

Intimate Exchanges

The Courtesan Narrative and Male Homosocial

Desire in *La Dame aux camélias*

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Before Violetta moved audiences with her soaring arias in *La Traviata*, there was a play called *La Dame aux camélias*. But before the curtain ever rose on this melodrama, there was a novel of the same name. What sets Alexandre Dumas, fils's original 1848 novel apart from its better-known theatrical and operatic adaptations is its narrative structure. Borrowing a structural technique from *Manon Lescaut* (more on this reference to come) the story of the courtesan Marguerite Gautier and her doomed love affair with Armand Duval unfolds for the reader as the heartbroken lover recounts his tale of woe to a sympathetic male listener. At the start of the novel, when the narrator meets Armand, the courtesan is already dead. The reader comes to know Marguerite, *la dame aux camélias* herself, never through her actions, but through the words of her mourning lover and two letters she has left behind.

The anonymous narrator who shares this story with us meets the grieving Armand by chance, and the two quickly form a close friendship—close enough that Armand feels comfortable sharing this personal tale with him and no one else. All the reader learns about the narrator is that he is male, around the same age and class as Armand, and that he felt great pity towards prostitutes even before learning of Armand and Marguerite's true love.¹ After establishing a strong friendship that involves helping Armand transfer Marguerite's remains to a better grave site and nursing him back to physical and emotional health, the narrator becomes the recipient of Armand's sad tale. The story Armand tells the narrator, and that the narrator tells us, is a tragic one. A beautiful courtesan suffering from tuberculosis genuinely falls in love with a young admirer, whom she ultimately abandons in a selfless act to save his family's honor, before succumbing to her disease and her broken heart.

Even though this novel never achieved the fame and popularity of its

subsequent adaptations, a closer look at Dumas's original text can shed light on an important part of the narrative. Considering the frame story that encloses the more familiar narrative reveals new insights into the allure of fictional prostitutes for nineteenth-century French authors. Thus, my focus here will be on the frame narrative and its two main characters: the narrator and Armand. I want to explore the story of how this story got told. My aim is to highlight not the prostitute's body, as other critics have done, but the importance of her narrative.² The common interpretation of *La Dame aux camélias* is, as Naomi Segal succinctly describes, "The text is all about her body."³ I would argue that the text is about much more. The courtesan herself only appears once in the frame narrative: as a gruesome exhumed cadaver. But her story becomes the glue that binds these two men in a special way. From the first words of the text, "on ne peut créer des personnages que lorsque l'on a beaucoup étudié les hommes,"⁴ the focus is on men getting to know men. Despite its title, this is a story about two men, not about a courtesan.

For the purposes of this essay, I will use the terms prostitute and courtesan interchangeably, although a prostitute is any person who accepts monetary compensation for sexual acts, and in the nineteenth century a courtesan is a more fashionable female prostitute of a higher price. Also, the mercenary nature of that profession will not be relevant here, except to the extent that the need and desire for money usually bring the prostitute into contact with more men than a woman who is merely adulterous would meet. The men mentioned in the context of this novel are presumed to be heterosexual because they have had or plan to have sex with a woman, namely Marguerite, although there are few indications that the narrator is sexually attracted to women. Finally, I will be employing Eve Sedgwick's use of the term "homosocial" to describe the kind of desire and intimacy the heterosexual men of this text exhibit. "Homosocial" is a particularly appropriate word here because it is both "obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual,' and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual.'"⁵ To be clear, the men of this text never engage in or express a desire for a homoerotic encounter, but, as I will show, they repeatedly seek and experience an intimacy that is nevertheless based on sexual relationships.

Using Dumas's novel as an example and a starting point, I will establish the complexity of this kind of ambiguous male desire and show how the courtesan's narrative helps it develop. First I will describe the homosocial desire between the narrator and Armand, then I will explain how prostitutes normally mediate such desires between the men who "exchange" them.

Finally, I will reveal how the male homosocial desire in the case of the frame narrator and Marguerite's former lover is satisfied not through the actual exchange of a prostitute, but through a series of paper proxies that facilitate essential communication between men.

