



外国文学经典



茶花女

La dame aux Camélias

Alexandre Dumas fils (法) 著

外语教学与研究出版社

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LA DAME AUX CAMÉLIAS

ALEXANDRE DUMAS *fils* was born in Paris in 1824, the illegitimate son of a seamstress and Dumas *père* , author of *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte-Cristo*. He was unhappy at school and was still an adolescent when his father initiated him into the social and literary life of Paris. He cut a figure as a dandy, ran up debts and, in 1844, began an affair with one of the most celebrated courtesans of the times, Marie Duplessis, whom he immortalized in *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848). Turning his back on 'the paganism of modern life', he set out to pay his debts with his pen. By the age of 30 he had written eighteen largely undistinguished novels. It was the long delayed stage version of *La Dame aux Camélias*, first performed in 1852, which made his name. From about 1855, he devoted himself almost exclusively to the theatre where he was immensely successful not only in commercial terms but also in establishing the 'well-made' play with a social message. His messages grew increasingly austere with time, and he denounced illicit love in all its forms as destructive of human happiness. His anti-feminism and ultraconservative moral ideas injured his reputation in later life, though his position in the history of the theatre was secure. A journalist, reacting against his final, messianic period, summed up his career in three words: Paphos, Pathos, Patmos. To the public, he presented a cold, impassive face. His private life, in which illicit love played a considerable role, was one of insecurity. He married twice. Dumas died in 1895.

DAVID COWARD is Senior Fellow and Emeritus Professor of French Literature at the University of Leeds. He is the author of studies of Marivaux, Marguerite Duras, Marcel Pagnol, and Restif de la Bretonne. For Oxford World's Classics, he has edited eight novels by Alexandre Dumas, including the whole of the Musketeer saga, and translated two selections of Maupassant short stories, Sade's *Misfortunes of Virtue and Other Early Tales*, and Diderot's *Jacques the Fatalist*. Winner of the 1996 Scott-Moncrieff prize for translation, he reviews regularly for the *Times Literary Supplement*.

INTRODUCTION

La Dame aux Camélias has never been a novel for which persons of taste and discernment have been able to confess outright enthusiasm. When it appeared in 1848, stern judges declared its subject to be indelicate. Nowadays the blushes spring from a reluctance to admit openly that a four-hankie novel can claim to be literature or even have a serious call on our attention. By any standards, it is not a particularly good book: at most, it falls into G. K. Chesterton's category of 'good bad books'. Yet the judgement of history is clear. However embarrassed some readers have been by her, the Lady has had far more friends than enemies. Since 1848, she has never been much further away than the nearest bookstall, always in print, always available, bound or papercovered, with or without illustrations, annotated or left to speak for herself. Seventy separate editions in her published life — twenty-one since 1945 — may be regarded as a sorry commentary on public taste, but countless copies sold are at least evidence of her longevity. It should not be thought, however, that it is merely the French who stand accused. The British were first off the mark with a translation in 1856, followed by the Spaniards in 1859. Since then, Marguerite Gautier has lived, loved and died to the evident satisfaction of Russians, Germans, Hungarians, Italians, the Japanese and others besides, who should all perhaps have known better.

But this is only part of the story. Dumas turned the novel, which he wrote in a month, into a play, which took him a week: Act II was dashed off one day in 1849 between lunch and tea. It was blocked at first for commercial reasons and then ran foul of the censor. It was not finally performed until February 1852 when it started its career as the greatest dramatic success of the century. It is impossible to say how many times it has been played throughout the world, but its status may be gauged by the fact that, as each generation has its Hamlet, so Eugénie Doche (the first Marguerite), Bernhardt (who took the play to London and the United

States), Duse (who toured in it throughout Europe and South America), Cécile Sorel, Ida Rubenstein, Blanche Dufrène, Marie Bell, Ludmilla Pitoëff all left their mark in the role. Edwige Feuillère played Marguerite over a thousand times between 1939 and 1952. More recently, the challenge has been taken up memorably by Loleh Belon in Paris in the '60s and, in London in 1985, by Frances Barber.

