare at her, “l’animal reparut au fond...il serait là, devant ses yeux, dans sa chair, à jamais” (191). Not only does Zola refer to Nana as an animal, but he employs the masculine pronoun “il” to refer to her. The pronoun masculinizes Nana who has been reduced to a savage animal stripped of any femininity or ability to reason.

In sum, the story of Nana as the “Mouche d’or” demonstrates Zola’s fears about the *demi-mondaine* as powerful class avenger and spendthrift in a society that promotes consumption over human relations – while the reference to her as the “bête d’or” reveals his anxieties about her animalistic sexuality. In the end, despite Nana’s temporary escape from the proletariat and her brief vengeance on

²⁴¹ Peter Brooks, “Storied Bodies, or Nana at Last Unveil’d,” *Critical Inquiry* 16.1 (1989): 19.

²⁴² Warren 34.

the aristocrat's oppressive economic system that created the poor environment she came from, Nana ultimately returns to her repressed lower class. At the end of the novel, Nana dies of the *petite vérole* surrounded by people of her own class, her fellow *demi-mondaines* and actresses she worked alongside during her life. Her rotting corpse not only signifies her failure to achieve total vengeance on the upper class, but also marks her return to the decaying and putrid lower class from which she rose.

Her decomposing corpse also represents the fall of the Second Empire. As Zola outlines in the *Roman expérimental*, he views society as a sort of body made up of many members. This "*circulus social*" is disrupted when one dysfunctional member upsets society's equilibrium. In the case of Nana, she is one representative errant "organ" who corrupts the corporate body of France. According to his purpose outlined in the *Roman expérimental*, Zola is to master Nana's unruliness, or at least render her harmless, in order to restore the "health" of society.

Yet, Zola abandons his supposed neutrality as a scientist when he turns Nana into the deteriorating Second Empire. Thus Nana is more than a woman in the sewer – she is the representative figure of the Second Empire who begins as a positive character in the book, then degenerates completely. Her corruption grows with her power until the novel culminates in a final scene in which her body is decomposing, which signifies the collapse of the decadent Second Empire in 1870. In the final chapter of the novel, Nana's courtesan friends gather around her corpse carrying on various conversations about Nana and the impending war with

the Prussians that are punctuated with “À Berlin, À Berlin.” A crowd outside the hotel cheers on the war. Yet Zola’s audience understands that this enthusiasm is ironic because it foreshadows the utterly humiliating defeat the French will suffer to the Prussians.

The novel ends with a grotesque description of Nana’s rotting face framed by her glorious blond hair. Zola writes: “Vénus se décomposait. Il semblait que le virus pris par elle dans les ruisseaux sur les charognes tolérés, ce ferment dont elle avait empoisonné un peuple, venait de lui montrer au visage et l’avait pourri.”²⁴³ In this instance, Zola’s use of images of decay represents more than one woman’s degraded sexuality and social milieu – the images represent the death of the Second Empire. In the end, critic Jill Warren states that although Zola has taken “great pains to give the impression of scientific detachment and objectivity to his Rougon-Macquart cycle,” presenting “a physical and hereditary explanation for every action or characteristic,” he abandons any sense of objectivity he claims to possess (30). Because Nana is the Second Empire when she dies, she is no longer an individual figure that Zola can manipulate; she is a romantic embodiment of corruption.

PART TWO: THE COURTESAN WRITES BACK

While in the first part of this chapter I have focused primarily on the way in which male writers employed the figure of the prostitute to express their ambivalence to social, political, and economic transformations, I conclude with the courtesan’s response to the backlash against her. During the early Second

²⁴³ Zola 411.

Empire, when novelists and playwrights were generating stories about courtesans, actual *demi-mondaines* carved out places in the public realm as Bal Mabille dancers and Vaudeville actresses, as infamous mistresses of powerful aristocratic political figures, and as authors of their own life stories. The autobiographical writings attributed to the Second Empire *demi-mondaines* such as Lola Montès and Céleste Mogador stoked apprehensions about women breaking out of the domestic cocoon of marriage and motherhood through their pursuit of careers and autonomy. Indeed, these works confirmed the *demi-mondaine's* high-profile career as writer, actress, and dancer and her notoriously unconventional lifestyle, which alarmed Second Empire moralists who feared that her endeavors would encourage bourgeois women to follow her lead. More importantly, these autobiographies privilege the prostitute's response to her own social ostracism and allow her to refute the negative stereotypes generated by male authors to give the illusion of controlling her.

In contrast with the relative domestic confinement and lack of financial autonomy (as dictated by Napoleonic Code) that the average bourgeois woman faced, the *demi-mondaine's* public presence, her financial and sexual independence made her seem liberated and powerful. As such, the *demi-mondaine* challenged the ideologies of female domesticity, passivity, and independence by pursuing public careers as actresses, dancers, and writers, by embarking on international adventures and intellectual endeavors, and by exercising control over her finances and influence on her aristocratic lovers.

