Ideas of Dumas fils for a more perfect society as reflected in his seventeen major plays and their prefaces

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THE IDEAS OF DUMAS FILS FOR A MORE PERFECT SOCIETY
As Reflected In His Seventeen Major Plays And Their Prefaces

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The purpose of this thesis is to present the ideas of Alexandre Dumas fils (1824-1895) for a more perfect society as reflected in his seventeen major plays and their prefaces. The bases for this society are legal, economic, religious, political, moral and social. Dumas did not discuss every aspect of each of these bases nor did he discuss them in a systematic manner. He commented only upon the injustices he noted around him in the social sphere in which he lived. He believed his ideas could ameliorate some of the conditions he saw about him and, if extended to other levels of society, could aid in their improvement as well. Even though he was a moralist, his role as an artist must be realized too.

The research for this thesis included mainly the study of Dumas' seventeen major plays and their prefaces. Supplementary material included biographies and critical works which aided in the formation of the ideas presented in this endeavor.

The conclusions reached in this thesis are as follows: Dumas was concerned with the social injustices he noticed about him and through the didactic themes of his plays and his informative prefaces he hoped to ameliorate or change the conditions which caused these injustices. Dumas' beliefs are based only on theory as he never attempted to give them concrete form through experimentation in actual society.
INTRODUCTION

Alexandre Dumas fils was one of the great playwrights of the nineteenth century. His plays were full of pathos, passion, action, excitement, and some had a surprise ending. In short, he was a good entertainer although his dramas were considered immoral and unfit for young girls. But Dumas had one goal beyond amusement—that of reform. This desire primarily resulted from his own need to regularize his position in society.

Dumas fils was born illegitimately July 27, 1824, the son of Alexandre Dumas père and of Catherine Labay. He inherited from his mother his "strong common sense, and a healthy, moderate moral outlook which counterbalanced the vivid imagination, the passion, and conscious desire to astonish, which were the legacy of his father's family."¹ He was acknowledged seven years after his birth only because Dumas père's new mistress, Belle Krelsamer, wanted her daughter, Dumas fils' half-sister, recognized and the father felt he had to be fair to both children. Also, he was afraid Catherine would attempt to take the child away from him--although he only wanted him with him spasmodically.

After this official recognizance of paternity--March 17, 1931--Dumas obtained custody of his son, but Catherine, who had acknowledged her son only a month later, appealed the custody. The boy was eventually taken away from both parents and placed in a boarding school by the police.

commissioner as a ward of the state. Dumas père finally regained custody but soon sent the boy to Prosper Goubaux's Saint-Victor boarding school because the child rebelled against living with his father and Belle Krelsamer. While at school, he was miserable because the wealthy and noble mocked him for his illegitimacy. This hurt him deeply and all his life he was haunted by the problem of natural children and seduced women. He wanted vengeance but, being smaller than the boys his age, he could not obtain it. Thus he soon grew to love solitude and meditation and learned to observe people. In 1834, he left the Goubaux and went to the Henon boarding school from which students passed into the Collège Bourbon. There he completed his education with average success. After living aimlessly in Paris for some months trying to forget his mistress, Marie Duplessis, he went to seek his own literary fame in Marseille.

Father and son were not close until Dumas fils terminated his affair with Marie Duplessis and Dumas père allowed his wife, Ida Ferrier, to depart for Italy with her lover. Then the Dumas, father and son, lived together and Dumas fils was introduced into the gay Paris society of writers, actors, nobles, and wealthy. They toured Algeria and Spain leading a frivolous, dissipated existence.

Marie Duplessis died on February 3, 1947. Her life and death played a leading role in the moral evolution of Dumas fils who was now convinced that "the comedy of pleasure more often than not ends in tragedy." The result was La Dame aux camélias, a successful novel based on his affair with Marie Duplessis. Dumas fils requested his father to present La Dame aux camélias.
aux camélias to the Théâtre Historique when he rewrote the novel in dramatic form. His father refused because he did not believe it would make a good play. Dumas fils proceeded with it nonetheless and, in 1849, he created his first prose drama giving it the same title as the novel. However, it was not presented until 1852 and then with great success. He has written Le Bijou de la reine, 1845, in poetry as a school-boy endeavor.

After writing the play, he spent some time passing from mistress to mistress and writing mediocre short stories about them. This life disgusted him and, after beginning Diane de Lys (1853), in short story format, he changed its form to a five act drama. In his next play, Le Demi-Monde, (1855), he earnestly began his career as a moralist and created his first truly reformist character, Olivier de Jalin.

Oliver de Jalin is the first of a long line of argumentative characters put upon the stage by Dumas fils. They are the clear-sighted men who can penetrate the secrets of the human heart. They are aggressive and irritating by reason of their complacency, of their conviction that they are always infallible, of the privilege which they arrogate to themselves of fulfilling the function of directors of conscience. They seem, at first sight, to be disillusioned skeptics; actually, they are the champions of a conventional morality. Already, in Paul Aubry [Diane de Lys], some of their characteristics have been visible, but Paul Aubry was himself emotionally involved. Olivier de Jalin, on the other hand, wants to remain detached and to dominate the action.3

La Question d'Argent, written in 1857, is one of his few plays not based directly on immoral love. In no other play does his witty and clever dialogue show to better advantage.

3Ibid., p. 296.
Le Fils naturel (1858) and Le Père prodigue (1859) followed and were autobiographical. "He made himself the champion of all that had most been lacking in his own case, the family; and the pitiless enemy of what had most wounded him to the quick, the rake, the courtesan, and the adulteress."

L'Amit des femmes (1864), his next play, was based on George Sand's idea that a girl's first experience with sex can be a horrible ordeal if her husband is lacking in delicacy. Monsieur de Ryons is "l'ami des femmes;" he is an extension of Olivier de Jalain and thus of Dumas fils himself. He is also patterned after Monte Cristo in The Count of Monte Cristo by Dumas père.

Dumas fils married the mother of his illegitimate daughter, Jadejda Knorring, Princess de Naryschkine, on December 31, 1864. Included with the marriage ceremony was the acknowledgement of Marie-Alexandrine-Henriette Colette. He had not recognized her before since his wife's husband-in-name and presumed father of the child was still alive.

The failure of L'Amit des femmes kept Dumas out of the theater for some time but he returned with Les Idées de Madame Aubray (1867) in which he finally set a virtuous woman on the stage. It is a sociological study based on forgiveness and Christian charity. Here Dumas' sympathy for the wronged mother and the illegitimate child was so great that he has given the play unusual emotional appeal.

Une Visite de noces (1871) and Monsieur Alphonse (1873) are similar in that Dumas had almost anticipated Becque and the later Naturalists in

\[^{4}\text{Ibid., p. 315.}\]
creating the Comédie Rosse, the "tough comedy," that flourished with the Théâtre Libre. However, Dumas' plays portray a few worthy and sympathetic dramatic figures to offset the contemptible roles of some of the leading characters.

La Femme de Claude (1873) was animated by patriotism and its symbolism was inspired by the evangelist Saint John. This play is probably the weakest of Dumas' as his metaphysical intentions are not well or clearly expressed and his intent is not discernible.

La Princesse Georges (1871), Denise (1885) and Francillon (1887) show a return to Dumas' former subjects of the seduced woman and the unhappy wife without adding much of value. L'Etrangère (1876) and La Princesse de Bagdad (1881) are based on Taine's determinism which attempted to explain all literary movements and products of the individual mind by the three factors of heredity and physical and temporal environment. Many of the characters are too contrived to be credible and therefore the plays' theses were weakened.

Dumas' best dramas are those that are autobiographical: La Dame aux camélias, Diane de Lys, Le Demi-Monde, Le Fils naturel and Le Père prodigue. All his plays include witty dialogue and expert use of scene directions which were no doubt due mainly to his father's teaching. After Francillon, he wrote no other major works. Many younger playwrights commented on his work either with ecstatic praise or sarcastic jealousy. Age brought hardened arteries and headaches as well as a doubt of his ability to produce and create and he died with his wife of four months, Henriette Escalier Regnier, beside him on November 28, 1895.
One wonders at times what causes a dramatist to choose a certain goal for his work. Dumas fils did not set out to be a moralist but rather he evolved into this goal as a result of his life. He felt he was forced to be a moralist because: "de la loi qui m'avait opprimé, je passai à celles qui opprimaient les autres. Né d'un erreur, j'avais les erreurs à combattre." He further explained "... je tentais de développer une thèse sociale et de rendre, par le théâtre, plus que la peinture des moeurs, des caractères, des ridicules et des passions. J'espérais que le spectateur emporterait de ce spectacle de quoi réfléchir un peu. ...