But even this does not exhaust the list of Ladies. There have been over twenty screen adaptations, the earliest made by a Dane in 1909. Sarah Bernhardt was Marguerite on celluloid in 1913; Lubitsch directed Pola Negri in 1920; Abel Gance made the first sound version in 1934, with Yvonne Printemps. Cukor's *Camille* (1937) — which, like the first American stage version in 1856, retitled the story after the flowers worn by its heroine — was hugely successful, and for a generation the face of Garbo symbolized noble suffering and tragic self-sacrifice. In 1981, Isabelle Huppert, in Pierre Bolognini's loose rendering, was the first actress to add nudity to the role. Marcel Pagnol adapted the novel for television in 1962 for Ludmilla Tchérina, and Kate Nelligan starred in a BBC serialization in 1976 ... Marguerite has had many faces.

And voices. Verdi attended the first performance of the play in Paris in 1852 and immediately saw its musical potential. The first production of *La Traviata*, in Venice in 1853, was a hurried affair which its composer described as a 'fiasco'. It was restaged, however, in 1854, and proved to be an immense success. Christine Nilsson sang Violetta in the first Paris production in 1856 and her successors — from Patti, Melba and Pons, to Callas, Sutherland, and Kiri Te Kanawa — include all the great divas. Since the war, there have been four notable ballet versions. And strip cartoons in newspapers. According to estate agents, she lived in as many houses in Paris as Cromwell built castles in the British Isles. Whatever view we might take of Dumas's merits as novelist and dramatist, it is clear that Marguerite Gautier has been much more than a character in a book or a play: she is a cultural phenomenon.

Part of the explanation lies in the public's eternal fascination with the private lives of great people in general, and of great sinners in particular. Marguerite was drawn from life, where she was Alphonsine Plessis, who was born at Nonant, in Normandy, on 16 January 1824. Her father

was a pedlar, Marin Plessis (1790–1841), the illegitimate son of a priest and a peasant girl with a weakness for cider and men. Her mother, Marie Deshayes (1795–1830) was the daughter of Anne du Mesnil d'Argentelle, last of a noble but impoverished line, who had married a servant. Marin Plessis was a brutal man and, leaving Alphonsine and her sister Delphine (who was two years older) with an aunt, Marie Deshayes found employment as the companion of an English noblewoman. She died in Geneva when Alphonsine was six and already sufficiently difficult for her aunt to return her to her father. It is possible that Marin Plessis started offering her to men by the time she was twelve.

In 1838 she travelled to Paris, either with her father or with a band of gypsies to whom he had sold her, and lived for a time with relatives who ran a grocer's shop. For a while, shopgirl on weekdays, and dance-hall flirt on Sundays, she remained within the ranks of the *grisettes*. But she quickly caught the eye of a restaurateur who made her his mistress, and then passed through the hands of a succession of lovers. In 1840 her much publicized affair with Agénor de Guiche (who was later to be, for a brief period, Napoleon III's foreign minister) launched her on her career, and, at sixteen, she was one of the most celebrated courtesans of her day. Agénor installed her at a fashionable address and paid for piano and dancing lessons. It was now that Marie Duplessis, as she styled herself, learned to write and began to read the two hundred books which she owned at the time of her death.

She was loved by many men, and it was said that the 'lions' of the Jockey Club banded together to ensure that every day of her week was reserved for one of their number. She was given vast amounts of money which she spent recklessly. When she left Agénor she moved to 22 rue d'Antin, an even more fashionable address, and soon met Comte Édouard de Perregaux, a wealthy army officer. Of all her suitors, Perregaux, a wealthy army officer. Of all her suitors, Perregaux appears to have been the most truly in love with her. He took her to Germany and bought her a house at Bougival. When Marie wearied of him, he was no longer wealthy.