Lola Montès: Dancer, world traveler, countess, actress, writer, and lecturer

Lola Montès (1821-1861) was not only one of the first important *demi-mondaines*, but perhaps the most world-renowned one due to her travels in Europe (England, France, Spain, Germany, Russia, and Poland), in the United States (from the East Coast, to New Orleans, to the gold rush territory in California), and in Australia. Lola, *née* Eliza Gilbert to her British officer father and to her Irish Protestant mother, made her stage debut in 1843 as a Spanish dancer after her marriage to a British officer serving in India failed and her very public London affair with Lieutenant George Lennox ended. With her dreams of becoming the next Mrs. Lennox dashed, Lola became “just another of London’s high-priced courtesans.”²⁴⁴ She left London for a more peaceful existence with relatives in Edinburgh; however, her prospects of ever recovering her reputation ceased when her estranged husband charged her with adultery. She decided to become an actress to support herself, but when she was informed that she lacked the talent necessary to succeed as a thespian in London, she opted for a career in dance. Because classical ballet demanded training and discipline from a tender age, the twenty-one year old was too old to become an accomplished ballerina (30). Rather, she embraced a career as a Spanish dancer according to Seymour, because national dances were “less technically demanding,” and “Spain and Spanish culture were then much in fashion” (30). In order to realize her dream, Lola took lessons for four months from a “Spanish dancing master,” then traveled

²⁴⁴ Bruce Seymour, *Lola Montez: A Life* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996) 27.

to Spain to perfect her newly forged persona as “Maria Dolores de Porrís y Montez, the proud and beautiful daughter of a noble Spanish family impoverished and exiled by the cruel Carlist civil war” (30). She thus shrugged off her socially condemned identity as Eliza James, adulteress and divorcee, and returned to London as Lola, an exotic émigrée who was feted, supported, and promoted as a dancer by upper-class men and aristocrats.

According to the *Morning Post*, “Donna Lolah Montes...a purely Spanish dancer,” made her debut in London at Her Majesty’s Theatre on June 3, 1843 (33-34).²⁴⁵ Though faulted for her lack of technique, the press praised her passion and beauty. Shortly thereafter, critics challenged her credibility both as a dancer and as an authentic Spaniard. She launched a newspaper campaign in which she completely reinvented her life in letters to the editor and entertained foreign nobles who promised to support the vagabond in her endeavors around Europe. Lola left London late that summer to perform in Berlin and Poland. After she was chased out of St. Peterburg, Russia, Lola headed to Germany and conducted a brief affair with Franz Liszt. Despite their brief liaison, Lola’s calculations succeeded and she acquired the letters of introduction she needed to establish important connections. In the spring of 1844, Lola performed at the Paris Opera, but was panned by critics. She became the mistress of Henri Dujarier, the co-owner of *La Presse*, and gathered up the courage to perform again in Paris one year later in “La Biche aux Bois” at the Porte St. Martin Theatre. Her stage career began gathering momentum until Dujarier was killed in a duel and therefore could

²⁴⁵ Seymour cites the article “Donna Lolah Montes” from the *Morning Post* [London] 3 June 1843, 5c5.

no longer pressure theaters to engage her as a dancer. After her career fizzled in Paris, Lola traveled to Germany in search of work.

In Berlin, she received mixed reviews for her performances, but captured international attention for publicly whipping a Prussian guard when he blocked her passage to a VIP section of a military parade. She violated social norms with this violent outburst, for her temper and aggression clashed with the notion of woman as a passive being dependant on male guardians. Though Lola was never tried for assault in Prussian courts, her reputation as a gun-toting, whip-cracking virago was firmly established. In Paris, her reputation as a termagant grew when she received attention for her skill at firing a pistol, and then in 1846 when she proclaimed at the trial against Beauvallon, the man who killed her lover in a duel, that she could have prevented the shooting contest from ever having taken place.

In 1848, the European press portrayed her once again as an aggressive woman responsible for social disorder. Although she was not a participant in Parisian uprisings, the trouble Lola stirred up in Bavaria around the same time as the events in Paris, resonated with the French journalists who remembered her scandalous antics as a dancer in Paris only a few years earlier. In late 1847, 62-year-old King Ludwig bestowed his mistress Lola (who had won the Hispanist's heart while performing her dances in Munich a year earlier) with the title of the Countess of Landsfeld. Though Montès enjoyed the protection of a fraternity of male university students called Alemannia, she was snubbed by the nobility, and hated by military officers and university students who resented the favors Ludwig showered the Alemannen. Ludwig, jealous of the attention Lola directed at the

Alemannen (he feared one senior in particular was her lover), closed the university hoping that the fraternity would disband. When several members of the town revolted and rioted in front of Lola's house, Lola came out brandishing a pistol – daring the crowd to kill her. Friends dragged her back in the house and put her in a carriage that took her to safer shelter outside of Munich; soon after, she went into exile in Switzerland.

Ludwig neglected to write to Lola because he was busy staving off rumbles of revolution and making concessions to the liberal demands of his citizens. When Lola grew impatient and even fearful that Ludwig would no longer send her money, she disguised herself as a man and furtively penetrated Bavaria in an effort to plead with the king in person. However, police, suspicious of a small man wearing a beard, foiled her plans by arresting her and taking her to the police station. Ludwig secretly met with her there in the middle of the night and asked her to leave the country. Though she departed the next day, rumors spread that Lola never left the country. According to Bruce Seymour, “Lola's visit had poisoned the public's mind, undermining Ludwig's authority. Rumors circulated that Lola Montez was hiding somewhere within Bavaria, awaiting the right moment to emerge and lead the king into reactionary repression.”²⁴⁶

Mobs searched Munich in an effort to find Lola. Seymour implies that Ludwig abdicated the throne mid-March of 1848 not only to avoid the humiliation of making further concessions to the liberal opposition, but also to be free to leave Bavaria and visit Lola. Needless to say, despite Ludwig's resignation, he never

²⁴⁶ Seymour 217.

again met with Lola. He continued to send her money, but the relation ended when Lola moved to London and married George Heald, a rich army officer. Lola's marriage to Heald did not last long (in fact she was publicly charged with bigamy) and she returned to Paris where she began to publish her memoirs in *Le Pays* in January 1851. She threatened to publish Ludwig's letters in the memoirs, but did not succeed in obtaining the money from him for her silence. Seymour claims that the memoirs met with the general public's disappointment in their apparent lack of scandal, and that the Republican owners who bought *Le Pays* shortly thereafter refused to publish the rest of her installments. When Lola eventually returned the letters to Ludwig, he sent her 5,000 francs (the last money he ever sent her) out of gratitude.