He believed that as a reformer, he had to go beyond combatting evil, that the means of reform should also be: "à éclairer, à renseigner le bien, à lui élargir la voie."

Dumas, as a reformer, drew praise from his contemporaries. They realized the worthiness of his aims even while admitting the idealistic nature of them. Jules Claretie described him thus: "Dumas veut exterminer ... la fausse morale, le préjugé, tout ce qui lui paraît faux, convenu, factice, dans les moeurs modernes." "Dumas a lavé le 'linge sale' de la société actuelle, non pas en famille, mais devant la foule."

Edouard Rod, another nineteenth century critic and scholar, spoke

6 Ibid., III, Le Fils naturel, préface, p. 5
7 Ibid., VI, Monsieur Alphonse, préface, p. 46 - 47.
9 Ibid., p. 22 - 23.
of him as follows: "Seul peut-être parmi ses contemporains, M. Dumas croit à la perfectibilité des hommes; seul, il y croit comme à un dogme qu'aucun doute ne doit effleurer: seul, il croit que la littérature est l'outil nécessaire et précieux de cette perfectibilité, seul, enfin, il a assez de confiance en son jugement, en sa conscience, en ses forces pour indiquer avec énergie et précision les conditions de cette perfectibilité."

Like any other writer, Dumas has faults which are criticized and defended. For example, there are only a few social classes which are represented in Dumas' works. The majority of his dramas treat the nobility and the high bourgeoisie. There are infrequent examples of shop girls raised to a nobility of mind and spirit by their love and their desire for self-improvement, the prime illustrations being Marguerite Gautier in _La Dame aux camélias_ and Clara Vignot in _Le Fils naturel_. The rest of the classes are mentioned in passing or are pawns to contrast their baseness with another's virtue, instances being Prudence in _La Dame aux camélias_ and Césarine in _La Femme de Claude_. This obvious fault is noticed by several critics and scholars of the last century and of the present: one but the best expression of this criticism is that of Mr. Rod who stated:

M. Dumas nous dira qu'il n'a pas eu l'intention de faire entrer le monde entier dans son théâtre. Soit. Mais il est s'agit de savoir s'il n'a pas laissé une trop grande part de monde en dehors de son univers spécial et si les problèmes auxquels il s'est consacré ne se présentent pas tout autrement selon qu'on les rapporte à un petit nombre de types enfermés dans une classe particulière, qui suffirait tout au plus à mettre un peu d'animation au Bois, à l'heure à la mond e, dans les théâtres du vernissage et au Grand-Prix . . qui consiste à prendre la partie pour le tout."

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11 Ibid., p. 195-196.
This is a valid and important criticism which even Dumas recognized for he countered with the following statement: "Tout cela est local, ... ce sont les moeurs de Paris et encore d'un Paris dans Paris? Soit; mais Paris, c'est le cerveau de la France, et, quand il y tumeur au cerveau, tout l'économie est ébranlée et tôt ou tard la paralysie arrive."

Dumas has also been accused of creating characters which are unreal. This, I think, is dependent upon the acceptance or rejection of the character by the reader or the spectator. This criticism may also be due to those who believe Dumas had overburdened his characters with didactic speeches thus making them spokesmen for his own theses. Yet the words and the manner of speaking are so much an extension of the personality of the characters that the total effect is of a strengthened, more realistic person. However, the accusation that Dumas' personages lack variety and fall into well-defined classes has a certain validity.

Mr. Rod's classification is the most complete and follows:

1. *L'honnête femme*—la femme qui ne veut appartenir qu'à un seul homme, nourrir et élever, au prix de n'importe quels sacrifices, les enfants (le plus nombreux possible) qu'elle a eus de lui.

2. *L'honnête homme mêlé aux passions*—l'homme entre trente et quarante-cinq ans, ayant vécu, connaissant le plaisir, sachant où il faut le trouver, capable de sentiment, guidé par une conscience droite, simple et catégorique, voulant bien jouer avec la Bête [vice and/or prostitution], mais non pas se laisser dévorer par elle.

3. *L'honnête homme en dehors des passions*—celui qui a les sens trop paresseux ou le coeur trop fatigué pour être un protagoniste.

4. *Le vibrion-mâle*—l'homme de plaisir, l'homme à

---

femmes, le don Juan vulgaire, incapable d'amour véritable, dépourvu de conscience, dénué de scrupules, qui séduit les jeunes filles, abandonne ses enfants, trompe sa femme, se ruine avec des prostituées, tout cela sans même songer qu'il fait mal, en accomplissant simplement ses fonctions naturelles de ferment corrupteur.

5. Le vibrion-femelle--c'est la courtisane, c'est la 'femme de rue', qui peut s'égarer au foyer, le corrompre et le renverser. 'c'est la femelle de Cain!'

6. La jeune fille honnête difficile à marier--soit parce qu'elle est pauvre, soit parce qu'elle est déclassée, soit parce qu'elle est victime d'une calomnie.  

Dumas was a reformer, a moralist. He, like Diderot (la drame bourgeois or la comédie sérieuse), felt the theater was the natural and most effective method of presenting a reformative platform to the public. Yet he realized he must amuse them. At times, however, it might be necessary to shock their sense of propriety. Reform, he thought, must come from within the individual and move outward into the society in order to be absolutely successful; nonetheless, the impetus for the reform of the individual can often come from without, from the theater, from the arts in general, from legislation. Above all, he realized it must be gradual, that a society cannot change overnight. "Nul ne saurait avoir, sans être fou, la prétention de faire à soi tout seul une réforme générale; mais il est probable que cette réforme doit s'opérer graduellement."  

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13 Rod, loc. cit., p. 192-194.
14 Dumas, loc. cit., V. La Femme de Claude, préface, p. 189.
Except for La Dame aux camélias, which I consider his least representative play, Dumas has been largely forgotten. He is a curiosity of the nineteenth century to us of the twentieth, who believe seduced women, illegitimate children, contracted and contrived marriages, adultery and their causes are rather minor problems in comparison with our problems of nuclear war, the population explosion, and the gold drain. Yet he was immensely popular and a positive force in his own day, becoming exceedingly wealthy and gaining election into the Académie Française. He also became, with Augier, the major heir of the pièce bien faite of Eugène Scribe and the prime creator of the pièce à thèse. It was he, among others, who carried on the didactic theater of precursors such as Molière and Diderot. He contributed to the advancement of French literature from Romanticism into Realism. Also, he and his contemporaries, such as Augier and Becque, led in the movement to overcome the domination of the Théâtre Français on the French theater by writing plays for the smaller theaters that were worthy of production and by creating several good dramas not conforming to the near-classic rules of the Théâtre Français. They aided their art in emancipating it from form and releasing it to expression and content, therefore aiding in the eventual birth of the Théâtre Libre and other experimental theaters. For these reasons Dumas is worthy of notice and study even though he may seem antiquated and out of date.

The ideas of Alexandre Dumas fils for a more perfect society as reflected in his seventeen major dramas and their prefaces are thus worthy of study and reflection. The chapters which follow deal with the bases for this society. These bases are economic, legal, moral, political, religious, and social.
CHAPTER I

THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND RELIGIOUS BASES

The political, economic and religious bases for a more perfect society are treated by Dumas fils, although not extensively. Nonetheless, no one can deny their importance. I deal with them in one chapter because a separate treatment may overemphasize their importance and the major stress ought to rest on those three bases wherein Dumas distributed the greater part of his talent and his thought, namely: the legal, moral and social bases. Furthermore, a deletion of the three minor topics would create misconceptions about Dumas' theories for a more perfect society. Also, Dumas himself felt they were necessary and important.

I will treat these three bases, the political, economic, and religious, separately in order to define and categorize them clearly and to comment on their practical potentiality and Dumas' inconsistencies concerning them.

* * *

The political bases for a more perfect society are those bases which pertain to the principles, organization, and methods of government as Dumas fils hoped they would eventually exist. These bases are few in number but are all encompassing.

