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FROM PAMPHLET TO MELODRAMA: THE RESACRALIZATION OF THE QUEEN IN DUMAS’ MARIE ANTOINETTE ROMANCES

by

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Thanks to all of my committee members, especially Dr. Susan Blood. Without your guidance I would never have achieved this goal.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my father, Richard Riccardi.
Abstract

Marie Antoinette was famously calumniated in pre-revolutionary and revolutionary pamphlets as being a debauched monarch who represented the corruption of the Ancien Régime. The transition of her portrayal from wicked queen to that of a martyr started to appear in earnest during the Restoration period of the early nineteenth century as literary genres evolved from libertine to pamphlet to melodrama. During the period of 1846-1855 Alexandre Dumas père wrote a series of historical drama called the Marie Antoinette Romances in which he used melodramatic elements such as moral polarization, masks and mistaken identities, and the occult to paint a portrait of the last years of the monarchy and the outbreak of the Revolution. In Dumas’ series, the resacralization of Marie Antoinette comes toward the end of her reign and throughout her imprisonment through the attempts made to save her by the Knight of Maison Rouge. The inclusion of the element of courtly love represented by the Knight renders the character of Marie Antoinette worthy of pity and endears her to the reader. Dumas’ series manages to both serve as a means of showing the forces behind the outbreak of the Revolution while simultaneously re-legitimizing the monarchy by showing the struggle and self-realization of Marie Antoinette.
Introduction

The story of Marie Antoinette has been told and retold time and again throughout the past two hundred years since her death. The curiosity surrounding her life, particularly during her years at Versailles, both as dauphine and eventually as the queen of France has raised questions about her own morality and the role that she played in contributing to the onset of the French Revolution. Those who surrounded her on a daily basis at court were the first both to embrace her as a young princess, and then quickly turn on her when she did not behave as their ideal queen. She, like other queens, was seemingly doomed to failure even before setting foot from Austria on to French soil. She was always seen as a foreigner, and therefore a threat to the crown and to France’s relations with other countries. The fact that she liked to spend money and gamble, while simultaneously ignoring court etiquette did not help the nobility at Versailles to embrace Marie Antoinette as one of their own. Over time, her image was questioned then completely debased by the public at large. She became the symbol of all that was considered wrong with the monarchy. Her physical body was used as a symbol of debauchery by the pamphleteers both before and during the Revolution in order to spread doubt and fear about the Old Regime. After her arrest, imprisonment and execution in 1793, Marie Antoinette continued to fuel the revolutionary cause through the slander of her character in the public libels.

In the aftermath of Marie Antoinette’s death, Mme de Staël wrote her famous Réflexions sur le procès de la Reine, in which she tried to reverse the slander against the queen in the pamphlets. Mme de Staël painted the image of a suffering mother and reminded the French of their role in vilifying Marie Antoinette within a few years after
they had welcomed her to France with open arms. Despite Mme de Staël’s plea to the French people to think about Marie Antoinette as a human being and to save her son from imprisonment and death, the resurrection of Marie Antoinette’s image did not come until years later. During the July Monarchy, Alexandre Dumas wrote a series on the Revolution called *The Marie Antoinette Romances*. Although Dumas himself was a staunch Republican whose father rose to the position of general under Napoleon, he worked as a young man for Louis Philippe and often socialized with aristocrats. Dumas’ portrayal of Marie Antoinette was arguably misogynistic as he showed her using her feminine wiles to get her way with the king as well as other aristocratic men who wanted to win her favor. However, he also managed to show the human side of Marie Antoinette that was denied in Revolutionary literature. Whether intentional or not, Dumas’ melodramatic series serves to paint another portrait of Marie Antoinette’s life at Versailles before the outbreak of the Revolution. In Dumas’ interpretation of Marie Antoinette she is shown at once as being a proud queen and a victim of forces beyond her control that had but one goal: to delegitimize and bring about the end of the monarchy.