After spending a little over a decade as a Spanish dancer and mistress to Franz Liszt, Henri Dujarier, and King Ludwig of Bavaria in Europe, she performed as an actress both in America and in Australia in a stage version of her life with Ludwig entitled *Lola Montez* in Bavaria. Lola reinvented herself yet again as a lecturer in 1857, discussing "Beautiful Women," "Gallantry," "Heroines of History and Strong-Minded Women," "Comic Aspects of Fashion," "Slavery in America," and toured with great success in America, Canada, and Europe until 1860. She also penned the *Arts of Beauty* (1858) and *Anecdotes of Love* (1859). She suffered from a stroke in June of 1860; she briefly recovered by that December, but caught pneumonia on a Christmas outing and died on January 17, 1861 in New York.

Defying domesticity

In the autobiography she penned along with her lectures in 1858, Lola not only denounced the prescribed domesticity, passivity, and dependence that reduced the average bourgeois woman to “a pretty piece of statuary,” but posited herself as an example of a woman who actively fought against social convention to carve out a space in the world.²⁴⁷ Throughout her autobiography and lectures, Lola emphasized her drive to wield power and make her voice heard in a way that would impact society. The significance of Lola’s work lies in the fact that her stories countered the negative fantasies being spun about prostitutes by novelists and playwrights. During a time when male authors were generating myths about harlots with hearts of gold and pitiless *demi-mondaines* in their novels and plays to damper their purported impact on society, Lola offset these texts with fabrications about her own adventures in order to portray herself in the most flattering light. To be certain, her autobiography is often self-indulgent, untruthful (Lola constantly lied about her age, nationality, and purported nobility, over-exaggerated her talent and successes as a dancer, and downplayed her illicit affairs) and perhaps even colored a bit by a male ghostwriter’s efforts;²⁴⁸ however, its pioneering spirit and its criticism of societal prejudices against women give voice to the figure of the prostitute that had been silenced for years in novels.

²⁴⁷ *Lectures of Lola Montez (Countess of Landsfeld) Including her Autobiography* (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1858) 13.

²⁴⁸ The University of Texas’s Harry Ransom Center has attributed in brackets the *Lectures* to Chauncey Burr. However, according to Seymour, “The manuscripts of her lectures are nearly all in her own hand, with many of her own editorial corrections. Even in her first lectures, when Burr was helping her, most of the ideas appear to be her own; moreover, the style of the lectures resembles Lola’s other writings but is dramatically different from Burr’s published works” 359.

In both her “Autobiography” and “Heroines of History,” Lola laments the way prescribed domesticity not only stifles women’s lives, but also renders them woefully unprepared for “the perpetual battle of life” (13). The domestic woman, according to the “Autobiography,” has no real connections to the wider world and is “an inane piece of human wax-work, whose life has consisted merely of powdering, drinking, tea, going to the opera, flirting, and sleeping [...] (13). Woman’s confinement to her home reduces her to object status where she serves as “a pretty piece of statuary,” or as “a pleasant piece of furniture for a drawing-room” (13). Her objectification and her docility prevent her from achieving anything in the turbulent world. Lola writes: “A good tea-drinker – a merely good drawing-room flirt, would make a very sorry shift of it, I fear!” (14). She would need ample “force of resistance” to withstand the “tidal shocks of the world” (14).

Indeed, whereas some women muster the courage to venture out of the domestic cocoon, they often lack the resilience to endure the criticism they will inevitably receive for going against the grain, and thus invariably “fall” into prostitution (14). In such cases, rebellion against social convention often translates into tragedy for even “the most beautiful and naturally-gifted women in the world” (14). Montez explains: “The great misfortune was that there was too much of her to be held within the prescribed and safe limits allotted to woman; but there was not enough to enable to her to stand securely beyond the shelter of conventional rules” (14). According to the “Autobiography,” “the social and moral fabric of the world” dictate that a woman

must be content with an exceedingly narrow sphere of action, or she must take the worst consequences of daring to be an innovator and a heretic. She must be either servant or the spoiled plaything of man; or she must take the responsibility of making herself a target to be shot at by the most corrupt and cowardly of her own sex, and by the ill-natured and depraved of the opposite gender. (14)

Lola thus not only disputes the nineteenth-century discourse that faulted a woman's weakness and depravity for her fall into prostitution, but also criticizes the doctrine of domesticity that limits a woman's choices. Neither choice is easy, because a woman will either remain confined to the home or venture out on her own as Lola did and face the ridicule generated to counteract her innovative actions. Hence, in contrast with Dumas *filles*'s consumptive, self-denigrating heroine romanticized for her humility and fatalism, Lola promotes the image of an active, outspoken woman who refuses to remain at home and who fights for what she believes in – even if the price is public humiliation.