During Dumas' life, the woman had few rights except those extended to her from her husband or father. She was primarily considered more as a possession than as a helpmate with mutual plans for the future. If
she happened to be happy, all was well; but, if not, she had little power to change her status and, of course, she had no political voice. This made her even more dependent upon the man who, through his participation in government, made the laws which bound her economically, religiously, esthetically, legally, morally, and socially. Dumas described her condition in this way: "La Femme est un être circonscrit, passif, instrumentaire, disponible, en expectative perpétuelle. C'est la seule œuvre inachevée que Dieu ait permis à l'Homme de reprendre et de finir."\(^1\)

The ideas of a woman having equal rights with a man struck many Frenchmen as a movement by women to change their place in society and to upset this status. They did not believe that women would have a conservative effect on legislation. Rather, they believed a radical government would evolve. Dumas saw the change as inevitable, however, and expressed himself in this manner:

Nous voulons l'égalité politique, civile de tous les hommes; soit, décrêtons cette égalité, la nature continuera à se charger des inégalités intellectuelles nécessaires. Eh bien, la femme aussi va demander l'égalité comme les hommes. Pourquoi pas? Est-elle un être vivant, pensant, travaillant, souffrant, aimant, ayant cette âme dont nous sommes si fiers, payant l'impôt comme vous et moi? Je voudrais bien connaître les raisons que vous ferez valoir pour lui refuser toujours la liberté que vous réclamez pour vous? Cette égalité de la femme et de l'homme, qui est déjà dans les lois et dans les moeurs américaines, qui pénètre visiblement dans les idées et dans les habitudes anglaises, va nous arriver comme conséquences inévitables de nos fameux principes de 89, proclamés immortels.\(^2\)

\(^1\)Ibid., IV, L'Ami des femmes, préface, p. 45.

\(^2\)Ibid., VI, Monsieur Alphonse, préface, p. 29 - 30.
Concerning the fears of those who felt the structure of society would be upset as well as that of its members’ functions if equality were extended to women, Dumas explained that women could have liberty without changing their status in society but rather while enhancing their position. He also claimed there was no just reason for refusing her command.

Je ne dis pas, ..., qu'il faut que la femme porte les armes, bâtisse des maisons, conduise des locomotives, pave les routes, pas plus que je ne dis que les hommes doivent faire de la tapisserie, porter des cheveux longs et des jupons brodés, mettre les enfants au monde et les nourrir du lait de leurs mamelles; je ne demande pas que les femmes abdiquent leurs grâces et leurs charmes, mais qu'elles y ajoutent, au contraire, en n'y voyant pas leur seul mérite et leur seul moyen d'action. Enfin, ne connaissant pas une seule raison juste, plausible, ou même spécieuse pour que cela leur soit refusé, je réclame pour elles la même liberté et les mêmes droits que pour les hommes.3

Dumas hoped for a society in which each individual would have the privilege of equality and liberty yet would recognize and fulfill the responsibility of his or her function and status.

The preceding ideas are taken from prefaces of Dumas’ complète theater. He did not develop them to their fullest extent as he might have if he had given them the visual stability of a character representation personifying the pros and cons previously discussed. He was stating his own theories yet these had a high degree of practical potentiality as one can discover if one considers the near universality of woman suffrage and its results in the Western Hemisphere. Also, these ideas were the trends of his own period.

3Ibid., p. 36.
The economic bases for a more perfect society deal with the production, distribution and consumption of wealth and with the satisfaction of the material needs of the people. France, during the Second Empire, 1851-1870, the period of the majority of Dumas' best plays, saw a great economic development in which much of the economic structure of modern France was built. The railroads tripled in miles of track with most of the big lines radiating from Paris, making Paris more than ever the economic, social, and intellectual capital of the country. Great credit institutions such as the Crédit Mobilier and joint-stock banks such as the Société Générale were created and encouraged resulting in an intense speculative activity and a big increase in the number of small investors. At the same time France's overseas trade increased about 400% and the progress of industrialization had transformed France into a considerable industrial power. People with a little money, some intelligence, common sense, and courage could make a fortune. At the same time, many previously wealthy people lost their money. French society fluctuated and new people, often uneducated or unscrupulous, entered the ranks of the wealthy. Money was to be made and many flocked to Paris to seek it. Morality suffered because the traditional mores were broken. Dumas described the situation in one of his prefaces as follows:

On créa les chemins de fer. Les premières fortunes rapides faites par les premiers agioteurs se jetèrent sur le plaisir, dont l'amour instantané est un des premiers besoins. Ce qui, chez les filles pauvres, n'était qu'une conséquence finale, devint une cause première. Les facilités nouvelles de transport
amenèrent à Paris une foule de jeunes gens riches de la province et de l'étranger. Les nouveaux enrichis dont le plus grand nombre était sorti des plus basses classes ne craignaient pas de se compromettre avec telle ou telle fille à surnom à qui le bal Mabille et le Château des Fleurs avaient acquis une grande célébrité. Il fallut fournir à la consommation sensuelle d'une population progressive, comme à son alimentation. "...voilà l'argent du vice pénétrant dans l'industrie, dans le commerce, dans les affaires, et venant aider, alimenter, créer des fortunes nouvelles..."^5

With this destruction of the traditional mores, a new set of mores developed to meet the needs of society. The new set was based on money rather than the family. It forced its way into all classes, even into some of the best homes of Paris. Dumas illustrated this vividly when he described the new criteria for husbands-to-be:

Qu'il soit noble ou roturier, spirituel ou sot, laid ou beau, jeune ou vieux, peu importe. Qu'il soit riche, voilà la grande affaire. Ces vierges savent ce que coûte une maison^6...l'argent est l'argent, quelles que soient les mains où il se trouve. C'est la seule puissance que l'on discute jamais.^7

Dumas envisioned these new mores as a threat to society. He thought they would create a pleasure-seeking population to whom the idea of work was foreign. He wanted to change the trend to a society in which every man, no matter what his position, would work to give whatever ability he possessed to the betterment of himself and his society. These ideas are well expressed due to their vivid characterizations, mainly by M. Pressard

^4Ibid., I, La Dame aux camélias, préface, p. 23.
^5Ibid., p. 21.
^6Ibid., p. 28.
^7Ibid., II, La Question d'argent, Acte I, Scène 4, p. 252.
in *Le Fils naturel*, by André in *Le Père prodigue*, and by Jean Giraud, René de Charzay, and M. de Cayolle in *La Question d'argent*. Dumas' theory is noble and very well presented, yet, he refused to consider human nature as a barrier to his goal. This inconsistency in his generally profound reasoning impairs the credibility of eventual achievement of his aim. A thesis which ignores human frailty can never succeed as the foundation for a more perfect society. I quote some of Dumas' best expressions of this belief:

...il n'y a qu'un moyen légitime de se procurer de l'argent, ...c'est le travail.\(^8\)

Aussi, pour conserver le bonheur et pour le mériter, j'ai résolu de me créer une occupation quelconque, de travailler, d' être un peu utile, enfin. Il y a ..., dans la journée d'un homme, cinq ou six heures que la nature et la société veulent qu'il occupe de choses sérieuses. Tout ce que nous faisons de mal, nous le faisons pendant que les autres travaillent ... D'ailleurs, l'exemple est tout pour les enfants, et j'entends que les miens, en ouvrant les yeux, voient leur père travaillant \(^9\)

C'est une preuve de plus qu'il ne faut évaluer un homme que sur son œuvre, quelle que soit son origine. ... quand on est le fils de ces œuvres, on est de la meilleure famille du monde, et le nom qu'on se fait vaut toujours mieux que celui qu'on reçoit...\(^10\)

Dumas hoped to see a society in which a man reinvested that which he gained from it. The more he gained, the more he should contribute through the expenditure of his time and talent. A man should be known

\(^8\)Ibid., *Le Père prodigue*, Acte III, Scène 1, p. 309.


\(^10\)Ibid., *Le Fils naturel*, Acte IV, Scène 4, p. 185.
and accepted for his accomplishments rather than for his name or fortune.

* * *

Dumas' religious basis for a more perfect society contained systems of belief, worship, and conduct, involving a code of ethics and a philosophy. For Dumas, religion was comprised of two equal aspects: one included a monotheistic philosophy unaffiliated with the Catholic Church or any church; the other embodied a humanistic ideology founded on human interests rather than on theism (the belief in a god who is creator and ruler of the universe). Each could exist in one individual and could convey him to a higher plane of concern for humanity and could guide man into peace and concord.

Dumas believed that religion was superior to man because it dealt only with his divine qualities and hence required more of him than would man. Also, he did not feel any religious affiliation was necessary.