So then did the pamphlets take over as a form of mass popular literature that bridged the written movements of libertinage and melodrama which were in fashion before and after the French Revolution, respectively? In order to answer that question, it is necessary to look back at the portrayal of Marie Antoinette in the pamphlets and the goals of those who published such libels. After investigating the goals of the pamphleteers in slandering Marie Antoinette, I will be comparing and contrasting the portrayal of Marie Antoinette in Alexandre Dumas’ series about the queen and attempting to arrive at the reasons behind his resurrection of her character.
Chantal Thomas, the famous French historian, has written several works on Marie Antoinette. Among them is The Wicked Queen: The Origins of the Myth of Marie Antoinette. She also contributed to Dena Goodman’s collective work entitled Marie Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen. In The Wicked Queen, Thomas theorizes that the way that Marie Antoinette was shown in the infamous pamphlets of pre-revolutionary France stemmed from the tradition of libertine literature which included such infamous characters as the Marquis de Sade and Giacomo Casanova. She convincingly shows the manner in which every aspect of the ill-fated queen’s person was debased in order to fuel the revolutionary cause. By metaphorically stripping her of her clothing and prostituting her, the pamphleteers were able to show a morally corrupt Marie Antoinette who represented the height of debauchery. In Thomas’ own words:

“In looking into pamphlet literature, which, as it approached the revolutionary years, increasingly wallowed in a vulgar representation of aristocratic debauchery even while denouncing it, I wanted to delineate the end of a philosophy and a practice of pleasure indissociable from conditions of existence conducive to idleness and sophistication. Such a philosophy was effectively based on a complete separation of the family values of genealogical and moral continuity and the egotistical values of carnal pleasures, which, far from concerning themselves with enlistment in a lasting relationship, are satisfied with the passing agreement of a complicity. But the more pamphlets I read, …the more I was convinced that the history of libertinage ended with the French Revolution. In particular, I became more and more amazed and fascinated by the awesome monstrosity of the Marie-Antoinette portrayed in the pamphlets, by her flagrant unreality… What was being constructed here, in these brief, repetitive, tirelessly slanderous opuscules, was a caricatured double who lived her own life and developed according to the internal logic of a genre that required “ever worse” as a law of necessity. As Robert Darnton has shown, pamphlet production was a commercial enterprise. Contrary to high literature, it above all obeyed mercantile objectives. Like the tabloid press, its register was hyperbole, excess its motto. The diabolical vocation of Marie-Antoinette was to overstep all the limits, to always outdo herself in frivolousness, indecency, denaturation, scorn for her husband and squandering of the realm, sexual audacity, and murderous lunacy. As a pamphlet heroine, Marie-Antoinette was a woman whose capacity for evil exceeded by a long shot, all bounds of plausibility.” (Thomas 9-10)
Thomas explains that this caricature of Marie Antoinette represented in the pamphlets had nothing to do with the person in reality thus created the “myth” of the wicked queen. It was this fabricated creature of the tabloid press -- which used sensationalism as a tool of debauchery -- that was used to the advantage of the revolutionaries to spread hatred of the ill-fated queen and of the aristocracy by association with and proximity to her. Even immediately following Marie Antoinette’s death, the pamphlets continued to be produced to emphasize the justification of her execution. In recounting the story of her trial, the authors of the libels used such inflammatory language in passages such as “You have purged the earth of a monster who was its abomination” and “During her interrogation, she never ceased to display the brazenness of deep-rooted crime”. (Thomas 249-50) Her death was used as a tool to fuel the fire of the Revolution, using her death as a banner for the republican cause. The pamphlets served not only to demonize Marie Antoinette during her reign, but also to employ her death as justification that the revolutionary cause was correct. She was shown as being the opposite of the motherly figure that a queen should be. Instead, she was represented as a monster who went so far as to have lesbian liaisons with her female friends and even worse, an incestuous relationship with her son.

In *The Wicked Queen*, Thomas cites Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* (1957), in which he defines the concept of myth. She relates Barthes’ ideas that myth is a message, a system of communication, and that anything can be mythologized. (Thomas 14) The pamphlets, which were the premier means of spreading lies about the king’s wives and mistresses, were nothing new in France. Madame Du Barry was often the victim of their hatred, and once Marie Antoinette came onto the scene, the pamphleteers simply shifted
victims. Thomas gives the following interpretation of myth: “In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialects, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions since it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity; things appear to mean something by themselves.” (Thomas 15)

Other historians such as Lynn Hunt and Sara Maza also show the political use of the pamphlets. In her work *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie*, Maza critiques the way in which women were singled out for victimization through their association with the mother figure. She writes:

“No doubt Physiocrats gave a scientific framework and therefore greater legitimacy to what was already the cultural obsession of their age where social issues were concerned: the ubiquitous fixation on “fertility” linked to both population and agriculture. From the second third of the eighteenth century, the French were convinced that their country was threatened with both economic anemia and depopulation, and a wide range of writers and artists sought answers and reassurance in images of bountiful agriculture, happy village life, and healthy infants gorging milk from their mothers’ breasts. Conversely, danger crystallized around those who were celibate or practiced unproductive sex—monks and nuns, domestic servants, libertine aristocrats—hence the extreme stigma of the adjective “sterile” applied to merchants and artisans. Rousseau and Beaumarchais were but the most famous devotees of the maternal breast, and long before Marie-Antoinette played milkmaid in the rococo village she built for herself and her friends at Trianon, the French upper middle classes were consuming idealized images and experiences of what they thought of as country life.” (Maza 38)

Those who went against this role were singled out. The first seven years of Marie Antoinette’s marriage proved to be infertile and she was therefore put under public scrutiny for her lack of ability to produce an heir. This image of the queen as being incapable of offspring both emasculated the king and lead the public to question the
legitimacy of their children once the couple was shown to be fertile. Eventually, the idea that other men may have fathered the Children of France, and of particular interest the dauphin, was circulated as the queen’s libertine image was exploited in the press.

It is clear that the scandal sheets left no room for interpretation. They laid out the images that they intended their audience to absorb without question. They served both to entertain and influence thought. They appealed to the aristocracy as well as the public at large and had a unifying effect by isolating a common enemy.

Pamphlets for the use of spreading revolutionary thought and Enlightenment philosophy are mentioned several times throughout *The Marie Antoinette Romances* series by Alexandre Dumas. Dumas wrote *The Marie Antoinette Romances* between 1846 and 1855 during a time when he was fascinated with writing historical drama. The series consists of five books, *Joseph Balsamo* (a.k.a. *Memoirs of a Physician/Mémoirs d’un médecin*) (1846-1848), *Le Collier de la Reine* (*The Queen’s Necklace*) (1849-1850), *Ange Pitou* (1853), *La Comtesse de Charny* (*The Comtesse de Charny*) (1853-1855), and *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge* (*The Knight of Maison-Rouge*) (1845). Those pamphlets specifically used to calumniate the queen were incorporated into the second book entitled *The Queen’s Necklace*. As the title suggests, this volume concentrates on the Diamond Necklace Affair in 1785. During this time period, scandal sheets played a major role in incriminating Marie Antoinette in the court of public opinion. In *The Queen’s Necklace*, Dumas creates the fictional journalist M. Reteau who has published a slanderous story about Marie Antoinette’s appearance in public at one of Dr. Mesmer’s demonstrations. The pamphlet is entitled *The Paroxysms of the Princess Ettenniotna at the House of the Fekeer Remsem* and is receiving orders by the thousands. Since this is the pre-
revolutionary period, freedom of the press was not yet instituted, and there is a fear of punishment for speaking out against the monarchy. There is an exchange between M. Reteau and Aldegonde, his servant, in which they discuss his latest publication and of the possible discovery of the pamphlet by the authorities:

“Aldegonde”, dit-il à la vielle, “voilà un joli numéro ; l’as-tu lu?”

“Pas encore; ma soupe n’est pas finie”, dit la vieille.

“Je suis content de ce numéro”, dit le gazetier en élevant sur son maigre lit ses bras encore plus maigres.

“Oui”, répliqua Aldegonde; “mais savez-vous ce qu’on en dit à l’imprimerie?”

“Que dit-on?”

“On dit que certainement vous n’échapperez pas cette fois à la Bastille.”….

“Aldegonde…” dit-il, “fais-moi une bonne soupe et ne te mêle pas de littérature.”

“Oh ! Toujours le même,” répliqua la vieille ; “téméraire comme un moine franc.”

“Je t’achèterai des boucles avec le numéro d’aujourd’hui”, fit le gazetier… “Est-on venu déjà acheter beaucoup d’exemplaires?”

“Pas encore, et mes boucles ne seront pas bien reluisantes, si cela continue. Vous rappelez-vous le bon numéro contre monsieur de Broglie : il n’était pas dix heures qu’on avait déjà vendu cent numéros….”

“Soit”, dit Reteau ; “mais je n’aurai pas tant à courir, et je mangerai tranquillement ma soupe. Sais-tu pourquoi, Aldegonde ?”

“Ma foi non, monsieur.”

“C’est qu’au lieu d’attaquer un homme, j’attaque un corps ; au lieu d’attaquer un militaire, j’attaque une reine.”

“La reine !…alors ne craignez rien ; si vous attaquez la reine, vous serez porté en triomphe, et nous allons vendre des numéros, et j’aurai mes boucles.” (Dumas 259)

“Aldegonde”, said he to the old woman, “this is a capital number; have you read it?”
“Not yet; my soup is not finished.”