“Let woman, like man, do that which nature has best fitted for her”: Female politicians and women warriors defy conventional gender roles

Lola's conviction that women should let their talents, not their gender, determine the course of their lives, not only anticipated modern gender studies, but also radically challenged the nineteenth-century notion that women were different from men. Indeed, Lola rejects the ideology that declares women incapable of political, intellectual, and even physical feats gendered male. In her lecture, “Heroines of History,” Lola affirms: “Genius has no sex. Look back upon the page of history, and see how clearly this fact is proved. When women attack and defend fortifications, when they command armies and obtain victories, what do you call it?” (177). She argues that women who excel as warriors should be

allowed to fight, rather than occupied with more conventional domestic tasks. She asserts: “Let woman, like man, do that for which nature has best fitted her” (177).

Céleste de Chabrilan

“My heart is full of ambitions and I shall be rich. In addition, you see, I have become sickened with my class. I could never have been the wife of a laborer.”²⁴⁹ With these words, Celeste Mogador joined a brothel at age 16 and embarked on an arduous journey to create a life and career that defied the constraints placed on her as a lower-class woman in a patriarchal society. Penned at the request of her attorney 12 years later, Mogador’s memoirs were intended to explain her life to the judges presiding over the numerous lawsuits brought against her by the family of her lover, the Count Lionel de Chabrilan. This vivid account of her first 28 years won her rave reviews outside the courtroom, however, when celebrated writers Camille Doucet, Alexandre Dumas *père* (with whom she would later collaborate during her career as a playwright), and Madame de Girardin read her memoirs and recommended them for publication. Certainly the tales of her stepfather’s attempted sexual assault on her, a week as a starving runaway on the streets of Paris, incarceration in Saint-Lazare, entrapment in a brothel, a bout of slightly disfiguring, nearly fatal smallpox, two bloody insurrections (Lyon, early 1830s, and Paris, 1848), three botched suicide attempts,

²⁴⁹Céleste Mogador, *Memoirs of a Courtesan in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Trans. Monique Fleury Nagem (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2001) 71. A few paragraphs on this work are included in a book review of *Memoirs* that has been accepted for publication by *Women in French Studies*.

police threats of imprisonment, denigrating attacks by the press, the deaths of several friends, and the desertion by the love of her life undoubtedly fascinated readers as much as they alarmed the administrators who seized the work and deemed it unfit for the public.

Initially a *lorette*, Mogador won reclaim at the Bal Mabille. There, she earned her nickname Mogador when her dance partner claimed that the Moroccan city of the same name besieged by the French was easier to defend than Mogador from her admirers. Her prowess as an *equestrienne* at the Hippodrome further increased her celebrity, enough so to attract an Italian aristocrat. Mogador writes: “My liaison with the duke placed me in a totally new position,” a fortunate situation Monique Fleury Nagem notes establishes her as a courtesan (111). The end of her affair with the duke, a serious injury during a chariot race which ruins her career at the Hippodrome, a failed affair at the Hague with a puritanical baron, and her dismay with “this life of subjection of others” pushed her to open a fashion shop with her mother. Though the clothes sold well, thanks to her contacts with other kept women, she incurs much debt because her customers buy on credit. Faced with financial ruin and threats from the police because she skips the required sanitary visits at the Préfecture, Mogador tries to gas herself. When this first of three suicide attempts fails, she feels covered by ridicule. When her friend Lise, her former rival at the Bal Mabille, dies, Mogador plunges into a deep depression.

In order to distract herself from her sadness at her friend’s death and her own failed attempt at suicide, she renews her contacts with the *monde galant*, and

falls hopelessly in love with the Count Lionel de Chabrilan. During the course of their passionate affair, he leaves her several times in hopes of marrying a rich fellow aristocrat who will save him from his debt; but each time the marriage fails due to his liaison to the notorious Mogador, and each time he woos her back with lavish jewels, apartments, and carriages, as well as *séjours* at his chateau on his family estate in Berry. She initially encourages him to settle his debts, and even lends him 40,000 francs she has borrowed from her grandfather, but his love for hunting, his bad business decisions in terms of managing farming tenants and unlucky stock market speculation sink him further into debt. When she realizes he is not going to change his habits or return her money, she gives in to his whims, saying: “I no longer opposed his extravagances; I shared in them, and sometimes I even encouraged them. Adorned with gifts, radiant in my conceit, I wore his ruin like a trophy” (269). Throughout their torrid affair, they torment each other with jealous disputes: she stabs herself (yet another attempt on her life) as well as Lionel because he has taken another lover, and he stops her marriage to a rich Englishman with a manipulative *billet doux*. Eventually creditors get the best of their relationship when a now penniless and shamed Lionel sails to Australia to re-make his fortune by gold mining, leaving Mogador to fight off creditors and battle against lawsuits brought against her by his outraged family.

Despite the dysfunction of her co-dependent relationship with Lionel, Mogador remains fiercely independent. She supports herself as an actress, courageously performing nightly despite her own admitted lack of talent. As mentioned earlier, during the trials, 28-year-old Mogador pens her memoirs at the

request of her attorney Demarest to explain her life to the judges presiding over the lawsuits.²⁵⁰ When Alexandre Dumas *père* with whom Mogador collaborates later on during her career as a playwright, admires the text, he passes it on to various literary circles, and the memoirs are accepted by an editor. Consequently, Mogador's memoirs are *en route* to being published when Lionel returns from Australia and offers to marry Mogador and take her back to Melbourne where he is to serve as French consul. At the end of the memoirs, Mogador writes: "If my memoirs appear after my departure, Lionel will not know about it since we shall be at sea for four months" (316). Much to her chagrin, her memoirs do appear, and unfortunately for Mogador and her new husband, news of the scandal they cause in France reaches Melbourne before they do. As a result, during her tenure in Australia, Celeste faces estrangement from the respectable society that admits her diplomatic husband into its circle, but which at the same time bars her entry.