By 1844, Marie's protector was the eighty-year-old Comte de Stackelberg, a Russian diplomat, who, it was believed, had been struck by the uncanny resemblance she bore to his dead daughter. He set her up in style in an apartment at 11 Boulevard de la Madeleine where she

was to live until her death. He paid the rent and engaged a cook, a maid and a coachman. Marie was not faithful to him — Dumas claimed that Stackelberg's interest in her was purely sexual — and she was frequently seen in the theatres and the gaming rooms where she won or lost with indifference. The 'lions' of the Jockey Club and the 'loge infernale' came to her apartment where she also received Musset, Eugène Sue and others; after her death, one newspaper called her 'the most elegant of women, having the most aristocratic taste and the most exquisite tact: she set the tone for a whole area of society'.

By general consent, Marie Duplessis was exceptionally beautiful. According to her passport, she was five feet six tall, with auburn hair, brown eyes, well-shaped nose, round chin and an oval face. Dumas, in the 1867 Preface to the play, was less prosaic: 'She was tall, very slim, with black hair and a pink and white face. Her head was small, and she had long, lustrous, Japanese eyes, very quick and alert, lips as red as cherries and the most beautiful teeth in the world.' After her death in 1847, which was widely reported, journalists spoke of her 'exquisite' and 'miraculous' beauty, and of her 'natural elegance and distinction'; she had, said one family paper, 'an indefinable but genuine air of chastity about her'. Albert Vandam, an Englishman who frequented fashionable and literary circles and talked to Marie occasionally between 1843 and her death, recalled 'her marvellously beautiful face, her matchless figure'. Like many others, he agreed that she was 'no ordinary girl'. She possessed 'a natural tact, and an instinctive refinement which no education could have enhanced. She never made grammatical mistakes, no coarse expressions ever passed her lips. Lola Montès could not make friends; Alphonsine Plessis could not make enemies.' According to Vandam, Dr Véron, the newspaper publisher, was equally impressed: 'She is, first of all, the best dressed woman in Paris; second, she neither flaunts nor hides her vices; thirdly, she is not always talking or hinting about money; in short, she is a wonderful courtesan.' The literary critic Jules Janin also remembered 'her young and supple waist', 'the beautiful oval of her face', and 'the grace which she radiated like an indescribable fragrance'. But Janin also detected a sense of *ennui* in her, the result of too many pressing loves. It is a view to be treated with scepticism, for *ennui* was fashionable ('La France s'ennuie', Lamartine

had declared). For while a great deal is known about her conduct, little is known about her soul. Her surviving letters, brief undated notes for the most part, do not speak of her soul, and are pointed and direct.

She was Dumas's mistress for eleven months, between September 1844 and August 1845. How much she loved him is difficult to say, though she was very close to him at first. After the break, however, there is nothing to suggest that she pined for him. Her continuing extravagance led her back to her lovers, while her consumption was making her only too familiar with doctors. Late in 1845, at a concert, she met Liszt who appears to have been the only man she ever genuinely loved. 'She was the most absolute incarnation of Woman who has ever existed', he wrote subsequently, and for a while they were happy. Then, inexplicably, on 21 February 1846, she married Perregaux at the Kensington Register Office. The marriage, while valid in England, was not legal in France, and the couple separated at once, Marie returning to Liszt in Paris. Whatever her reasons for marrying Perregaux, she now felt able to sign herself 'la comtesse du Plessis' and to add a coronet to her plate.

Liszt left Paris in the spring, promising to return in the autumn when he would take her with him to Constantinople. She was now increasingly ill and, in June, left to take the waters in Belgium and Germany. She maintained contact by letter with Perregaux who was now attempting to return to the army. Marie was back in Paris by mid-September, but her condition deteriorated steadily. Drs Davaine, Manec and Chomel saw her frequently, and she consulted Dr Koreff, a fashionable charlatan, but their prescriptions of asses' milk, fumigations, frictions, their warnings against over-use of her voice and the recommendation that she sleep on a horse-hair mattress, made little difference. Liszt did not return and Marie dropped out of circulation. In late December, she paid her last visit to the theatre, 'the shadow of a woman', one journalist reported, sitting in her box like 'something white and diaphanous'.