“It is excellent,” repeated the journalist.

“Yes,” said she; “but do you know what they say of it in the printing office?”

“What?”

“That you will certainly be sent to the Bastille.”

“Aldegonde,” replied Reteau calmly, “make me a good soup and do not meddle with literature.”

“Always the same,” said she, “rash and imprudent.”

“I will buy you some buckles with what I make today. Have many copies been sold yet?”

“No, and I fear my buckles will be but poor. Do you remember the number against M. de Broglie? We sold one hundred before ten o’clock; therefore this cannot be as good.”

“Do you know the difference, Aldegonde? Now, instead of attacking an individual, I attack a body; and instead of a soldier, I attack a queen.”

“The queen! Oh, then there is no fear; the numbers will sell, and I shall have my buckles.” (Dumas 205-6)

The embodiment of the queen as a representative of the crimes of the Ancien Régime was one definitive goal of the pamphleteers. Her lack of popularity grew over time and with it grew the interest in circulating more literature with her as the scapegoat for all that was perceived to be wrong with the monarchical system. The Revolution brought with it an end to the censorship laws that previously protected the monarchy from criticism, although despite the restrictions the number of underground printers had remained relatively high. In Origins of the French Revolution, William Doyle describes the monarchy’s loss of control over subversive literature. He writes, “…by 1770 the damage…had been done. Even if it had been possible after that date to suppress all contentious literature appearing in France, and to dam up the multifarious channels by
which it flowed in from abroad, there was no recalling what had been published in
previous decades, and no blunting of the public’s appetite for more. The government had
lost control of public opinion.” (Doyle 79) Once the censorship laws were lifted,
however, there was an explosion in the number of pamphlets being printed in Paris in
particular, with Marie Antoinette as their favorite victim. In 1793 and 1794 there was
resurgence in the scandal sheets featuring the evil queen. She had gotten what she
deserved according to the Republic and continued to serve as the model of anti-
revolutionary behavior. It was not until well after Marie Antoinette’s execution in 1793
that the pamphlets ceased altogether.

Eventually though, the lust for blood subsided, and with the Bourbon Restoration
in 1815 began a gradual trend towards the redemption of Marie Antoinette’s character in
the press. During the Romantic period in the 1840s and 1850s, Alexandre Dumas père
wrote *The Marie Antoinette Romances* which showed the queen in a new light. Far from
elevating her to the status of saint, Dumas nevertheless gave a less wicked, more
sympathetic view of Marie Antoinette. It is my intention to show that through the use of
melodramatic elements, Dumas was able to write his novels about the most famous queen
of France by capturing the drama and mystique surrounding her reign. I intend to discuss
the evolution of the portrayal of Marie Antoinette from the low forms of the pamphlets
and early theater, both within Dumas’ series and outside of it, to the high form of the
novel and eventually arriving at her cinematic portrayal in the twentieth century, and how
it lends itself to melodramatic interpretation.

In order to understand some of the character references and possibly a lack of
continuity in the story line, it is important to note that Dumas’ series was written out of
order. He began the series in 1845 with The Knight of Maison Rouge. This novel was originally intended to stand on its own. Eventually, Dumas, accompanied by August Maquet with whom he often collaborated, created the other five books that actually preceded The Knight of Maison Rouge, but did not share the same characters, Marie Antoinette and Philippe de Taverney being the only exceptions. Cagliostro, for example, who plays such a pivotal role throughout The Marie Antoinette Romances, disappears after his involvement in the Diamond Necklace Affair in The Queen’s Necklace. Cagliostro was in real life an infamous charlatan of Italian origin who was known for mixing with the aristocracy and dealing in the occult. He was convicted of taking part in the Diamond Necklace Affair and was imprisoned for nine months for his involvement in it. In Dumas’ series, his role was to spark the Revolution and bring about the end of the French monarchy, and by the time The Knight of Maison Rouge begins in 1793, his task has been accomplished. The other characters in Knight are not tied in with the characters from the previous books, but they do pick up where the others left off. After the start of the Revolution, the mass emigration of the aristocracy, and royal family’s arrest and imprisonment at the Temple, Dumas only focused on the fate of Marie Antoinette. However, he did employ characters who were loyalists and devoted to freeing the imprisoned queen. The polarization of good and bad was one of the melodramatic elements Dumas used to create tension and drive the action in his historical dramas.