Indeed, the colorful adventures, the glamorous love affairs, and the heart-wrenching betrayals in Mogador's memoirs read like a romance novel; her confessional narrative, however, offers so much more. As Claire Marrone has suggested, one must not only appreciate Mogador's tome as a female *Bildungsroman*, but also as a rare document that records a poor prostitute's experiences in a brothel.²⁵¹ Moreover, her memoirs provide invaluable socio-historical insight into prostitution, class, revolution, sexuality, and feminism.

²⁵⁰ Nagem claims that Demarest "most certainly helped her write" the autobiography. Although Nagem's suggestion seems logical given Mogador's limited amount of education, it raises complicated issues of authorship that – for the purpose of space -- should be addressed in a different study.

²⁵¹ Claire Marrone, "Male and Female *Bildung*: The *Mémoires de Céleste Mogador*, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 25.3-4 (1997): 335-347.

In contrast to the works by Parent, Dumas, and the others discussed in this thesis, Mogador proffers a sorely needed female point of view that often counters the misogynous elements of these accounts, for she is able to draw upon her own experiences and *esprit* in order to present a more humane vision of the harlot stereotypically regarded in animal-like terms. Specifically, Mogador documents the shame of inscribing herself on the “vile” register of regulated prostitutes, the fear of being an *insoumise* tracked by the police, the despair and vacuity of working in a brothel, the dishonesty of cunning recruiters who prey on poor desperate young girls locked up in Saint Lazare for begging, the thrill of fame and the despair of infamy, and finally the scintillating luxury of a party at the Café Anglais that is dimmed by the humiliation she endures when she is insulted for being a harlot. In addition to her critique of the social conditions that foster prostitution, Mogador attacks the hypocrisy of writers and theater directors who exploit the scandalous subject of prostitution in works like *La Dame aux camélias* for profit. She quips: “During two hundred performances, all of Paris swooned over the tender generosity and the distress of a courtesan; then one day some other vaudeville and theater directors, catching the new trend, had placed us in the pillory of opinion” (98).

In her *Mémoires*, she responds to the misogynistic, hypocritical double standard that traps her in the role of threatening other. In the 1858 preface, she reflects upon all the criticism she received for purportedly corrupting virtuous women. She defends her right to tell her story and to expose the lies told about her in the lawsuits creditors brought against her. She explains:

Je ne voulais pas me rehabiliter, on ne se rehabilite jamais quand on est tombée si bas! mais, je le répète, je n'attaquais pas, je me défendais. Loin de vouloir exciter de pauvres créatures à suivre mon exemple, à marcher sur mes traces, je voulais leur montrer que les écueils de ce genre de vie, leur prouver qu'une honnête fille, respectée dans sa misère, est plus heureuse que ces reprouvées auxquelles il ne reste pour l'avenir que le mépris et l'abandon. Voilà sous quelle impression j'ai écrit ces mémoires auxquels on a donné beaucoup trop d'importance.²⁵²

She thus humbly accepts the success of her book and fends off criticism with self-effacing humility. She later exposes the hypocrisy of the writers and artists who wooed *demi-mondaines*, shaping and molding them into creatures of luxury and objects of male desire, and who, alarmed by their fame, publicly flailed their mistresses for being what these men had wanted in the first place. Chabrillan says that the fallen *demi-mondaine* has nowhere to go but down, because she will never escape her tainted past, while her lover is free to walk away from the *demi-monde* and circulate once again in legitimate society as though he had never left it.

While her denouncement of the double standard plays an important role in her memoirs, social ambitions and class conflicts also figure prominently in Mogador's narrative. Indeed, in her work, tensions surface between her desire to escape her lower-class status and its poverty and her sentimentality for the honest, simpler life far different from the superficial circles she frequents as a courtesan. For example, though she occasionally idealizes life in the working-class neighborhood of her youth in Paris, her ambivalence about lower class individuals

²⁵² Céleste Mogador. *Mémoires de Céleste Mogador. Nouvelle édition* Vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie Nouvelle, 1876) 1-2.

flares up when she witnesses the violence of the 1848 uprisings, for it stirs up anxiety about the terrifying atrocities she had witnessed as a child during the Lyon insurrection. Issues of sexuality and feminism come into play as well in her tome, for her attraction, fondness and sometime obsession with Denise, a young woman who befriends her in Saint-Lazare, hint at a lesbian liaison. Her desire for financial independence and her pursuit of a career correspond to the goals that feminists and socialists like Flora Tristan demand in the 1840s, and the strong bonds she forges with many of her fellow actor friends and kept women emphasize the importance of female solidarity. Nevertheless, she is not entirely supportive of female emancipation, especially when one considers her tacit agreement with her lover that women participating in the political insurrections of the 1848 revolution deserve a whipping. Curiously enough, this anecdote suggests a possible intertextual link between Mogador's autobiography and Gustave Flaubert's *l'Éducation sentimentale* (1869), for although Joanna Richardson maintains that Flaubert fashioned his *lorette* Rosanette, after Baudelaire's lover, La Présidente, the fact that Rosanette agrees that women at the 1848 Club des femmes gatherings should be flogged, and that her military moniker La Maréchale evokes war in the way the reference to Mogador does, leads one to believe Mogador's story might well have influenced Flaubert's fiction.