The relationship that develops between these men serves as more than an excuse to allow Armand to tell his story; it is an example of sexually ambiguous male homosocial desire. The narrator describes feeling at their first meeting "une si vive sympathie pour ce jeune homme"⁶ that is as sudden and as powerful as *le coup de foudre*. He promises to do everything he can for Armand in exchange for nothing more than his friendship. He assures Armand that he seeks only "le plaisir de [lui] être agréable,"⁷ hinting at pleasure without specifying its source. This initial meeting also ends with a tinge of the erotic as the narrator appears almost seduced by the troubled young man in his home: "Le regard de ce jeune homme était bon et doux; je fus au moment de l'embrasser."⁸ Of course, he never does kiss Armand, and certainly his appreciation for the other man and any kind of embrace they might share could be interpreted without any hint of sexual tension. But the narrator's growing obsession with Armand after this meeting goes well beyond merely a generous effort to help out a kindred spirit.

After their initial encounter, the narrator is filled with curiosity and cannot wait to see Armand again. This attraction, heightened by Armand's mysterious disappearance, seems beyond the narrator's control, as he admits: "je m'intéressais malgré moi à ce jeune homme."⁹ When Armand returns from a prolonged voyage gravely ill with a mysterious fever, the narrator tirelessly cares for him, performing any tasks the sick man requests and seldom leaving his bedside. He even accompanies Armand to see the dead courtesan's body as it is being moved to a new grave. After this shocking scene, Armand is bedridden, and after a long convalescence with the narrator by his side, he is finally capable of telling the lengthy story of his doomed love affair with Marguerite. And in the end, the narrator does what Marguerite never could: he joins Armand on a trip to visit his family in the country. When the prodigal son returns home, he does so with his faithful and loving male friend at his side.

This relationship contains an intensity and complexity that exceed the common understanding of friendship. Certainly, we find echoes of Montaigne's essay on friendship, as these two souls "se mêlent et confondent l'une en l'autre, d'un mélange si universel, qu'elles effacent et ne retrouvent plus la couture qui les a jointes."¹⁰ It is not their closeness that is significant here, but rather the erotic element that is always present. The story of Armand's flirta-

tions with, and sexual seduction of Marguerite is promised early on, and its anticipation seems as compelling to the narrator as its telling is satisfying. Although these men never overtly acknowledge or act upon the eroticism at the heart of their friendship, it is nonetheless there, as their every conversation is either about, or awkwardly avoiding the subject of a prostitute.

The prostitute fascinated not just Armand and the narrator, but many nineteenth-century French writers. Gustave Flaubert once admitted, “J’aime la prostitution pour elle-même” but quickly qualified his praise with the words “indépendamment de ce qu’il y en a dessous.”¹¹ In other words, he loves everything about prostitution, except for what it is. Flaubert’s awkward endorsement highlights the contradictions in nineteenth-century attitudes towards prostitution and prostitutes. The prostitute is, in Charles Bernheimer’s words, at once “desire and its inevitable disappointment, the intimate contact of bodies and its demystification by monetary exchange, the ideal aspiration of love and the void enclosing each human being in his loneliness.”¹² Such contradictions can be found in the depiction of Marguerite as well. As Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer points out, her description is characterized by its ambiguity, and it portrays her character as one of compromises: “à la fois innocent et vicieux [. . .] à la fois pur [. . .] et d’une sensualité voluptueuse.”¹³ The complex and ambivalent character of Marguerite, then, reflects the ambiguous nature of the bond the narrator and Armand share.

For a nineteenth-century reader anxious about confining and controlling feminine sexuality, the prostitute is also, as Jann Matlock reminds us, a safe outlet for male sexuality that can protect other women from unwanted advances.¹⁴ Furthermore, by her exclusion from legitimate social relationships, the prostitute serves the function of reinforcing social norms such as controlled female sexuality and bourgeois marriage.¹⁵ The prostitute’s body, particularly as it has been portrayed as diseased, contagious, and sexual, has been the subject of much critical analysis. Clearly, the illnesses of a courtesan are never purely physical, as many astute interpretations of Marguerite’s tuberculosis and of her grotesque cadaver have shown.¹⁶ I am proposing here another contradictory aspect of prostitutes that also begins to explain their broad appeal in literature: prostitutes satisfy heterosexual men’s need for a female body, but they also facilitate intimate bonding among those same heterosexual men.

Homosocial bonds among men are often forged through women. As Sedgwick argues, homosocial bonding frequently takes place in the private, domestic sphere of marriage and the equally private sphere of adultery.

Gayle Rubin has famously posited that tribes or families solidify their bonds of peace when a father from one group gives his daughter in marriage to a man in another. When the daughter consummates her marriage she represents her family, and specifically her father, in the marriage bed.¹⁷ Thus, this economy of marriage does more than ensure a refreshed gene pool; it allows two men to connect on a sexual level without their physical bodies ever touching.