In addition to using characters to steer the action towards an inevitable conclusion, Dumas also used the melodramatic element of doubles and masks to hide identities, thus polarizing individual traits and allowing for confusion of the action. Many of the characters throughout The Marie Antoinette Romances are either doubled or hidden
behind masks and disguises, sometimes for good and sometimes with more sinister intentions. Either way, Dumas was able to use the individual to showcase many different qualities or defects of a personality, echoing the fracturing of the society in pre-Revolutionary France and the internal struggles of some characters. I intend to give examples of the many masks and hidden identities used as a literary tool by Dumas, mostly within *The Marie Antoinette Romances* series, but also in some of his other works, such as *The Man in the Iron Mask*.

The French Revolution has been called a misogynist movement by many historians, such as Lynn Hunt, who pointed to the sexism attributed to Enlightenment philosophy. In *Inventing Human Rights*, Hunt discusses the way that the implementation of pornographic images of the queen served to bring down the monarchy by showing her to represent the “bad mother” who engaged in sexually depraved acts. The place of women in post-revolutionary society was questioned by philosophers, most famously by Rousseau. Hunt puts into words the pre-revolutionary conception of women: “Women were not simply less reasonable than men because they were less educated; their biology destined them to the private, domestic life and made them entirely unsuitable for politics, business, or the professions. In these new biological doctrines, education or changes in environment could never change the inherent hierarchical structures in human nature.” (Hunt 187)

Throughout Dumas’ series, there are many different types of women, from Marie Antoinette and other female aristocrats down to simple servants. Their romantic partners seem to influence their own portrayal and the success or failures of their relationships are entangled with the political convictions of their husbands and lovers. For some, the
notion of courtly love comes into play. Dumas constructs several love triangles among his characters, most of whose participants have pure intentions. Conversely, there are other relationships that involve outside influences such as the occult which doom the existence of any pure love. I will be discussing the differences between these pairings and the way that Dumas used courtly love and misogyny to impact the outcome of the love relationships of his main characters and the manner in which women were portrayed as fitting in to revolutionary ideals. As previously mentioned, Dumas came from a republican background and considered himself to be a republican, although he did not alienate himself from the aristocracy altogether. In *The Marie Antoinette Romances* series, Dumas generally portrays Marie Antoinette and the majority of his secondary female characters as victims worthy of pity. Although he attributes feminine wiles to his women, they are not to be scorned and hated—as Marie Antoinette was in the pamphlets—but rather are shown to be victims of social and political circumstance. The human frailty of the women in *The Marie Antoinette Romances* lends itself to the creation by Dumas of a world in which the queen of France can be seen as being haughty and privileged, but not reprehensible. Dumas thus showed Marie Antoinette as a martyr of the Revolution. The series was written during a period of political turbulence in France. Dumas began the series in 1846 during the July Monarchy and didn’t complete it until 1855, during Napoleon III’s reign. In the interim, the Revolution of 1848 took place, which forced the abdication of Louis-Philippe, the son of Philippe Égalité and Dumas’ former employer.

In his work entitled *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Peter Brooks substantiates the claim that certain nineteenth century dramatists, among them Balzac, Hugo and
Dumas, “within an apparent context of ‘realism’ and the ordinary…seemed in fact to be staging a heightened and hyperbolic drama, making reference to pure and polar concepts of darkness and light, salvation and damnation”. He goes further to explain that “Reading these novelists with a full awareness of their ambitions more and more appeared to me to pose problems and to demand understanding of the melodramatic mode: a certain theatrical substratum used and reworked in the novelistic representations.” (Brooks xiii)

He goes on to give a detailed explanation of the criteria for melodrama. I will discuss the elements of melodrama outlined by Brooks and show how they apply to Dumas’ Marie Antoinette Romances series.

According to Georg Lukacs in The Historical Novel (1938), the rise of the genre can be directly traced to the French Revolution. He claims that:

“It was the French Revolution, the revolutionary wars and the rise and fall of Napoleon, which for the first time made history a mass experience, and moreover on a European scale. During the decades between 1789 and 1814 each nation of Europe underwent more upheavals than they had previously experienced in centuries….Now if experiences such as these are linked with the knowledge that similar upheavals are taking place all over the world, this must enormously strengthen the feeling first that there is a such thing as history, that it is an uninterrupted process of changes and finally that it has a direct effect upon the life of every individual.” (Lukacs 23)

The idea that history can be a mass cultural experience is prevalent in Dumas’ series. In Ange Pitou in particular, Dumas creates a character that rises up from his simple peasant upbringing to become a hero of the Republican cause. An autobiographical figure, Pitou represents Dumas himself as a wild youth who spent much of his time outdoors trapping animals. He also includes other local heroes such as le père Billot, Pitou’s boss and neighbor, who abandons his family at the outbreak of the
Revolution to go to Paris and fight for the Republican cause. Another character worthy of
mention is Gilbert, the de Taverney family’s servant who is inspired by the philosophy of
Rousseau and becomes a doctor who tries to inspire societal change through his writings
and dealings with Masonic figures.