While in her *Mémoires*, Chabrilan protests against the societal prejudices which prevent her from rising above her lowly status of a prostitute, Maria Deraismes, a Second Empire socialist, exposes the ridiculous, implausible plots in the theater in her collection of lectures delivered in 1870-1871. In "La Femme

dans le théâtre," she mocks the plays by Barrière and Dumas *fils* that vilify the women in all her weakness, but which portray the men as flawless, noble creatures who never flounder. Deraismes thus locates the subjugation of women in the dominant discourse. She argues that the theater, like a mirror, should reflect humanity in all its forms.²⁵³ She asserts "Le théâtre, il est bien entendu, doit être, sous la forme fictive, la reproduction de la vie réelle" (112). Disturbed at the lopsided representation of men and women that weighs in men's favor, she claims that plays only show women as feeble, perverted, vice-ridden creatures, while the dramas always show men at their best. She declares:

Ne rencontrerons-nous donc pas au théâtre, en opposition à la femme qui ne puise son omnipotence que dans le vice, la femme forte qui trouve son énergie dans la vertu. Quoi, nulle d'elles n'a de ressort pour réagir. Les auteurs et leurs oeuvres se succèdent et nous serons condamnés à voir produire, exclusivement, cette catégorie d'êtres plus ou moins perversis ou detraqués, comme si elle représentait la majorité. (107-108)

The danger of constantly reinforcing this weak image of women is that "une impression profonde survivra la représentation et ce souvenir reste favorable au vice et défavorable à la vertu" (113). This disequilibrium conditions theatergoers to accept women's purported inferiority as the *status quo*. Because the theater wields so much influence over public opinion, Deraismes understands its potential to instigate social change. She therefore demands more characterizations of

²⁵³ Marie Deraismes, "La femme dans le théâtre," *Ève dans l'humanité* (Paris: Librairie Generale De L. Sauvatre, 1891) 112.

females as intelligent and strong, so society will open itself up to a more favorable opinion of women and thereby afford them more opportunities.

In sum, nineteenth-century *demi-mondaines* and feminists were not only aware of the backlash against them -- they protested it in best-selling memoirs and well-attended public lectures both in Europe and in America. Though extremely popular in their day, these fascinating texts are largely neglected by contemporary scholars who focus rather on the canonical works that scapegoat and demonize the *demi-mondaine*. Nonetheless, in the last 25 years, feminist scholars have resuscitated texts by important nineteenth-century female writers such as George Sand, Marie d'Agoult, Delphine Gay de Girardin, and Flora Tristan that enjoyed popularity in the nineteenth century, but were excluded from the literary canon in the twentieth, and have reintegrated them into the literary mainstream. In the same vein, it is my hope that the *Mémoires de Céleste Mogador*, which has been recently translated as *Memoirs of a Courtesan in Nineteenth-Century Paris*²⁵⁴ by Monique Fleury Nagem, will earn the same attention, for although Mogador's work, or for Lola Montez's for that matter, may not be of the same literary caliber of texts by the aforementioned writers, it is certain to captivate scholars keen on studying the prostitute's response to her own social alienation.

²⁵⁴Nagem bases her translation on the 1968 *Les Amis de L'Histoire* version of Mogador's memoirs, an edition that has shortened passages considered redundant in the 1854 version, and that has added catchy chapter titles to the narrative. While what the *Les Amis* tome edits out is mostly banal (for example, Mogador coyly remarks at the beginning of chapter five: "Si je vous ennuie, c'est votre faute"), it sanitizes the memoirs in a few cases by omitting the passages in the 1854 version that directly name and vehemently denounce prostitution.

CONCLUSION

This project began as an exploration of the “dialectic of disgust and fascination” Hollis Clayson and Charles Bernheimer had detected on the part of French artists and writers depicting prostitutes in nineteenth-century France.²⁵⁵ Though much has been written about the way in which nineteenth-century French writers and artists’ misogynistic representations of prostitutes stemmed from their fantasies and fears about female sexuality, I sought to locate other factors that drove writers to portray the prostitute in such a devastating manner. While I originally intended to focus solely on the figure of the *demi-mondaine* and the myths surrounding her, I encountered numerous terms used to describe not only her predecessors -- the *grisette*, the *lorette* and the *courtisane* -- and her

²⁵⁵ Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) xviii.

successors -- the *cocottes* and the *grandes horizontales*. Intrigued by this proliferation of terms used to describe the various prostitutes, I set out to define them and quickly discovered that many of them could be classified according to a social ladder and were associated with important historical events and periods. Indeed, I determined that these figures served as social constructions that embodied anxieties and ideologies of their respective periods.

Faced with new social and political transformations, July Monarchy, Second Republic, and Second Empire writers created a new incarnation of the prostitute – from the *grisette* to the *lorette*, from the modern courtesan to the *demi-mondaine* – an act which implied a range of anxieties related to capitalism, modernity, revolution, and evolving gender roles. Given the chaotic state of social, political and economic affairs in post-revolutionary France, these writers' creation of a complex system of social classification gave the illusion of both subduing the *demi-mondaine* and her cohorts and mastering these overwhelming forces of change. This illusion of control took the form of scapegoating the prostitute, for if her lawlessness was eradicated through her destruction, containment or punishment in the narratives, then the actions of the marginalized prostitute could be kept in check, and a sense of order could thereby be reestablished.