Outside of marriage, two heterosexual men can develop and express homosocial desire through their rivalry over a woman married to one of them. For instance, in the medieval legend of Tristan and Iseult, Tristan is loyal to King Mark, not because the latter is his uncle, but because he is married to Tristan's beloved. Similarly, Lancelot remains a faithful and special vassal to King Arthur as long as he is able to sleep with Arthur's wife. When the adulterous affair is exposed and the two are separated, Lancelot must leave Arthur's court, and the bond between the men can no longer exist.

These two literary examples demonstrate well René Girard's notion of triangulated desire, which is at the heart of rivalrous homosocial bonding. According to Girard, the presence of a rival is not an impediment to but in fact creates the desire for the beloved.¹⁸ There is an early example of this process in *La Dame aux camélias* when the narrator attends the auction of Marguerite Gautier's belongings. He admits that he barely knew Marguerite and has no desire to possess anything once belonging to her. On a whim he decides to place a bid on a book of hers, *Manon Lescaut*, and only becomes determined to acquire it when another man begins to try and outbid him. Fully aware of the motivation behind this acquisition, the narrator admits: "Je me suis entêté à renchérir sur ce volume, je ne sais pourquoi, pour le plaisir de faire enrager un monsieur qui s'acharnait dessus et semblait me défier de l'avoir."¹⁹ In this case the object of desire is the courtesan's book—an easy metaphor for the woman herself—but the narrator's desire for her clearly takes a backseat to his rivalry with the other bidder.

In nineteenth-century Paris, male bonding could happen anywhere, from a public auction to a university lecture hall to a crowded cabaret. Sometimes the object of rivalry or exchange that connects two men is not a wife, a lover, or a book, but instead is a prostitute. In this case, the homosocial bonding takes place not in the private sphere of marriage and adultery, but in the public sphere, with a public woman. Like Guinevere or Iseult, the courtesan has more than one sexual partner, but in the case of the prostitute, her known promiscuity only increases the number of men who fulfill their homosocial desires through her body. Because they know the body they

are touching has been and will be touched by other men, the prostitute's lovers are able to connect intimately and sexually—albeit vicariously—via the courtesan.

Unlike the triangulated desire that bonds heterosexual men in the private sphere, the homosocial intimacy to be found through the courtesan in the public sphere is generally devoid of rivalry—like the relationship between the narrator and Armand. In fact, any rivalry among the prostitute's many customers is seen as ridiculous, or in the case of Armand and Marguerite, impossible. Armand's jealous desire to monopolize Marguerite would force her to renounce her role as a facilitator of male homosocial bonds. As everyone repeatedly reminds him, such a fantasy of monogamy with a courtesan is absurd. Marguerite's friend Prudence and Marguerite herself attempt to explain to Armand that a courtesan of Marguerite's status needs vast sums of money that Armand alone cannot supply. Further, Armand's father would never allow a marriage or even a relationship with a former prostitute. Like the narrator foolishly overbidding for a novel, Armand refuses to see the futility in his desire to possess the courtesan. He does not recognize that Marguerite has a social function to fulfill, and his sole control of her body is preventing other men from having her, and preventing the intimate bond with her other previous lovers as well. The men who can never come in intimate contact physically with each other need the prostitute's body to mediate their desired bonds.

Homosocial bonding among men occurs in *La Dame aux camélias* in a small way via Marguerite's body. We know she has had many lovers, and these men have been able to bond through the vicarious intimate contact she enacts. But in this novel, the courtesan is a poor vehicle for male homosocial desire because of her early death and Armand's demands for her sexual fidelity. Despite the number of men who respond to the narrator's inquiries whether they knew Marguerite with "Beaucoup!" and a grin, the Marguerite we see is not very promiscuous. And an important absence on her list of suitors is the narrator, who is careful to clarify, "Je n'ai connu Mlle Gautier que de vue."²⁰ The narrator and Armand can never express their homosocial desire through Marguerite's body; instead they share her narrative. For them, Marguerite is not a body they each enjoy, but a series of texts they exchange.

The first of these texts is *Manon Lescaut*. When the narrator impetuously overbids to acquire an object of Marguerite's estate, the book he obtains is Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*. This novel is in many ways an eighteenth-century version of *La Dame aux camélias*. In both these texts a grieving young man

tells his story to a male narrator, and in both the heroine is a courtesan who finds sexual fidelity difficult and dies before the outset of the narrative. Armand conspicuously draws the parallel between the text and Marguerite when he first gives her Prévost's novel and includes a handwritten note: "Manon à Marguerite. Humilité."²¹ In addition to serving as an object of rivalry between the narrator and the other bidder, *Manon Lescaut* the novel also brings Armand and the narrator together. Armand tracks down the narrator in order to get back the novel. Manon—in many ways Marguerite's doppelgänger—introduces the narrator to his new special friend.