Thus, wars at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries took on a
new social dimension. Lukacs explains that the change from mercenary to mass armies
also called for propaganda to rally the troops for a common cause:

“The wars of absolute states in the pre-Revolutionary period were waged by small
professional armies. They were conducted so as to isolate the army as sharply as
possible from the civilian population supplies from depots, fear of desertion, etc.
Not for nothing did Frederick II of Prussia declare that war should be waged in
such a manner that the civilian population simply would not notice it. “To keep
the peace is the first duty of the citizen” was the motto of the wars of absolutism.

This changes at one stroke with the French Revolution. In its defensive struggle
against the coalition of absolute monarchies, the French Republic was compelled
to create mass armies….If in place of the recruitment or pressing into professional
service of small contingents of the declassed, a mass army is to be created, then
the content and purpose of the war must be made clear to the masses by means of
propaganda.” (Lukacs 23)

In France, the use of pamphlets to further revolutionary ideas became widespread
and linked directly with anti-aristocratic sentiment. Although pamphlet literature was not
a new concept in France, it took on a new meaning in the pre-revolutionary years,
targeting not just individuals but an entire social structure. In the case of Marie
Antoinette, the gradual degradation of her image through scapegoating served to
represent the vices of the aristocracy in general, and in particular shone a light on the
perceived evils of the royal family in order to challenge its legitimacy. In this way, the
pamphlets served as military propaganda. As Darnton wrote in The Origins of Pre-
Revolutionary France, “The ideological origins of the Revolution should be understood as process of delegitimizing the Old Regime rather than as a prophecy of a new one.” (Darnton 216)

The goal of my research is to demonstrate the way in which the pamphlets bridged the literary and historical gap between the end of libertine literature which preceded the French Revolution and the beginning of melodrama that followed it. I will address the manner in which the pamphlets and the historical novels of Alexandre Dumas in the Marie Antoinette Romances shared certain melodramatic elements while simultaneously remaining separate genres. I will attempt to show the way in which the scapegoating of Marie Antoinette in the pamphlets and apparent resurrection of her image in melodrama merged in an ideological function by maintaining military propaganda. Finally, I will attempt to address the continued public interest in the mystique surrounding Marie Antoinette in present day literature and film.
Chapter 1 –The Pamphlets

The image of Marie Antoinette is one that has undergone dramatic changes from the pre-revolutionary period to modern times. The pamphlets of the late eighteenth century, beginning in 1785 as a reaction to the Diamond Necklace Affair depicted a frivolous woman who spent so much money as to drive the nation into fiscal ruin. As time went on and the Revolution progressed, images of the queen in the press ranged from critical to pornographic, showing her as the ultimate symbol of a libertine. While criticism of foreign-born queens was hardly new in France due to the Salic Law which forbade women from becoming rulers except through marriage, Marie Antoinette was easily the most heavily criticized, if not most hated queen of France. In her article entitled “The Heroine of the Crime: Marie Antoinette in Pamphlets”, Chantal Thomas gives a brief history of the evolution of the circulation of the libels featuring the queen and their insidious underlying themes. She describes the first pamphlets appearing during the early years of Marie Antoinette’s reign, notably during a visit from her brother Maximilian in 1775. According to Thomas, Maximilian mentions the courtiers at Marly circulating papers decrying Marie Antoinette’s imprudence and gambling. (Thomas cited in Goodman 105) She quotes him as saying, “Let us name the authors of this backbiting: it was the courtiers, a cruel and perfidious race. Each morning they brought from Marly to Paris a newspaper full of little anecdotes that circulated only as long as, by their nastiness, they poisoned the situation: thus appeared The Break of Dawn, a little libel, flat, obscure, and despicable”. (Thomas cited in Goodman 105) The myth created by the pamphlets eventually found its way into every aspect of the queen’s persona.
The pamphlets themselves were written in the form of small, soft cover booklets. Most were between approximately five and fifty pages in length. They varied in form, from mini-plays mimicking the theatrical form to rewritten songs and short stories. No matter which type of pamphlet was being circulated, they seemed to appeal to a large audience, from the lower classes to the nobility. The form of the play is of particular interest in that it was accompanied by stage direction, allowing the addition of parenthetical references to lewd activities and reactions that each character should have. This left little to the imagination on the audience’s part, which was precisely the goal of the pamphleteer—to directly affect the opinions of the readers in an effort to stir public thought and drive home the republican cause. For the most part, in the period leading up to the outbreak of the Revolution, all of the characters in the pamphlets were bad. There was no struggle between good and evil, no protagonist and antagonist fighting. Instead, the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary pamphlets concentrated for on the perceived ills of the aristocracy, and in particular on the evil queen Marie Antoinette and her cuckold husband who were its representatives. Although Louis could be considered a victim of his wife’s debauchery, he was also seen as being deserving of it due to his own lack of leadership. In this way, the raising of Marie Antoinette to the ultimate emblem of the depraved monarchy simultaneously emphasized the emasculation of Louis.