Indeed, in their characterizations of these prostitutes, the writers examined in this dissertation alternated between fascination and disgust as the myths of illicit femininity shifted from the romanticized harlot with the heart of gold to the demonized *demi-mondaine*. These writers' alternating attraction and repulsion to

the figure of the prostitute mirrored their ambivalence to modern institutions expressed elsewhere as capitalism, social mobility, revolution, and feminism. On the one hand, they saw in the *lorette* and the *demi-mondaine* the prosperity, hope, and revelry made possible mid-century by the wealth from industrialization. On the other hand, writers resented these same institutions and practices that gave rise to the celebrative atmosphere of the *demi-monde*, for they not only ushered in rapid, seemingly unstoppable change, but also introduced values and life-styles that ran against the grain of the hierarchical, elitist, and patriarchal traditions of Ancien Regime France.

Pierre Bourdieu's theories of social hierarchies outlined in *Distinction* provide an analytical tool for scrutinizing the reasons why the French writers concentrated on ranking prostitutes in their works. According to Bourdieu, the dominant individuals in a given society organize and reinforce the "classificatory schemes that structure the social world according to their interests."²⁵⁶ Because hierarchies give a sense of order to the world, these writers who were distressed by the political instability in post-revolutionary France, sought to classify the prostitutes they associated with the disorderly state of political, cultural, social, civic, and economic affairs in nineteenth-century France. These writers' efforts to master the unruly prostitute illustrated their endeavor to recover a sense of dominance and control. Further, in their attempt to prove their dominance, the rich bourgeois and ambitious writers analyzed in this dissertation defined their preeminence against the prostitutes, the lower social pariahs.

²⁵⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984) 471.

Each period examined in the work – the July Monarchy, the Second Republic, and the Second Empire -- spawned a new incarnation of the prostitute which matched ongoing social transformations. In the case of the *lorette* and the *demi-mondaine*, new words were coined, whereas in the case of the courtesan, a line was drawn separating the idealized ancient courtesan from the demonized contemporary one to solidify and correspond to male fantasies about significant changes of the period.

With regard to the *lorette*, writers employed her as a symbol of the new neighborhood of Breda. Through her, they discussed the social shifts in the geography of the city in the late July Monarchy. Whereas the *grisette* of the 1830s lived with her students/artist/bohemian lovers in the Latin Quarter, in the 1840s, the *lorette* lived in a newer area that reflected the recent wealth amassed by stock market speculators and bourgeois industrialists.

At first charmed by her freshness, beauty, and playfulness, the writers toned down their praise of her when problematic issues such as social climbing, capitalism, revolution, and feminism escalated in importance. Also, the issue of female agency influenced the way writers viewed her. Indeed, when Gavarni represented her as a delightful carnival reveler, she represented a harmless plaything for the men she entertained. However, as women's cries for emancipation increased, so did the fantasy that the *lorette's* independent lifestyle could potentially inspire feminism in bourgeois women. Writers viewed the *lorette* as a threat to the patriarchal order she embodied; she risked inciting bourgeois women to oppose the status quo.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the combined efforts to relegate bourgeois women to domesticity and to generally exclude them from the public sphere ensured that French women would not again participate in revolutionary activity as they did during the late eighteenth century. During the revolutionary period, women organized political societies, rallied, fought, and took part in public activities. Later, nineteenth-century historians such as Michelet blamed the failure of the revolution on women, and post-revolutionary leader Napoleon squelched women's hopes for political rights with the Civil Code that institutionalized their subordination for a century.

For Dumas, Alhoy, and Gavarni, the *lorette's* public visibility was initially contained within the confines of a limited audience of readers who perused the caricatures featured in *Le Charivari* and the *physiologies* of the early 1840s. Yet, as the *lorette* gained popularity not only in fictional caricatures and stories, but also in gossip columns in newspapers that detailed her exploits at the Bal Mabille or the Hippodrome, she began to exceed the control of their initial narratives. Indeed, the *lorette* began to live a life of her own, and had achieved too much notoriety. Consequently, in an effort to regain control, Gustave Flaubert, Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, and Eugène Sue created narratives that linked her reckless behavior to a diseased capitalism and an unsanctioned female political activism. The Goncourt brothers and Sue thus punished the *lorette* to restore gender and economic order and their depiction of her as a menace to society illustrates the first manifestations of the backlash that culminates with the denunciation of the *demi-mondaine*.

The modern courtesan also evoked ambivalence on the part of nineteenth-century writers. Whereas the male writer romanticized the ancient courtesan, celebrating her intelligence and beauty, he refused to examine her contemporary counterpart through the same idealizing filter. Rather, he associated her with anxieties about female sexuality and encroachment on the public sphere. In contrast with the modern woman's public forays and political and revolutionary activism, the courtesan in Ancient Greece evoked for Dumas and Neuville a utopian society in which challenges to male rule were nonexistent. Thus, Ancient Greece, according to this nineteenth-century fantasy, shut women out of politics or any other public engagement. As such, it inspired a female docility that post-revolutionary French critics, historians, and politicians considered reduplicating as a way of suppressing rebellion in its women. Further, Ancient Greece enforced the double standard that denied education and freedom to wives, but granted them to the hetaera in the same way French men isolated their bourgeois wives but provided courtesans with the money they needed to live independently. According to Simone de Beauvoir, only the savviest courtesan knew how to exaggerate her passivity and womanliness in order to enchant the male who would in turn provide her the money she needed to enjoy autonomy. In sum, for nineteenth-century writers, the Ancient Greek courtesan symbolized a society that enforced the doctrine of separate spheres. Conversely, the modern courtesan was punished with death or humiliation in texts for having violated the bourgeois ideal of the woman as domestic angel.