In the scene of their initial meeting there is another textual signifier for Marguerite. During their first conversation Armand unabashedly has the narrator read Marguerite's final letter to him, even though he just met the narrator. Armand wishes to convey to his new acquaintance how unlike common prostitutes Marguerite was, but he is unable to do so without turning to a written document. Similarly, at the end of his narrative, Armand again hands the narrator a text written in Marguerite's hand. Marguerite's memoirs of her final days depict her courage and devotion better than Armand ever could. Like two bookends surrounding Armand's account of their affair, Marguerite's writings encapsulate her narrative, just as the frame story does for *La Dame aux camélias*.

These three texts—*Manon Lescaut*, Marguerite's letter to Armand, and her memoirs of her final days—become written replacements for the dead courtesan's body. The physical act of handing each other these papers brings the men closer to each other in space—one can even imagine fingertips brushing. More importantly, each of these documents allows the narrator more and more intimate knowledge of Armand and Marguerite's relationship. Reading and discussing each text prolongs and deepens the friendship of the two men. If the narrator seeks, as he says, "une connaissance plus longue et de relations plus intimes"²² with Armand, the paper proxies of Marguerite assure that he does.

The words written on these paper replacements allow these two men to communicate without needing to speak. Marguerite's narrative—even in the form of Manon's—appears and provides a visual communicative link instead of what might otherwise be awkward verbal discourse. As close as these two men quickly become, certain conversations are still impossible for them. Although they ultimately share very private details, not all of them are spoken. In fact, their homosocial bond—the desire one man feels to be intimately bonded with the other—is difficult to put into words. In this text, as in most nineteenth-century literature, there is a certain degree of unspeak-

ability associated with the desire in men for homosocial intimacy. The clues that point to it are as subtle as two men's glances during a bidding war and the clasping of a friend's hand in moments of distress.

In most cases where a prostitute is involved, the female body makes that impossible speech unnecessary. If two men know they have been with the same prostitute there is no need to discuss their individual encounters with her. Each man knows the body and the act the other enjoyed. Without experiencing an erotic exchange, or even discussing the intimate particulars of their experiences, the men who frequent the same prostitute satisfy their homosocial desire for sexual intimacy. In other words, their unspeakable homosocial desire is sated without ever having to be articulated. The courtesan allows their impossible exchange to take place not through words, but through her body.

But the narrator and Armand never have sex with the same prostitute. Marguerite's body cannot be shared, not only because she is dead, but because of Armand's jealous need to keep her all to himself while she is alive. One may easily assume that if the narrator had ever been with Marguerite, Armand would have never become his friend. When Armand asks the narrator if some important memory of Marguerite is the reason for the high price he paid for her book, the narrator notices his fear that he had "connu Marguerite comme lui l'avait connue,"²³ and he is quick to reassure the grief-stricken jealous lover. An essential element of their friendship, then, is the fact that they do not frequent the same prostitute.

Since Marguerite's body cannot satisfy their unspeakable desire for intimacy, the two men suffer an initial inability to communicate, which manifests as a difficulty speaking together in general. For instance, the first conversation between Armand and the narrator is punctuated with pauses that surpass the normal formalities and awkwardness of a new acquaintance. A grieving Armand repeatedly bursts into tears and gets so overcome with emotion that he cannot respond. Further, the narrator himself holds back certain questions because he fears he might appear overly curious and wanting to "[se] mêler de ses affaires."²⁴ The two interlocutors also misunderstand each other, such as when the narrator suggests that Armand turn to his friends and family for support. An embarrassed Armand huffily replies: "Je vous ennuie. Excusez-moi, je ne réfléchissais pas que ma douleur doit vous importer peu, et que je vous importune d'une chose qui ne peut et ne doit vous intéresser en rien." The narrator tries to explain, "Vous vous trompez au sens de mes paroles,"²⁵ but the mutual understanding that reading Marguerite's letter brought is gone when these two men try to speak.

Later when the narrator goes to see what has become of Armand since their first exchange, the sight of the young man's emotion again renders him speechless: "C'est à peine si j'osai répondre,"²⁶ and he has to be content with nodding his head in response. Communication between these two men remains stilted until they share the experience of seeing the cadaver of Marguerite. On the way to the exhumation of Marguerite's body, they say nothing to each other. But once this shared visual experience is complete, their verbal exchanges begin to flow more smoothly.