In The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France, Robert Darnton addresses the popularity of the pamphlets and the concern about their publication by the government and the police in the 1770s and 1780s. Darnton addresses what he refers to as “a special sector of the book trade, marked off by well-established practices and organized around a working notion of the “philosophical”.” (Darnton 22) He goes on to
explain “the basic character of the clandestine book business” (Darnton 22), which he traced through the archives of the Société-typographique de Neuchâtel, Switzerland. According to Darnton, the business of selling forbidden literature was one of supply and demand and that the production of illegal books in countries bordering France made it easy to smuggle them across the border. In reference to the Société-typographique de Neuchâtel, Darnton writes, “The STN occupied an ideal site just across the French border for producing illegal French books and for shipping them down the Rhone or the Rhine or across the Jura Mountains. Its stock included a vast assortment of all kinds of current literature in addition to its own publications, and its customers, mostly retail booksellers, came from all the major cities and most of the sizable towns in France—as well as dealers who sold French books throughout the rest of Europe, from St. Petersburg to Naples and from Budapest to Dublin.” (Darnton 23) He writes,

“According to Lenoir (the lieutenant general of the Parisian police during the pre-Revolutionary period), libelles did not cause much concern in Versailles during the first years of Louis XVI’s reign. The comte de Maurepas, the dominant minister in the government and a veteran of court intrigue, collected slanderous songs and epigrams…But policy changed under the ministries of Necker, Calonne, and Brienne. By 1780, the ministers secretly subsidized writers to undercut one another…Then the slander turned on Louis XVI, deriding his supposed impotence, and on Marie-Antoinette, deploring her supposed sexual orgies. Defamation of this kind could not be laughed off, not even by Maurepas, who reversed his policy and organized secret missions to cut off the production of libelles in foreign countries…But the slander appeared faster that they could repress it, so (according to Lenoir) the “law was particularly ineffective against anti-government libelles during the years before the Revolution”. ” (Darnton 224-225)

Marie Antoinette herself was known for underestimating the pamphlets and ignoring their significance, despite warnings from her mother Maria Theresa. In her biography entitled Marie Antoinette, the Journey, historian Antonia Fraser addresses the
queen’s reaction to the scandalous literature being circulated about her: “Marie Antoinette herself was left with the alternatives of weeping or shrugging them off with laughter that was intended to show disdain. In fact, she did both by turns. Tears were provoked by the sheer unfairness of it all—“these miserable gazettes”, as she termed them to Marie Teresa. She took to singing the refrain from *Les Nouvelles de la Cour*, the obscene attack on the King’s potency…in an effort to demonstrate a sophisticated indifference. For the time being the disdainful mode of reaction prevailed, as though the Queen found it impossible to take these anonymous ambuscades seriously.” (Fraser 147)