Une seule puissance nous est supérieure,—la religion, parce qu'elle ne traite que du côté divin de l'homme et ne l'entretient que de ses aspirations sublimes, profondes—et dernières. Je dis: la religion, je ne dis pas: L'Eglise, une certaine Eglise surtout.11

Marriage with a worthy and equal partner was important because one of the duties of the marital state was procreation and it is through procreation that man comes closest to God. Procreation was also of primary import as the child was the raw material that man could mold, either in his own image or into the image necessary for a more perfect society.

11 Ibid., préface, p. 27.
With love, concern, diligence and patience from the parent, the child could emerge into adulthood equal to the tasks of life.

La procréation chez l'homme étant libre et préméditée, se rattache ainsi à la création divine, puisque non seulement cette procréation donne une forme matérielle et animée au produit, mais qu'elle lui communique cette intelligence, cette pensée et cette volonté qui, si elles sont développées comme elles méritent, comme elles ont le droit de l'être, compléteront l'âme et la feront communier avec le principe inépuisable et infini. En un mot, l'amour, dans toutes les acceptions supérieures du mot, est l'agent qui, mis au service de l'homme par Dieu, ramène à Dieu l'homme après qu'il a rempli sur la terre sa quadruple mission d'être organisé, intelligent, sensible et producteur.12

Dumas perceived love, if worthily embodied, as the greatest means to happiness and to the advancement of mankind. This love emitted from God. He explained it as follows:

L'amour est le plus grand moyen de bonheur, de civilisation, de perfectibilité, que l'humanité ait à son service, et le détruire, ce serait détruire Dieu lui-même, ce qui est impossible.... C'est le travail, c'est l'industrie, c'est la science, c'est le génie qui donnent une vie aux sociétés, mais c'est l'amour qui leur donne une âme.13

Pity and pardon for the failings of mankind ensue from this love and transform it into the tool necessary for man's gradual ascent into goodness. It is this which separates man from beast and can transform societies. M. Montaiglin tells this to Raymonde when he forgives her for having an illegitimate child:

12 Ibid., VI, Monsieur Alphonse, préface, p. 6-7.
13 Ibid., IV, Les Idées de Madame Aubray, Acte II, Scène 9, p. 137.
Créature de Dieu, être vivant et pensant qui as failli, qui as souffert, qui te repens, qui aimes et qui implores, où veux-tu que je prenne le droit de te punir?14

Denise explains it further where she declares:

...ce qu'il y a de plus grand, ce qu'il y a de divin dans l'homme, c'est la pitié et le pardon 15

Thus, through honestly applied theistic beliefs, humanity transcends the baseness of the human form and ascends into a new society. Yet the same results are possible with the humanistic ideology of Dumas' second aspect of religion. However, with the second, man abandons theism as an unreliable inconstancy in which confidence is impossible. Gaston, in *Monsieur Alphonse*, expresses this to M. Montaiglin in their conversation on religion:

L'humanité a eu beau, depuis des milliers d'années, prêter à un être abstrait, qu'elle a appelé Dieu, toutes les qualités et toutes les formes que pouvait lui succéder son imagination et son infinuité, elle a eu beau, dans des douleurs, supplier ce Dieu de lui venir en aide, il ne s'est jamais laissé attendrir, elle a en vain déclaré qu'il était partout, il ne s'est laissé voir nulle part; dès qu'elle croyait l'avoir trouvé, il lui apparaissait autrement, se manifestant toujours par des rigueurs nouvelles. Va-t-elle éternellement adresser des prières stériles, et maintenir son obéissance onéreuse à ce Dieu incessamment modifiable, sans miséricorde et sans confiance?16

Without theism, man focuses on natural laws which are observable even in the moral universe and whose logic states that the intervention of the gods is the visible consequence and the inevitable fatality

resulting from human actions

This is generally Dumas’ idea on the humanism of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

"Les anciens" Ils savaient aussi bien que nous, mieux peut-être, que le monde moral est régi par les mêmes lois que le monde physique, qu’il y a la même logique dans l’un que dans l’autre, et l’intervention des dieux n’était que la conséquence visible, la fatalité inévitable résultant des actes humains.17

Thus man realized that his will which is nature’s will is the motivating force in society and must therefore be employed wisely.

Infinity, lacking limits and bounds, is a natural phenomenon to be comprehended but never feared. It is that which exists forever and in which man discovers dignity and eternity, called love and death. These are the foundation for a rising humanity and an increasing brotherhood. ".. à cette heure solennelle où nous sommes en face de l’amour et de la mort, les deux seuls points par lesquels l’homme touche à l’infini."18

Dumas believed religion was one method of encouraging a more noble and compassionate relationship with one’s fellow man. Without this relationship, society would remain stationary because individual desires and needs would dominate those of society.

Generally, Dumas’ portrayal of the religious person is lucid and credible. Madame Aubray (Les Idées de Madame Aubray) forgave moral sins even at the price of sacrificing her son to her beliefs; M. Pressard (Le Fils naturel) felt mercy and kindness should extend even to the illegitimate; and Commandant de Montaiglin (Monsieur Alphonse) knew the

17 Ibid., L’Etrangère, Acte II, Scène I, p. 270.
18 Ibid., Acte V, Scène 4, p. 365.
first person he should forgive for having an illegitimate child was his wife. They are the marshals of the more perfect society and their eventual success seems inevitable. Nonetheless, Dumas could not scrupulously create all his personages as religiously successful. Too many rogues existed to thwart the good intentions of the righteous. Also, Dumas never revealed his ideas of the totality of a religious being. These gaps exist in his portrait and one can only guess what the complete person would be.
CHAPTER II

THE LEGAL BASES

The legal bases for a more perfect society which Dumas set forth are in conformity with the positive rules of law. Dumas felt laws could give the needed impetus to the individual for an acceptable behavior pattern if they were just and understood. His great concern for youth, for wronged women, and for men with unfaithful wives caused him to write the majority of his dramas dealing with legal themes. Outside of these areas this field was untouched leaving a vast uncompleted expanse in his system. These same problems will be treated again later in the chapters concerning moral and social bases.

Dumas' concern for the illegitimate child was expressed in Le Fils naturel which deals with the problem of the acceptance of the individual by society, in La Femme de Claude wherein the child is hidden and forgotten by the mother, and in Monsieur Alphonse in which the child can be introduced into society if its origin is unknown to society. In these plays, he laid a framework for legislation to rectify, in as much as it was possible, the position within the society of the illegitimate child and his mother. His first thought was that there should be no illegitimate children: since; they were conceived voluntarily, one could voluntarily allow himself never to be placed in a situation wherein a child might be conceived. The law allowed children only to the married yet did not prohibit their conception by the single person. Therefore, Dumas believed that a man who was responsible for the birth of a child should be
classed between thieves and murderers--especially if he did not assure the child of the social and material means of existence. Naturally these means could only be supplied if the father married the mother. To illustrate this, I quote from a statement by Aristide Fressard, the protagonist, in *Le Fils naturel*: "c'est de n'avoir d'enfants que par le mariage; car, voyez-vous, tant qu'on n'est pas marié, la loi permet de faire des enfants, elle ne permet pas d'en avoir."\(^1\)

Dumas himself illustrated this in his preface to the same play when he stated: "Moi, je trouve que l'homme qui met un enfant au monde volontairement (et c'est toujours volontairement), sans lui assurer les moyens moraux et sociaux de vivre, sans se reconnaître responsable enfin de tous les dégâts consécutifs, est un malfaiteur qu'il faut classer entre les voleurs et les assassins."\(^2\)

According to Dumas, if the mother supplied the needs of the child through her own honest labor because the father abnegated his responsibility, society must reward this woman by exempting her son from military service as it would be at that time the son could begin to support the mother. Here are Dumas' words on the subject from his preface to *La Dame aux camélias*:

_Tout enfant naturel dont le père sera parvenu à se dérober à la justice ou à ses devoirs, et que sa mère aura élevé honnêtement par son seul travail, sera exempté de service militaire, la société n'ayant le droit, sous aucun prétexte, de prendre à une femme, qui a travaillé pour lui, son unique enfant, au moment où, devenu son unique soutien, il va travailler pour elle._\(^3\)

Dumas recognized all too well the fact that recognition of paternity did not legitimize a child and that the child would still rest apart from total participation in his society due to prejudices. Therefore, the interest of the child should be considered before the legal rights of the father. This is illustrated through contrast in Le Fils naturel during a conversation among M. Aristide Fressard who is the protagonist, M. Sternay who is the father of the child, and the Marquis who wishes to legitimize the child. The legal rights of the father are stated first.