Strangely, Armand seems at first to deteriorate verbally. The shock of seeing his beautiful lover's rotting corpse has left Armand practically speechless, as the narrator notes: "Je lui parlai, il ne me répondit pas."²⁷ Once the narrator takes Armand home and puts him to bed, Armand begins to speak, but in an incomprehensible babble, stammering out "des mots sans suite à travers lesquels le nom seul de Marguerite se faisait entendre distinctement."²⁸ The only clear communication between these men in this most intense and intimate moment is Marguerite, in the form of her repeated name.

Soon, however, the words begin to flow. If Armand was once selfish in demanding physical fidelity from Marguerite, he fortunately has no qualms sharing the words written and spoken about her. Once he is assured that the body he has jealously guarded is decomposed and gone, he can easily conjure her presence through his words. The courtesan may be dead, but her ghost reappears over and over in her lover's storytelling. A man who previously could not put two words together without pausing for tears or senselessly babbling, seamlessly spews the narrative of his love story so eloquently that the narrator claims to have hardly changed a single word in writing it down.

This story of Marguerite's devotion, the verbal, then the written narrative, becomes something that these two men share. Not only are they—until the publication of the novel—the only two people who know this account, they are also the only ones who recount it. Armand is the speaker who makes the narrator be his audience, just as the narrator is the author who makes his readers be his audience. These men share a role, but they could not do it without Marguerite. Both narrators turn back to her words when their own are insufficient, adding Marguerite's unedited writings as a way to tell their story. The courtesan—through the shocking sight of her decomposing body and through her letters—helps Armand communicate with the narrator, and she helps the narrator reach his readers.

In addition to establishing a profound homosocial bond with Armand through the story of the courtesan, the narrator also creates the same inti-

mate connection with his readers by passing on the narrative. His justification for writing and publishing this story reveals his desire to create the same kind of bond in the form of shared intimate knowledge. Throughout his appeal for empathy for prostitutes, the narrator includes himself alongside his readers, proclaiming, “C’est à ma génération que je m’adresse.”²⁹ Interestingly, in his calls for greater understanding of the plight of courtesans, he never uses the “vous” form of the imperative, but instead uses the milder, first-person plural “nous” form in appeals such as: “soyons bons, soyons jeunes, soyons vrais,” “ne méprisons pas la femme,” “essayons de réjouir le ciel,” and “laissons [. . .] l’aumône de notre pardon.”³⁰ We should be good. We should not scorn these women. Over and over in these appeals the narrator states that he is one with his readers, as if they shared one soul. The narrator and his reader are close, he assures us, and will get even closer after sharing this intimate story. Like two heterosexual men, like the narrator and Armand, an author and his readers cannot physically embrace. But as the narrator of *La Dame aux camélias* learns, he can bond with them homosocially through the story of a prostitute.

The fictional prostitute is a powerful literary device for nineteenth-century French authors. Characters like Goncourt’s Fille Elisa, Zola’s Nana or Fleur-de-Marie in Sue’s *Mystères de Paris* express the social, political, and cultural anxieties of the age. Prostitutes are a trope used to represent fears of contagion, the increasing conspicuous consumption of industrial capitalism, and uncontrolled female sexuality.³¹ But as the frame story of *La Dame aux camélias* reveals, fictional prostitutes serve another literary purpose. They not only recall the homosocial connection men seek and share with a prostitute, but also facilitate an important kind of intimacy between an author and his readers. In writing about and describing the sexually available woman—whether the salacious details are included or implied—, the male author conjures up his own fantasies and experiences which blend with those of his (male) readers to create an intimate imaginary connection. A writer like Alexandre Dumas can never see or touch each reader directly, but by writing about a prostitute, he can form an intimate homosocial bond with all his readers. The frame story of *La Dame aux camélias* makes clear the role of the fictional prostitute as an object of discourse, as a text, that permits heterosexual men to share some kind of sexual intimacy.

The reader of this novel cannot arrive at the story of Marguerite and Armand’s doomed romance without first passing through the narrator and Armand’s successful relationship. Throughout the main story—the one that is adapted and performed on stage—, the reader retains the image of two male

friends sitting together, one baring his soul, the other listening intently. While the courtesan's role as the subject, instigator, and facilitator of this tale is essential, *La Dame aux camélias* remains an intimate exchange between men.