Cared for by her maid, Clotilde, who tried to shield her against her creditors, she grew weaker and died on 3 February 1847 at the age of twenty-three. She did not die in poverty, however, as some newspapers suggested, nor was she quite alone, for the faithful Perregaux returned. A service was held for her at the Church of La Madeleine which attracted

fashionable society and a cohort of journalists who filled their columns for days with anecdotes of her life. She was buried in a temporary grave in Montmartre cemetery and was exhumed on 16 February, at the order of Perregaux, who paid for a permanent plot for her remains. Her possessions were auctioned in her apartment between 24 and 27 February: Eugène Sue bought her prayerbook, and society ladies outbid each other for her combs and trinkets. The sale realized 89,017 francs, of which her creditors took nearly 50,000.

According to Dickens's friend John Forster, Marie 'left behind her the most exquisite furniture and the most voluptuous and sumptuous bijouterie. Dickens wished at one time to have printed the moral of this life and death of which there was great talk in Paris while we were together.' The same idea also occurred to Dumas who, however, had more pressing motives for doing so.

Dumas, younger than Marie by six months, was the illegitimate son of a famous father who, unwittingly and almost singlehandedly, made his boyhood unhappy and furnished him with that obsessiveness without which there is no literature. In 1831 Dumas *père* removed him from his mother, to whom he always remained attached, and sent him to a succession of *pensions* where taunts about his illegitimacy made him wretched: a few months before his death in 1895, he confessed bitterly that 'ever since the age of seven I have been fighting life'. It was to these years that he owed his enduring preoccupation with the plight of illegitimate children and abandoned mothers, and his general belief that illicit love was a force for evil.

He left school having failed his examinations and was drawn into the whirling life of Dumas *père*, a roaring man of great appetites and legendary generosity, who took immense pleasure in initiating his son into the delights of Paris. Alexandre was tall, blond and handsome, and he took readily to what he later called, disapprovingly, the 'paganism of modern life'. It was said that Victor Hugo warned his son against associating with the dissolute Dumas *fils* who, in 1843, took his first mistress. He was a familiar figure in the gaming rooms, cafés and theatres of Paris, and he never paid his tailor. One day in September 1844, after visiting his father at Saint-Germain, he met up with Eugène Dejazet, the son of Mademoiselle

Dejazet, of the Théâtre du Palais Royal. On reaching Paris, they dined and, for want of anything better to do, wandered into the Théâtre des Variétés. Marie Duplessis was in her usual box. Dumas must have known her by sight, but it was through Dejazet, who was acquainted with Marie's neighbour, Clémence Prat, more go-between than milliner, that they engineered an invitation to supper in the apartment at 11 Boulevard de la Madeleine.

Dumas became her lover. On the evidence of his straitened circumstances alone, it may be deduced that Marie returned his passion. She called him by his initials, and 'Adet' was granted the status of 'amant de cœur'. But since he was not rich and her needs were great, his exclusive position did not last long, and Marie returned to her regular keepers — Stackelberg, Perregaux and others besides. After eleven months of increasing suspicion and anxiety, Dumas ended the affair with a note, dated 30 August 1845, part of which survives in the letter sent by Armand in Chapter 14.

It is difficult to say how attached to Marie he was: in October 1844, he was still trying to free himself of a mistress he had found during a stay at Marseilles the previous summer. It is likely that Perregaux loved her more, and certain that Liszt occupied a higher place in her affections. But for a while they had been happy together. After the break, he could not have avoided seeing Marie in the small world of fashionable Paris, but there was to be no further contact between them. Wearying now of the dissolute life, of which he had never really approved, he resolved to earn enough money to pay off the 50,000 francs which he owed: his ambition, he later said, was not to see Naples and die, but to pay his debts and die. He wrote enough poems to fill a volume which, when it appeared in 1847, sold fourteen copies. He wrote a play, and began a novel. He found himself a new mistress.