ARISTIDE:
Oui, oui; on peut toujours reconnaître un enfant. Il faut reconnaître l'enfant par un papier authentique, à la mairie ou devant notaire.

The conversation continues for some time and then the child's interests are considered.

ARISTIDE:
Vous pourriez donc épouser la mère et légitimer l'enfant?

LE MARQUIS:
Oui.

ARISTIDE:
Jusqu'à présent, l'intérêt de l'enfant est de ce côté.

If someone wanted to marry the mother and legitimize the child even though the father acknowledged his paternity, the interest of the child must be the prime criterion upon which to decide.

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5 Ibid., Scène 10, p. 169.
Infidelity of either member of a marriage was a grave thing as it broke the marital contract and interfered with procreation and a favorable home environment for the child. Therefore, Dumas felt drastic measures should be taken, either by society or the individual, to punish such breaches of conduct. He believed killing the unfaithful partner would be excusable if all other means of maintaining fidelity failed. In *Diane de Lys*, Dumas shocked Parisian society by having le comte de Lys threaten Paul Aubry with death for committing adultery with his wife and, in the last scene of the last act, he actually carried out his threat. ... "Je vous donne ma parole d'honneur que, si jamais je vous retrouve auprès de madame dans les conditions où je viens de vous trouver, je vous donne ma parole d'honneur que j'use du droit que la loi m'accorde et que je vous tue."

Dumas felt gender was not to be considered as one criterion for punishment in adultery cases. He thought infidelity of the husband was encouraged by the lax attitude of his time toward these relationships. This he satirized well in *La Princesse Georges* when Séverine asked M. Galanson what she could do if her husband abandoned her for another woman.

GALANSON:
Quand il sera parti, vous pourrez faire constater légalement son départ, dans quelles conditions ce départ se sera effectué, l'emploi que votre mari aura fait de la moitié de votre fortune, ses relations publiques avec une autre femme, et nous demanderons une séparation de corps et de biens, que nous obtiendrons, je pense.

SEVERINE:
Alors voilà tout ce que les hommes ont trouvé pour garantir celles qui sont leurs mères, leurs soeurs, leurs femmes, leurs filles?

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In the same play, Séverine questions her mother, Madame de Périgny, on the attitude of her step-father on marital infidelity. Dumas made the response as biting as he could to show his disagreement.

**SEVERINE:**

Il considérait donc qu'en matière d'amour la trahison mérite la mort.

**MME DE PERIGNY:**

Si c'est la femme qui trahit, quoi si c'est l'homme, jamais, jamais! Ces messieurs ont profité de ce que nous les avons laissés faire les lois, ils les ont faites en faveur du masculin. Le monde, et surtout le nôtre, est organisé comme ça; nous n'y pouvons rien changer, ni toi ni moi. Se tuer, c'est un crime d'abord, que les gens bien élevés ne commettent pas, et, de plus, c'est une absurdité indigne des gens d'esprit. Quant à tuer les autres, c'est une bien grosse affaire!

If marriage were to remain sacred and an ameliorating influence on society, it must be inviolable for both sexes.

The most radical of Dumas' legal concepts was his civil conscription. This he described in great, explicit detail wherein he would create a society in which most of the moral and social problems would disappear. The cycle would begin with boys of twenty-one and girls of fifteen being "drafted" if they had no profession or if they did not want to work. From these individuals, the children of the next generation would result. The plan is ingenious and I quote it at length.

The first section is taken from *La Question d'argent* in a conversation between René, who wanted to be useful to society, and Cayolle, a

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philosopher who felt he had solved the problems of society through civil conscription.

CAYOLLE:

C'est une conscription dont j'ai eu l'idée et qui est la chose du monde la plus simple. Elle servirait de pendant à la conscription militaire, et pourrait même la remplacer, car il est probable que, dans un temps donné, tous les peuples seront unis par les intérêts, les arts, le commerce, l'industrie, et que la guerre disparaitra du monde. Alors, la société ne demandera plus aux hommes que le tribut de leurs capacités intellectuelles. Quand un homme aura vingt et un ans, l'État viendra le trouver et lui dira: 'Monsieur, quelle carrière avez-vous embrassée? Que faites-vous pour les autres hommes? --Rien, monsieur. --Ah!... voulez-vous travailler? --Non, monsieur, je ne veux rien faire. --En bien, monsieur, vous êtes libre de ne pas travailler: mais, alors, il faut prendre un remplaçant. Vous allez donc nous donner tant par an pour que des gens qui n'ont pas de fortune travaillent à votre place, et nous allons vous délivrer une carte de paresse, avec laquelle vous pourrez circuler librement.'

RENE:

C'est très ingénieux: mais à quoi occupera-t-on tous ces remplaçants?

CAYOLLE:

À la terre, qu'on néglige trop. Si cela continuait, dans cinquante ans d'ici, un laboureur coûterait vingt-cinq mille francs par an. Mais tout s'équilibrera et il y aura de la place pour tout le monde, quand tout le monde travaillera...

The theory is developed more fully in the preface to La Dame aux camélias wherein Dumas discusses the responsibilities and the privileges of the young girls.

Toute fille de quinze ans devra faire constater son identité, comme l'homme de vingt et un ans est forcé de faire constater la sienne; assistée ou de sa famille ou de deux témoins patentés, elle prouvera qu'elle a

9 Ibid., II, La Question d'argent, Acte III, Scène I, p. 310-311.
des moyens d'existence quelconques, soit dans un revenu, soit dans une profession.

Celle qui n'en aura pas, si elle sait un métier, trouvera de droit à exercer son métier dans les ateliers de l'État, qui seront les casernes du travail et qui ne coûteront jamais aussi cher que l'armée, puisqu'ils rapporteront quelque chose...

Si elle est riche et qu'elle ne veuille pas travailler, elle achètera une remplaçante qui travaillera pour elle. Si elle n'a pas de ressources et qu'elle ne veuille pas travailler, elle sera sous la surveillance de la police, et, au premier délit grave, on l'emportera dans les colonies où les déportés ont besoin de femmes et où la terre a besoin de bras. Puisqu'elles n'auront pas voulu être des femmes, elles seront des femelles.

En échange de ces devoirs, voici quels seront les droits des filles non mariées. Ils seront renfermés dans ce seul paragraphe:

La loi, en reconnaissant l'homme de vingt et un ans libre, l'a reconnu responsable; donc, tout homme ayant vingt et un ans qui sera convaincu d'avoir possédé une vierge sera condamné à donner à cette fille un capital ou une rente, selon sa position personnelle de fortune. S'il est dans l'impossibilité de fournir cette indemnité pécuniaire, il sera passible d'un emprisonnement de cinq ans; s'il a rendu mère cette jeune fille et qu'il ait refusé de l'épouser, la condamnation pourra être portée à dix ans; le fait d'avoir mis volontairement au monde ses semblables, sans aucune garantie de morale, d'éducation, ni de ressources matérielles, étant envers la société un délit plus grave que celui d'avoir tué. Donner la vie dans de certaines conditions est même plus barbare que de donner la mort.10

As to the practicality or the potentiality of these theories, it is difficult to decide. A law which would prohibit children to the unmarried would be difficult to enforce, even with modern contraceptive measures, due to the religious beliefs of many people as well as to the lack of unmarried persons who would systematically employ the contraceptives. However, exempting the illegitimate from military service could

10 Ibid., Le Drame aux camélias, préface, p. 44–45.
be practical if one considered he would support the mother and thus not require the state to do so. The only problem is that there would be no guarantee he would support her.

Infidelity perhaps could be ended by harsher punishments for the unfaithful partner yet it is doubtful. In Judah at the time of Christ, an adulteress would be stoned but, according to the Bible, adultery still existed. Also, the woman can now obtain a divorce if she can prove her husband has been unfaithful. A concrete example of Dumas' influence in the legal field is the 1884 passage of the Naquet divorce bill.

The civil conscription in the detailed description of Dumas might succeed because it does not leave as much to human volition as do most ideal societies. Dumas had set forth laws on which human will was to be based. Whether it has potential or not is a moot question which only serious experimentation could answer.

\cite{Mitze1927}
CHAPTER III

THE MORAL BASES

Dumas' moral bases for a more perfect society are those which pertain to principles, standards, or habits with respect to right or wrong in conduct and ethics, also, a precept. With them, Dumas hoped to direct the attention of the populace to the conditions contributing to the degeneration of morals and to present guide-lines for the correction of these conditions. Many of the precepts sound like La Rochefoucauld's Maximes or Ben Franklin's adages. The subjects Dumas treated can be categorized as follows: the courtesan, the wife and husband, the child and his mother, work, and miscellaneous.