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Notes

1. In his introduction to the Garnier-Flammarion edition of the novel, Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer claims that the narrator is an "auditeur qui était Dumas." *La Dame aux camélias: Le roman, le drame, la Traviata*, ed. Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer and Gilbert Sigaux (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1981), 33. However, since the story is generally considered to be based on Dumas's own relationship with the recently deceased Marie Duplessis, and since the name Armand Duval bears a close resemblance to Alexandre Dumas, it is likely that the author imagined himself more as the grieving lover than the patient listener. See Jann Matlock on the relationship between Duplessis's death, the author, and the political events of 1848. *Scenes of Seduction: Prostitution, Hysteria, and Reading Difference in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 108–09.

2. See for instance Charles Bernheimer's study of the grotesque corporeality of the prostitute in nineteenth-century literature in *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). For a focus on the prostitute's body in *La Dame aux camélias* specifically, see Bernadette Linz's persuasive article on the preponderance of bodily fluids in the novel, "Concocting *La Dame aux camélias*: Blood, Tears, and Other Fluids," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 33, no. 3–4 (2005): 287–307.

3. "Our Lady of the Flowers," *French Studies Bulletin* 11, no. 41 (1991): 6.

4. Alexandre Dumas fils, *La Dame aux camélias: Le roman, le drame, la Traviata*, ed. Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer and Gilbert Sigaux (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1981), 51.

5. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1. My focus throughout this article on Sedgwick's term "male homosocial desire" will not seek to problematize the concept, but rather to enlarge its scope by demonstrating another manifestation of this desire in the literary imagination of nineteenth-century France.

6. Dumas, *La Dame aux camélias*, 74.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, 77.

9. *Ibid.*, 78.

10. Michel de Montaigne, "De l'amitié," in *Essais*, ed. P. Villey and V. L. Saulnier, ARTFL: The Project for American and French Research on the Treasury of the French Language, <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/ARTFL/projects/montaigne/essais1.html>, 188.

11. "À Louise Colet, 1 juin 1853," *Correspondance*, ed. Louis Conard, Université de Rouen, <http://www.flaubert.univ-rouen.fr/correspondance/conard/lettres/lettres1.html>.

12. *Figures of Ill Repute*, 1.

13. Introduction to *La Dame aux camélias*, 20. Jean-Michel Lanskin also points out the conflicting binaries such as day and night, city and country in *La Dame aux camélias* and in Emile Zola's *Nana*. "Cocottes à la ville et colombes aux champs: dichotomie spatiale dans *La Dame aux camélias* et *Nana* ou l'écologie de deux demi-mondaines," *French Literature Series* 22 (1995): 105–18.

14. Matlock is of course referring to an old argument for tolerating prostitution that dates back to St. Augustine. Matlock's *Scenes of Seduction* makes perhaps the most convincing argument about the nineteenth-century discourses that sought to limit appropriate female sexuality by identifying the preferred site for that sexuality as a place near the center of a spectrum with repressed hysterics on one end and oversexed prostitutes on the other.

15. For more on the political and social agendas behind nineteenth-century literary depictions of the courtesan, and particularly in *La Dame aux camélias*, see for example Susan Painter, "*La Dame aux camélias*: The Myth Revisited," in *Melodrama*, ed. James Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Painter interprets Marguerite's death as a way to make her "submit to society's laws" (125). See also Richard Jones, "Audience and Otherness in *La Dame aux camélias*," *New England Theatre Journal* 8 (1997): 111–26, who reminds us of the bourgeois societal expectations of the audience for Dumas's play. In *Figures of Ill Repute*, Bernheimer sees the nineteenth-century fictional prostitute as a means to "contain, sublimate, or metaphorize the contaminating decomposition of her sexual ferment" (2). For Neuschäfer, much of the controversy surrounding both the novel and the play *La Dame aux camélias* can be attributed to "la contradiction entre la prostitution et la morale bourgeoise" with the latter needing to assert itself in revisions of the text (20).

16. See especially Lintz, "Concocting *La Dame aux camélias*."

17. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Feminism and History*, ed. Joan Wallach Scott (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1996).

18. *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1961).

19. Dumas, *La Dame aux camélias*, 71.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, 64.

22. *Ibid.*, 71.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, 72.

25. *Ibid.*, 74.

26. *Ibid.*, 83.

27. *Ibid.*, 88.

28. *Ibid.*, 89.

29. *Ibid.*, 67.

30. *Ibid.*

31. Again, see especially Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute*; Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction*; and Lintz, "Concocting *La Dame aux camélias*."

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