In October 1846, fourteen months after the end of the affair, he travelled to Spain with his father. It was there that he learned of Marie's illness, and he wrote to her asking for forgiveness and suggesting that they might begin again. No reply to his letter is known, but Dumas did not return to Paris. Instead, he continued on his travels with his father to North Africa, apparently content to go his own way. He returned to France early in January 1847 and on 10 February received news that Marie was

dead. Though he left at once for Paris, his reason for travelling was not unconnected with urgent business with his publisher. He arrived on 14 February, may have been the friend who accompanied Perregaux at the exhumation, and certainly attended either the preview of the auction or the auction itself which drew the whole of Parisian society, 'the female part of which — almost without distinction — went to look at her apartment, to appraise her jewels and dresses, etc. "They would probably like to have had them on the same terms," said a terrible cynic. The remark must have struck young Dumas, in whose hearing it was said, or who, at any rate, had it reported to him.' Vandam may have been right in going on to conclude that 'the first idea of the novel was probably suggested to him, not by his acquaintance (with Marie) but by the sensation her death caused among the Paris public'. Yet his first literary response was a rather banal elegy, dedicated to 'M. D.', written soon after the auction, which strikes an anguished note — though whether of personal emotion or of modish lamentation for the waste of youth, it is not easy to say. 'We had quarrelled you and I: what cause?/No cause! For some suspected secret love.' He evokes her 'fevered passion' and their nights of love, and he weeps for her death. 'One man alone was there to close your eyes', and at her graveside, 'Your sometime friends were now but two.'

Exactly when, or why, Dumas resolved to make a novel out of his affair with Marie, cannot be said for certain. He needed money, the story was there to be written, the subject was controversial and Marie was notorious. But whether *La Dame aux Camélias* was a cynical piece of exploitation or a genuine need to come to terms with his grief, or, more likely, a mixture of the two, Dumas confessed that he wrote the novel quickly, in June 1847. It was published the following summer. 'It was in everyone's hands', reports Vandam, 'and the press kept whetting the curiosity of those who had not read it with personal anecdotes of the heroine.' Vandam exaggerates the impact of the novel on Parisian society which was just emerging from the 1848 Revolution, but he does reflect the commonly held view that Dumas's book was autobiographical and that it revealed the secret mysteries of a courtesan's life.

The notion that *La Dame aux Camélias* is not simply true to life but actually true clearly helped shape the vogue for the novel which began

in earnest after the play was successfully staged in 1852. It even has considerable basis in fact. Gaston R*** was based on Eugène Dejazet, N*** on Perregaux, the 'Duke' on Stackelberg, G*** on Agénor de Guiche, and Prudence is a thinly veiled transposition of Clémence Prat. Marguerite is as intriguing as those who knew Marie say she was, and Armand bears the initials of Dumas himself. The meeting at the theatre and the supper party which followed, Armand's growing jealousy, even the letter he writes, all draw upon reality in the most transparent way. Marie's death, the exhumation, and the auction are similarly factual. In comparison, the changes which Dumas makes — Armand is four years older, Marie's address is disguised, the dates of events occurring between her death and the auction are advanced by seventeen days — are minor and trifling. Few novels between Restif's *Sara* (1783), which was written as the events it chronicles unfolded, and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965), reconstructed from official records and interviews, draw quite so brazenly on real life.

Dumas was quite clear in his own mind about the difference between life and art. Of course, he openly acknowledged Marie as his model, but once, after a memorable performance of *La Dame aux Camélias*, he confessed to his father that Armand that night had loved Marguerite more passionately than he himself had ever loved Marie. (Dumas père sympathized, and added that, for his part, he knew that D'Artagnan was the man he could never be.) Literature is not a reproduction of reality, it is reality transposed and heightened. Dumas further recalled a revival of his play in 1859 in which Clémence Prat, who was an occasional actress among her other trades, played Prudence, for whom she had unwittingly modelled, and was totally unconvincing in the role. If Dumas's novel, though rooted in fact, is not quite life, then perhaps it is art.