In the preface of La Dame aux camélias, Dumas described the conditions which often cause prostitution as general deprivation of opportunity and the necessities of life. He ascribed this deprivation to the callousness of the individuals within the society and, by extension, to the society itself. By refusing virtue the right to be an asset, vice was given this right by default.

...mais ce mal [the courtesan] a une excuse dans la misère, dans la faim, dans l'absence d'instruction, dans les mauvais exemples, dans l'hérité fatale du vice, dans l'égoïsme de la société, dans l'excès de la civilisation, dans cet éternel argument : l'amour.

...Son crime est notre crime et nous ne pouvons être bons juges là où nous avons été si mauvais conseillers. ¹

¹Ibid., I, La Dame aux camélias, préface, p 18.
En refusant la vertu le droit d'être un capital, vous avez donné au vice le droit d'en être un.²

In Les Idées de Madame Aubray, Madame Aubray's son and chief disciple, Camille, tells a dissipated youth, Valmoreau, what the consequences would be if prostitution and its causes were not obliterated. However, he also presents a remedy at which Dumas himself hinted in his civil conscription. Camille declares:

Quand un peuple qui se fait appeler le peuple le plus franc, le plus chevaleresque, le plus spirituel de tous les peuples, permet que des milliers de jeunes filles, dont il pourrait faire des compagnes intelligentes, des mères respectées, ne soient bonne qu'à faire des courtesanes avilies et dangereuses, ce peuple mérite que la femme qu'il a inventée le dévore tôt ou tard.³

Notre but est de protéger la femme, dans le présent et dans l'avenir, contre les dangers de l'ignorance, de la misère et de l'oisiveté, contre cet envahissement de l'amour vénaux qui tue le travail, l'honneur, tout, hélas! chez les plus belles filles. Nous voulons armer ces malheureuses d'un métier, d'un art, d'une instruction contre les mauvais exemples, bien tenant, il faut le dire, et nous voulons en faire des épouses, des compagnes et des mères.⁴

Dumas¹ theories had potential as many public assistance programs and orphanages exist today who have as at least one aim, the teaching of the uneducated and the fulfilling of basic needs. However, prostitution still exists in France and many of the causes are the same. Whether an extension of Dumas¹ programs discussed above is a definitive answer is doubtful.

²Ibid., p. 20.
³Ibid., IV, Les Idées de Madame Aubray, Acte III, Scène 1, p. 297.
⁴Ibid., p. 296.
Dumas was also very interested in the relationship between wife and husband and in the reasons for a rift in this relationship. He discussed the rift a husband could cause through infidelity and/or disinterest. He very strongly felt that a man who married an honorable woman should do all within his power to keep her contented. If he failed, any resultant breach caused by the wife would be primarily his responsibility. Maximilian tells Paul Aubry this in Diane de Lys on the eve of his marriage to an honorable young woman:

". . tu n'avais pas le droit de jouer avec le bonheur d'une honnête fille qui t'aime franchement, pour une coquette qui se moque de toi."\(^5\)

In Le Père prodigue, André enlarges upon this when he explains to his wife, Hélène, that a husband who awakens love in his wife receives one hundred times the devotion that a lover could from the same woman. For this reason, it is to his advantage, as well as his responsibility, to attempt to make himself agreeable and desirable to his wife.

"Il n'existe pas une femme, si habile, si belle, si aimée qu'elle soit, qui puisse donner à son amant le centième partie de l'émotion que donne en une minute à l'époux qui l'a choisie la jeune fille qui va recevoir de lui la révélation de l'amour.\(^6\)

Beyond this, it is necessary for a husband to respect his wife. He may have loved many women before her, but respect is a necessity for the woman who will bear his name. Hélène answers André's comment above with this statement:

\(^5\)Ibid., I, Diane de Lys, Acte V, Scène 3, p. 367

\(^6\)Ibid., III, Le Père prodigue, Acte III, Scène 1, p. 319.
Mais ceux qui disent que votre femme a plus besoin de respect que d'amour ont peut-être raison; car, avant elle, vous en avez aimé d'autres, que vous ne respectiez pas, puisqu'aucune d'elles n'a reçu votre nom. Votre respect est donc une nouvelle forme de votre amour qui nous appartient sans partage.7

If a husband had failed in any of these due to lack of effort, disinterest, or lack of ability, Dumas thought the husband lost any rights he might have over his wife. This is reflected in Francillon when Lucien demands of Francine why she disobeyed his orders and she cries: "Pour invoquer les droits du maître, il faut remplir les devoirs de l'époux. En vous dérobant aux uns, vous renoncez aux autres."8

M. Thouvenin, a family friend and philosopher, describes the desirable conduct of a man to André in Denise before his engagement to Denise. He sets forth all that Dumas believed necessary to render a man happy and secure in marriage.

Ce n'est pas de mentir au risque de sa vie et de son honneur pour sauver la réputation d'une femme dont on a été l'amant, c'est de ne pas être l'amant de cette femme, c'est de respecter la première femme que l'on a connue et aimée, sa mère, dans toutes femmes que l'on rencontre ensuite, n'importe où on les rencontre, c'est de ne pas les faire déchoir si elles sont en haut, c'est de ne pas les abaisser encore si elles sont en bas; c'est de n'associer à sa vie et pour l'éternité qu'une seule femme, cel le qu'on épouse et de n'avoir qu'une raison dans le mariage, l'amour. La voilà, la vérité.9

If the husband neglects his wife, and she loves another man, that love should be kept platonic so the marital contract remains intact.  

7Ibid.
8Ibid., VII, Francillon, Acte II, Scène 4, p 324.
9Ibid., Denise, Acte IV, Scène 3, p. 233.
Dumas felt that she would then have the sympathy and support of society and would have a clear conscience as well. Also, if a woman takes a first lover, she is liable to have a second. This is what Barantin is explaining to Madame Aubray when he refused to forgive his wife her infidelity:

"Celui [the lover] qu'il ne faut prendre, c'est le premier, les autres ne signifient plus rien. Pas de premier, pas de second."\(^\text{10}\)

These theories relating to marriage have a great deal of potential practicality as they are theories which require nothing but the individual's will to make them successful. The causes of marital problems in the nineteenth century are the same as the present ones and the solutions are often the same too. The only barrier to the application of these precepts is the same barrier which existed a hundred years ago—lack of desire to apply them on the part of individuals.

The bond between the child and the mother is one Dumas acknowledged as perhaps the most important in any relations between people. Perhaps this fervid recognition is the result of his experiencing it for the first seven years and lacking it afterwards. However this may be, Dumas felt this was the foundation on which society rested.

The responsibility of motherhood is the greatest of responsibilities. It is to the mother that the child should owe the most and to whom he should owe everything if the father is dead or absent. Otherwise, the child may reproach her later for not fulfilling her duties. Madame Aubray explains this to Jeannine when Jeannine states she has no means.

\(^{10}\text{Ibid., IV, Les Idées de Madame Aubray, Acte II, Scène 4, p. 265.}\)
of support unless she takes a lover. She is told she should work instead. "Il faut que votre fils vous doive tout, pour n'avoir rien à vous reprocher plus tard."

If the child is illegitimate, the father should marry the mother so that she may regain her lost honor. Marriage also would legitimize the child and allow him acceptance into society. However, if the father refused to marry the mother, he should fulfill the child's needs. Thus, M. Fressard exclaims to Clara, the mother, in *Le Fils naturel*: "...; il faut que ton enfant ait un sort, il faut surtout qu'il ait le nom de son père." He also states that a man who does not marry the mother of his child only because she has no fortune, should fulfill his duty and marry her anyway. "..., quand un homme n'a à reprocher à la mère de son fils que de ne pas avoir cent mille lives de rente, son devoir est de l'épouser comme si elle les avait."

Speaking of children in general, M. Fressard, who is a lawyer by profession, declares that the family tie is that which is usually lacking in those who do not conform. He also says that guidance, love, and the example of the parents' lives are the most valuable inheritance a child can receive.

Je veux bien diriger mes enfants, mais je ne veux pas les contrarier....Par ma profession, j'ai été à même de voir de près les vices, les passions, les tendances des hommes. Ils sont dans le faux tant qu'ils sont en dehors de la famille, comme fils, comme époux, comme père. Le but de la nature est que l'homme ait beaucoup d'enfants, qu'il les élève bien pour qu'ils soient...