While the Ancient Greek courtesan represented a society that subjugated women to a favorable degree, her elite qualities enabled writers such as Delord, Neuville, and Dumas to depict her in a manner that would reflect their superior aesthetic judgment. In short, they adopted the figure of the courtesan to win esteem in the literary world because in expressing their appreciation of her beauty and refinement, they exhibited what Bourdieu has called taste, the legitimate proof of refinement. Bourdieu's theory thus illustrates how Neuville and Dumas strove to distinguish themselves from commoners in recognizing the beauty of the Greek courtesan and expressing it in elevated forms. In short, for the same reason they extolled the Ancient Greek courtesan, they demonized the modern one – for she served as a negative pole against which these writers could define refined taste.

Just as writers expressed their “cultural” capital and learnedness through the figure of the ancient Greek courtesan, the *nouveaux riches* gentlemen entered into relations with *demi-mondaines* in an effort to distinguish themselves. In other words, they demonstrated their social capital through their relations with *demi-mondaines* who had in turn increased their status (at least in the parvenu's opinion) in their affairs with aristocrats.

In the initial phase of the *demi-mondaine's* existence, she enjoyed the same renown her predecessor the *lorette* did nearly a decade earlier. Indeed, Marguerite Gautier, the *demi-mondaine* par excellence, fascinated readers with her gaiety, mystique, and exoticism. Marguerite's docility and her avowed inferiority to the bourgeois class made her a popular heroine, and her death at the

beginning of the novel assured readers and critics that any threat of her influence had been contained in her coffin. Nonetheless, a backlash broke out against the *demi-mondaine* as it had against the *lorette*, for writers and critics began to associate feminist demand for female enfranchisement with the independence and unconventionality of the *demi-mondaine*. Just as government officials, journalists, and caricaturists struggled to counteract any impact women's participation in political clubs and civil manifestations may have made on bourgeois women, the novelists, playwrights, and moralists also strove to thwart in their literary works the influence they feared the *demi-mondaine* wielded. In plays such as Dumas fils's *Le Demi-Monde* (1855), Barrière's *Les Filles de Marbre* (1853), and Augier's *Les Lionnes pauvres* (1858), the destruction writers inflicted on the *demi-mondaine* "resolved" issues about class, sexuality and politics and to assure the patriarchal order.

After the humiliating defeat France suffered against the Germans and the collapse of the Second Empire, the backlash culminated against the *demi-mondaine* as Zola made her a scapegoat for the decadence that led to France's downfall in *Nana* (1880). For Zola, the *demi-mondaine* embodied the fatal combination of capitalism and degenerate sexuality that corroded social stability in the Second Empire. Indeed, dominant members of society such as aristocrats and politicians neglected their civic responsibilities to pursue hedonistic pleasure with the vast sums of money generated by the industrialization and speculation of the period. At the end of the novel, Zola kills Nana to annihilate the infectious organ of the social body that risks contaminating the entire organism. Far from

being redeemable through love as she was during the romantic period, the figure of the prostitute by 1880 embodies the illicit sexuality and political corruption in society that must be eliminated if it is to continue.

For at least fifty years (1830-1880), writers from Parent-Duchâtelet to Dumas, Balzac to Dumas *fils*, the Goncourt brothers to Zola, strove to rank the prostitute in terms of a hierarchy. Their efforts not only reflect their quest for hegemony and distinction, but also their drive to contain the individual who embodies the social, political, and economic chaos that distressed them. Their depictions of prostitutes and their efforts to control these figures they labeled unruly make us reconsider gender, class, and sexuality in the nineteenth century. Indeed, if prostitutes are read in such a manner, then these desires for hierarchies and containment must have implications for other disenfranchised groups as well. Specifically, this study invites scholars to investigate the way in which other “outsider” groups in the nineteenth century (spinsters, ex-slaves, immigrants from French colonies, members of the working class to name a few) were branded as Other, regulated by authorities, blamed for social ills, and generally anathemized the way the prostitutes were by groups vying for dominance and distinction.

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Vita

Courtney Ann Sullivan was born in Wichita, Kansas on December 2, 1970, the daughter of Agnes Hogan Sullivan and Gary Eugene Sullivan. After completing her work at Ursuline Academy, Dallas, Texas, in 1989, she entered Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana. In the summer of 1981, she studied in Anger, France, at the Université Catholique de l'Ouest. She attended Alma College's French program in Paris in the fall of 1991. She received the degree of Bachelor of Arts with a double major in French and communications in May, 1993. During the following year, she taught English at a private language school in Prague, the Czech Republic. In August 1994 she entered the Graduate School at The University of Texas. She received the degree of Masters of Arts in French Literature in August, 1996. During the following year, she taught English as an *assistante de langue* in Paris and attended Paris III. She was employed as a lecturer in the Department of English at Paris XIII the academic year of 1999-2000.

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