This is a proposition which carried more weight in 1850 than it does today. The impetus of Romanticism was spent and the seeds of a plainer Realism were only beginning to germinate. In historical terms, *La Dame aux Camélias* is a transitional novel which moves away from Romantic excess towards a more restrained presentation of social and psychological realities. Indeed, it impressed its first admirers as a remarkably sober and understated picture of contemporary manners. Modern readers, however,

will be impressed rather by its sentimentality and by the melodrama which, in the exhumation scene, verges on the Gothic. Poses are struck, rhetorical flourishes subvert plain speaking, and noble sentiments of stupendous pomposity are paraded without embarrassment. Nor is it possible to venture far into the story without sensing the manipulations of which we are the victims. In spite of the claim that Marguerite will not be shown except as she was, everything is calculated to reveal her in the best light. The Duke's fantasy and her dislike of N*** leave her singularly underemployed in her profession, and Dumas's insistence that she remains 'virginal' in the midst of vice, like his wish to turn her into a saint and martyr, will nowadays strike some readers as a piece of special pleading. Her consumption, a marvellously convenient literary disease, is used to extract our sympathy and to excuse the extravagance of her conduct. If we ever get round to wondering quite why she must have 100,000 francs a year (see A Note on Money, p.189), the question has long since been made tasteless and irrelevant. The fact that she is dead when the novel begins makes it difficult to speak ill of her, and the anecdotes involving Louise, like the behaviour of the public at the auction, remove any wish that we might have to do so. Four first-person narrators tell her story, and each voice is unctuous and persuasive. The first is the voice of our curiosity, and it tantalizes us by giving the view from the outside. Armand, through whose eyes we learn to see Marguerite, tells us part of the inside story, and it is left to Marguerite to take us to the truth. Julie Duprat reads the last rites over the 'unhappy destiny' which we have known was inevitable since Chapter 1. That Dumas maintains the suspense of a story having divulged the final outcome at the outset is a considerable achievement, and it suggests that if *La Dame aux Camélias* is not art, then it is at least artful.

Dumas was clearly conscious of the need to package the story for maximum effect. His choice of title, for which he claimed sole responsibility and which has contributed considerably to the notoriety of his novel, was no happy accident. Moreover, he was aware of the basic ground rules for the kind of tale he wished to tell. In the Epilogue to *Antonine* (1849), he deduces from the examples of *Paul et Virginie*, *Werther* and *Manon Lescaut* that an 'histoire de cœur' requires young lovers and that 'death alone can poeticize their young love'. It is likely that

if Marie had not died, Dumas would have killed Marguerite. He knew, too, that to succeed, a modern *Manon Lescaut* needed to be solidly anchored in contemporary reality. But his realism — the careful chronology, the precise locations, the preoccupation with money — is offset by a general mood of hyperbole, and the effect is one of surface without depth. The background characters are vividly realized and, as they were intended to do, they start contrasts designed to give perspective to the hero and heroine. Gaston, the insensitive young man about town, N***, who needs Marguerite to complete his public image, and the Duke, who makes her part of a private fantasy, help to define, by reflection, the sincerity of Armand's love. In the same way, Prudence and Olympe reveal, by implication, how different Marguerite is from the common pattern of the callous courtesan. Yet, though they are nimbly sketched, they remain social and psychological types, uninteresting in their own right and functional in purpose. Even Armand, in spite of occasional moments of self-mockery, fails to rise above the role for which he is typecast. He is a lightweight lover, dense and petulant by turns, a man too preoccupied by his own feelings and pride ever to become truly tragic, and too self-regarding to love anyone but himself. For all his tears and bombast, telling his tale assuages his grief and he 'recovers quickly', much as Dumas himself had done. In this company, Marguerite dominates the novel just as Phèdre dominates Racine's play, for only she escapes the limitations imposed by reality. If Armand and Prudence are reported and chronicled from life, Marguerite was invented.