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\[11\] Ibid., Scène 6, p. 384.


\[13\] Ibid.
heureux. Se marier quand on est jeune et sain, choisir, dans n'importe quelle classe, une bonne fille honnête et saine, l'aimer de toute son âme et de toutes ses forces, en faire une compagne sûre et une mère féconde, travailler pour élever ses enfants et leur laisser en mourant l'exemple de sa vie: voilà la vérité. Le reste n'est qu'erreur, crime ou folie.

Here again, it is only personal determination which can activate these principles and it is a personal decision to ignore them. Whether they are utilized or not depends upon the individual and the framework of his society.

Dumas believed that work is useful and necessary to a society because it enables individuals to participate and invest in their society while it occupies them and shortens their leisure time--the time in which the most destruction is unleashed upon society. Other reasons exist for working and André explains one of them to Denise in Denise.

C'est Thouvenin, qui sait tout qui m'a appris à aimer la nature, à travailler avec elle, et m'a rendu ainsi le bien-être matériel et moral.15

Les Idées de Madame Aubray through a conversation between Camille and dissipated Valmoreau, informs that work is necessary because what one earns belongs to those who have need of it and because man was created to work.

Camille:

..mais il faut bien travailler. D'abord, parce que l'homme n'a que ça à faire, et puis notre fortune n'est pas à nous.

14 Ibid., Acte, III, Scène 1, P 130
Dumas also believed the world will be dominated by those who work while the others dissipate their lives and their reason for existence. Claude declares his faith in this in *La Femme de Claude* "Le monde va être à ceux qui travaillent, qui veillent, qui se dominent et qui croient."

Dumas' intent is good but the possibility of seeing it realized is slight because men will always seek more leisure. Whether the leisure is well employed will depend upon the individual. No legislation can effectively control those who may commit crimes against society during this period of leisure or while one is working.

One of the miscellaneous axioms of Dumas' can be found in *Le Fils naturel*. The marquis, when conversing with his sister concerning her son who is not of the nobility, states that: "C'est l'homme qui fait le titre et non le titre qui fait l'homme." He is being very idealistic because then, as now, a man with a title, whether the title is noble or not, is welcomed many places where an untitled man is not. Also, a man who is a drone can be titled. Since many titles are hereditary, the

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statement appears even more naive.

This statement of René to Jean (a nouveau riche) in La Question d'argent:

On ne peut reprocher à un homme qui a fait sa fortune que de l'avoir faite par des moyens déshonnêtes: mais celui que la doit à son intelligence et à sa probité, qui en use noblement, tout le monde est prêt à l'accueillir ... 19

is naive as well because the "old rich" maintain a distinction between themselves and the nouveaux riches. This is only a social distinction but it is such differentiations as this which dissect society and cause civil strife thus distracting from the more perfect society.

Madam Aubray speaks of the causes of evil and of the duty of all to those who perpetrate evil. She explains:

Quand on fait le mal, ce n'est pas par préméditation, c'est par entraînement. On croit que la route est plus agréable à gauche qu'à droite; on prend à gauche, et, quand on est dans les ronces ou dans la fange, on appelle au secours, et le devoir de celui qui est dans le bon chemin est de se dévouer pour sauver l'autre 20

The innocence of this passage is unbelievable. Not all people do evil by accident, in fact the majority are aware of their actions. Also, if all those who have no blemishes on their record of conduct were to try to rehabilitate the rest, chaos would result unless the effort were

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19 Ibid., II, La Question d'argent, Acte I, Scène 4, p. 252.
20 Ibid., IV, Les Idées de Madame Aubray, Acte II, Scène 4, p. 266
organized. Also, realizing one's duty and performing it are not the same. Here Dumas lost his usually profound reasoning which profided logical patterns of execution for his theory.

Another belief of Dumas' is that one should marry for love. Hélène (Le Père prodigue) tells her aunt she wants to marry for love only. "Car l'important, vois-tu, ce n'est pas d'être noble, ce n'est pas d'être riche: c'est d'être heureux." Being happy is a worthy ambition yet Hélène does not define happiness. Perhaps Dumas disregarded the fact that happiness is a state of mind which fluctuates within the individual himself and among others in a group. It is not a stable product which can be stated to be good for society or its component parts. With this weakness, the statement above loses much of its apparent value as a guide and therefore much of its impact on the mind.

One statement by Barantin to Valmoreau in Les Idées de Madame Aubray contains a great deal of veracity. "...si les hommes dépensaient pour faire du bien aux autres le quart de ce qu'ils dépensent pour se faire du mal à eux-mêmes, la misère disparaîtrait du monde." Man could raise the level of livelihood of his fellows a great deal if all applied this simple maxim. Yet man is a thoughtless creature when he is among those who possess and a selfish one when among those who do not. Also human volition is often weak. The above adage, then, has no practical method of activation.

Dumas' moral bases for a more perfect society have great practical

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21 Ibid., III, Le Père prodigue, Acte II, Scène 9, p. 311.
22 Ibid., IV, Les Idées de Madame Aubray, Acte I, Scène 1, p. 233.
potential if man wills it, but humanity is not humane and the individual is often no better than his society. Selfishness is not a commodity one can dispose of and ambition often needs personal advancement over others to instigate it. If man can solve his own drives to exceed his fellows in all things and can destroy his ego which drives him onward, these moral theories, stated by many before and after Dumas, may be the ladder to a higher brotherhood and a more perfect society.
CHAPTER IV

THE SOCIAL BASES

Dumas' social bases for a more perfect society treat human beings living together as a group in a situation requiring that they have dealings with one another; also, they pertain to the ranks and activities of society. This is a very broad definition and may at times include the subjects treated in the previous chapters. However, it was necessary to make a division to facilitate handling of the material and to render it comprehensible.

Dumas thought many of the abuses of society were abuses wherein the totality, rather than any one part, was culpable. It was true that individuals were the particles of society and to reform society, the particles must be reformed. The totality, however, also had an existence apart because it had a will based on the collective wills of its components and it could survive if some of the elements deviated from the sphere. Also, it could reject those it could not condone and could force others to conform. It was this mass that was the excuse for many of the injustices perpetrated against individuals. This was the subject of the statement by Barantin when he tells Madame Aubray that society will avenge itself on anyone who questions its laws.

...la société a ses moeurs, ses traditions, ses habitudes que le temps a constituées en lois. Elle a une morale moyenne dont elle ne veut pas qu'on la sorte et qui suffit à ses besoins. Elle n'aime donc pas ces vertus singulières qui lui sont un reproche indirect, et elle s'en venge comme elle peut, par la
calomnie même, si elle n'a pas autre chose sous la main.1

Another expression of this is Marguerite Gautier's in *La Dame aux camélias* when she thinks of the merciless society which will not forgive them. "Ainsi, quoi qu'elle fasse, la créature tombée ne se relevera jamais! Dieu lui pardonnera peut-être, mais le monde sera inflexible!" 2

There is only one method to stay within the comfortable niche of society; one must submit to its laws. This Olivier de Jalin tells his friend Hippolyte in *Le Demi-Monde* when he explains why he can not refuse a duel. "Telle est la fausee logique des lois de l'honneur social. Ce n'est pas moi qui les ai faites; mais je suis force de les subir." 3

Society thus can be the direct cause of many individual misfortunes. The concept of right or wrong seems to rest apart from it therefore making it seem amoral. Dumas opposed this because he believed any society which would exclude members or oppress them was not fulfilling its function. Also, he believed a society which allowed so few deviations from its norms would be limiting its progress.

The social position of women also concerned Dumas. The idea that they were of two types, good and bad, was anathema to him. He illustrated this well when M. de Ryons discusses women with Madame Leverdet in *L'Ami des femmes*.

M de Ryons:

il y a deux sortes de femmes: celles qui sont honnêtes et celles qui ne le sont pas. Sans nuances


Mme. Leverdet:
Celles qui ne sont pas honnêtes?

M. de Ryons:
Il faut les consoler.

Mme. Leverdet:
Et celles qui le sont?

M. de Ryons:
Il faut les garantir. Il faut toujours empêcher ou essayer d'empêcher une femme d'avoir un premier amant, parce que le premier amant d'une femme est toujours un imbécile ou un misérable.

Nearly the same illustration appears in Denise when Thouvenin asks Fernand if men owe anything to women and he declares: "Si le respect et la maternité quand nous les épousons, le plaisir et la discretion quand nous ne les épousons pas." Dumas thought any woman could be good because she could be a mother (as was Raymonde in Monsieur Alphonse) and if she were a good mother, many other faults could be forgiven. If a woman were willing to sacrifice for her love, her love could purify her and thus absolve her from past sins (Marguerite in La Dame aux camélias). Also, if a woman were to try to rectify her position within society by leading an honorable life and working to support herself, she too would be pardoned (as was Jeannine in Les Idées de Madame Aubray). Therefore, two types of women did not exist. Each woman was an individual unto herself and should be judged on individual bases.

\(^4\) Ibid., IV, L'Ami des femmes, Act I, Scene 5, p. 71.
\(^5\) Ibid., VII, Denise, Act I, Scene 2, p. 131.
Mistresses, whether courtesans or otherwise, were a deficit for society, according to Dumas, because they seldom bore children and when they did, they seldom reared them. This he felt was a sin as God created women to be wives and mothers. He portrayed them as he saw them, desired but not respected and surrounded by shame, in the hope that he could save other women from a similar destiny. This shame is described by Marguerite to Armand in *La Dame aux camélias*.

En effet, nous avons des amants qui se ruinent, non pas pour nous, comme ils le disent, mais pour leur vanité. Nous sommes les premières dans leur amour-propre, les dernières dans leur estime. Ainsi, tout autour de nous, ruine, honte et mensonge.

Dumas treated another aspect of the mistress in *Le Demi-Monde*, the class of the déclassée, which he described in his preface.

.. le Demi-Monde ne représente pas; comme on le croit, ..., la cohue des courtisanes, mais la classe des déclassées. ... enfin toutes les femmes qui ont eu des racines dans la société régulière et dont la chute a pour excuse l'amour, mais l'amour seul.

Ce Monde commence où l'épouse légale finit, et il finit, où l'épouse véneuse commence, il est séparé des honnêtes femmes par le scandale public, des courtisanes par l'argent.

Still another aspect was the married woman who had a lover because she was bored and her husband didn't care for her. This is the subject of *Diane de Lys*.

All these women could be useful to society if they abandoned their immoral practices and entered into a correct relationship with the members

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of society. If their rehabilitation was complete, they should be accepted by all social class as equals and allowed all the privileges and responsibilities inherent in their position and status.

Dumas also discussed the position of children in society. He thought children were too often reared by domestics who did not have their interests at heart or by parents who ignored or slighted their responsibilities. In *Francillon*, Francine tells her husband, Lucien, that "La maternité, c'est la patriotism des femmes." Dumas believed this fervently and pursued it to its natural conclusion: the mother should subserve all other interests to those of the child. The father also was responsible for the welfare and rearing of the child. Together the parents must make of their lives an example which they would be proud for the child to emulate and thus give the child no opportunity to employ his background as an excuse for bad conduct as does Octave in *Monsieur Alphonse* when he states: "...il faut tenir un peu compte de l'éducation que les gens ont reçue, du milieu dans lequel ils se sont trouvés et des mauvais exemples qu'ils ont eu autour d'eux." As a reminder to parents that they are being observed and imitated, André tells his father in *Le Père prodigue*: "Mais je faisais naturellement ce que je te voyais faire: je vivais comme tu m'avais appris à vivre." The informal education of a child is also important. Girls should learn something of life before they leave home and they should learn it from their parents. They should be told the

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truth on all things Daniel, father of a daughter, discusses this in La
Femme de Claude. He declares:

Je crois qu'on se trompe sur la manière d'élever les filles. Il faut leur dire la vérité sur toutes choses, comme à des hommes. L'ignorance où on les laisse provient souvent de ce que les parents eux-mêmes ne savent pas les causes et les fins des choses, ou qu'ils n'ont pas le temps, ou qu'ils ont perdu, dans leurs propres passions ou leurs propres erreurs, le droit de parler de tout à leurs enfants.\textsuperscript{11}

Children, as stated in the chapter on religious bases, are the raw materials man can mold. It is through proper development of them that a new type of citizen can evolve—an honest, educated and working one who loves his fellows and combats injustice.

Marriage, one of the most important aspects of social life, is important because it is the foundation of the family and thus of society. Dumas thought too much concern was expended on getting married and not enough on remaining married. This is vividly illustrated when Valentine in La Princesse Georges declares to her friends: "Il faut être marié comme il faut être vacciné, ça garantit."\textsuperscript{12} Also, the trend of marrying for fortune or a good name was criticized because the interests of the two individuals were not considered although they had to live together and fulfill their function of rearing a family. Diane de Lys asks her friend Maximilien: "Est-ce qu'on a une volonté à dix-sept ans? ... mon père et ma mère ont voulu, j'ai obéi... Seulement, on a marié ma fortune avec son nom et l'on ne s'est pas trop occupé des deux coeurs."\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., V, La Femme de Claude, Acte II, Scène 1, p. 277
\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., La Princesse Georges, Acte II, Scène 1, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., I, Diane de Lys, Acte I, Scène 5, p. 235.
Due to the function of the family, the honesty of both parties is of the utmost import. If any blemish exists on either side, it should be erased and, as much as possible, any wrong should be rectified. Then the marriage has a greater chance of success. This is the substance of Olivier's conversation with Suzanne in Le Demi-Monde wherein he states: "... c'est la raison, c'est la justice, c'est la loi sociale qui veut qu'on honnête homme n'épouse qu'une "honnête femme."\(^{14}\)

Once married, the couple have to learn to cohabitate. This, according to Dumas, is a most delicate time as the marriage is in its formative stage. The pair must realize the effect they have upon one another and should attempt to be honest and pleasant at all times because, as the vicountess and Olivier (Le Demi-Monde) assert, "... les femmes sont ce que les font leurs maris... Mais les maris sont aussi ce que les font leurs femmes."\(^{15}\)

Dumas thought that perhaps the greatest barrier to a happy marriage is the idealization of love to the point that reality is not recognized. Too many men marry thinking they can still maintain much of their bachelor existence and many women do not understand there are responsibilities as well as privileges in marriage. Dumas himself expounds upon this in his preface to L'Ami des femmes:

\[^{15}\] Ibid., Acte I, Scène 1, p. 30.
Dumas had a maxim which he felt would keep a wife faithful, content, and at home if the husband utilized it. It is expressed by Rémonin, a lawyer, in the last of Dumas' plays, L'Etrangère: "La patrie de la femme, c'est le pays où elle aime." 17

Marriage thus is a sacred institution as it is the base of society because it is the foundation of the family. Any element of a partner's personality which is in conflict with this theory should be suppressed and any practices which endanger it should be cast aside, freeing the individuals to devote their time and attention to the function of marriage—the rearing of the child.

Dumas believed the family to be the foundation of society. Anything necessary, even the sacrifice of individual happiness, should be done to create a firm foundation because the children of today are the base of the society of tomorrow. If society is to be improved, more time should be expended creating a better foundation. This, Dumas thought, would help create a more perfect society.

16 Ibid., IV, L'Ami des femmes, préface, p. 32.
CONCLUSION

Alexandre Dumas fils was an idealist, not a systematic reformer. He did not set himself the task of revolutionizing the whole of society; he only attempted to correct those abuses he saw around him. He did not endeavor to write about the things with which he was unacquainted. His treatment of the conditions he witnessed is a very personal one due to his own intimate knowledge of the harshness of society when one does not conform to its specifications. He also attacked society when its ideals were opposed to human happiness and good.

Dumas was an artist, a playwright. He sought to produce works which would touch the human heart with the truth of his message. He used every device at hand toward this end. This accounts for the amusement and enjoyment one gains from his plays, for the satire and puns, for the comedy and risqué elements, for the beautiful and powerful words, all of which add to the message of the drama.

Dumas was, moreover, a man of his century, his country, his society. His plays seem antiquated to us today because they deal with subjects that seem relatively minor and because the vices he claimed would subjugate the world have not done so. His nationality is clear, because he could not avoid the ethnocentricities which entered into his works. He is a man of one small society within the greater society. His entrance into it was at birth and his exist was at death. It is this society that he observed and hoped to ameliorate and the observation of which supplies the realism in his drama.
Furthermore, Dumas was a man. He was subject to the same emotions as all men—love, hate, despair, fatigue, faith. All these entered into his plays embodying them with pathos, passion, drama, excitement, human understanding, and a desire to aid in the creation of a more perfect society.
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