'Marie', said Dumas in the 1867 Preface to the play, 'did not have all the moving adventures which I attribute to Marguerite Gautier, but she would have dearly liked to have them. If she sacrificed nothing to Armand, it was because Armand would not have it.' In life, Marie regularly stopped short of love. As each love died, she began afresh, like Penelope at her loom. In his novel, Dumas takes Marguerite into a 'moving adventure' in which she is not required to unpick the stitches of his imaginative embroidery. He takes her through Worldliness, Love, Renunciation, Atonement and Death, but he also leads her out of reality into fable. The story has survived not merely, as he once said, because 'it will always be replayed throughout the world wherever there are courtesans and young men', though this is probably true. It is rather, as

he also said, because it has the qualities of a 'legend'. It scarcely matters if *La Dame aux Camélias*, in spite of its solid carpentry, shrewd dramatic sense and lively dialogue, is no masterpiece, for it is that far rarer thing: a popular myth. Dumas, far from 'poeticizing' Marie, counters our cynicism with his sympathetic and moving portrait of Marguerite, young, hopeful and doomed, who demonstrates that even the souls of outcasts may be redeemed by love. Marguerite Gautier does not properly belong with Emma Bovary or Anna Karenina on the high slopes of literature, but with Juliet, Frankenstein's monster, Madame Butterfly, Tarzan and James Bond at the centre of the collective unconscious. For generations of (especially women) readers, Marguerite symbolized romance and selfless love in the most immediate way. Already in 1867, Dumas reports, women regularly visited her grave. Later in the century, the Comtesse Néra de la Jonchère put fresh camellias on her tomb each day for many years. In 1950, Edith Saunders, Dumas's biographer, surprised her intimidating *conciierge* setting off, as she did each Sunday, with a bouquet of azaleas for the Lady of the Camellias in Montmartre cemetery. The Lady has been an ideal, an inspiration, a consolation. Emma Bovary is a luxury; Marguerite Gautier is a necessity.

Watchful observers, however, have pointed out that by turning his skittish courtesan into an ideal of submissive, self-sacrificing womanhood, Dumas did nothing to help to liberate women. Dumas would have taken the criticism as a compliment, for Armand's respectable father — another invention, incidentally, for Dumas *père* was far from respectable — already voices reservations about the 'paganism of modern life' which were to dominate Dumas's later work. As time passed, his interest in illicit love, which he knew from personal experience was a source of personal unhappiness, turned into a concern for the well-being of society. Though he continued to believe that selfless love can move men and women to selfless acts, he gave dire warnings of the dangers presented not only by prostitution but by adultery. He came to view woman as evil, a force to be mastered by man, to be subjugated for her own good, for woman would be free only when protected against her own destructiveness. He presented a hard, impassive face to the public which knew him as the self-made author of well-made plays. But it is clear that the ever more moralistic Dumas,

famous for his wit, grew increasingly pessimistic as he saw the world plunge deeper into the permissiveness which made no one happy. After 1870, when he turned more and more towards a kind of secular religiosity, his popularity waned, though he knew that his position in the history of the theatre was secure. He continued to be interested in the same narrow range of moral and social problems — the problem of illegitimacy, prostitution, adultery, love, marriage and the family — and eventually spoke out in favour of political rights for women, though less out of conviction than from weariness. Other people's opinions, he remarked, are like nails: the harder you hit them, the more immovable they become.

Dumas's literary influence on several generations was profound. Pierre Louÿs called him 'the master of Ibsen and Tolstoy'. If this is excessive, it is undeniable that Dumas the playwright gave a new impetus to the French dramatic tradition and, by making the transition from the merely well-made play to the well-made play of ideas, prepared the way for the modern movement in the theatre. His novels, for all their incipient realism, made less of an impact, though as a novelist Dumas continued to be read and *La Dame aux Camélias* was regularly reprinted. But neither as a novelist nor as a playwright did he ever recapture the mythical quality of the tale he told of Marguerite Gautier. He wrote better novels and more significant plays, but he wrote them with his head. *La Dame aux Camélias* is a young man's book, and it has all the faults and virtues of youth. It was a romantic indiscretion for which Dumas was never moved to apologize.

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NOTE ON THE TEXT

THE first edition of *La Dame aux Camélias* appeared in July 1848, and was reprinted, with a preface by Jules Janin, in 1851. A number of minor errors were corrected by Dumas in the third edition, published in March 1852. In 1872, he prepared a revised version, of which only 500 copies were printed, which introduced a number of stylistic and formal changes