Darnton also suggests that readers of pamphlets and *livres philosophiques* during the Enlightenment were not altogether naïve regarding the authors’ intents. He writes, “Eighteenth-century Frenchmen understood enough about communication to expect readers and readings to be diverse. But they believed that *livres philosophiques* could produce powerful responses and that *libelles* could upset the stability of the state…But all the evidence points to the same conclusion: readers took forbidden literature seriously.” (Darnton, p. 226) In the years preceding the revolution, Louis-Sébastien Mercier penned such *livres philosophiques* as the utopian fantasy *L’An deux mille quatre cent quarante, rêve s’il en fut jamais* and *Jezennemours*, a story about the triumph of love over religious bigotry. (Darnton 230) In *Jezennemours*, Mercier inserted passages where the main character is dissecting forbidden texts and is obsessed with them to the point that he cannot stop himself from reading. Darnton likens the experience outlined by Mercier to the power of the written word among consumers of text during the time period. Darnton stresses Mercier’s “widespread conviction that reading could move mountains-and remove despots, especially if the books were “philosophical”.” (Darnton 231)
One can easily see the transition from philosophical ideals to pamphlet literature as the century progressed. As the Revolution approached, the radicalization of ideas did also. The principles of Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu and Locke were widespread and popular. The American Revolution was being fought across the sea and new democratic ideas were being used as a voice of the people against a form of government viewed as antiquated. In France, the situation was slightly different than in America, but the basic idea was the same--how to remove the old form of government in order to create a state in which personal liberty was guaranteed and protected. In France, revolutionaries had to spark public interest in their cause by finding someone to blame for the suffering of the masses. That someone was Marie Antoinette. She was an easy target as her popularity steadily declined over the years, even among her peers.

But what were the causes of the court’s dislike of Marie Antoinette? First and foremost she was Austrian, a foreigner on French soil who must be marrying to serve the interest of her powerful mother Maria Theresa. With very few exceptions, the Queens of France were always from abroad, since for centuries Salic Law (which was originally instituted in the Middle Ages to exclude women from inheriting property) forbade lineage from passing to female descendants of the royal family. Therefore, only sons could reign, and their queen consorts inevitably came from elsewhere in Europe. This put the young queens in the dubious position of being around to assure the continuation of the line by giving birth to male heirs while often being suspected of still having loyalties to their countries of origin. Apart from that, they had no real power, although they were always accused of having influence.
Once the heir was produced, the queen of France became a purely ornamental fixture at court. Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI did not help matters by taking almost a decade to produce their first offspring (a girl), then another three years to produce a dauphin. The fodder for public tongue-wagging was there. Questions about the King’s amorous ability came into play. What began as a slow-moving relationship between a pretty young dauphine and a shy dauphin was soon thrown into the spotlight and publicly questioned. Even Maria Theresa, Marie Antoinette’s domineering mother, could not understand what was, or was not transpiring in the royal bedroom, relentlessly sending letters to her daughter asking for details and responding with unsolicited advice.

Several biographers have treated the subject of the royal couple’s marital relationship. In 1932, the Austrian biographer Stephan Zweig wrote Marie Antoinette: Portrait of an Average Woman. He approached the relationship of Louis and Marie Antoinette from a Freudian point of view. In the chapter entitled “The Secret of the Alcove”, Zweig details the disastrous marital relationship between the king and queen. It has been well documented that the king and queen did not consummate their relationship for seven years following their marriage at ages fifteen and sixteen, respectively. In Zweig’s words, “Matrimonium non consummatum est; as far as its essential physical purpose was concerned, the marriage remained unfulfilled, today, tomorrow, for several years. Marie Antoinette had been coupled with a “nonchalant mari”, with a negligent husband; and at first the general belief was that nothing but timidity, inexperience, or a “nature tardive” (today we should speak of infantilism) had made the youth of sixteen impotent when put to bed with so fascinating a maiden.” (Zweig 20) Since the private life of the king was anything but private in the eighteenth century, and since an heir to the
The throne was of concern throughout Europe, the monarchy in other countries was also privy to the intimate details of Louis and Antoinette’s love life, and the French people took to mocking the young king via lampoons circulated in Paris. According to Zweig, Maurepas’ appointment to Prime Minister was used as an excuse to taunt the king with the following verse:

“Maurepas était impuissant
Le Roi l’a rendu plus puissant.
Le Ministre reconnaissant,
Dit : Pour vous, Sire,
Ce que je désire,
D’en faire autant.” (Zweig 24)

Zweig attributes their marital difficulties to pleasure seeking on the part of Marie Antoinette to compensate for the sexual impotence of Louis XVI. Thus, according to Zweig’s line of thinking, what began as physical impotence on the part of the king lead to frivolous behavior on the part of the queen, and ultimately the destruction of both their reputations in the public eye.

Antonia Fraser also wrote of the relationship between Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI. In her biography entitled Marie Antoinette: The Journey (2001), Fraser attributes Marie Antoinette’s character to a childhood in the Austrian court in which private family life was valued just as much as formal court tradition. In her chapter entitled “Born to Obey”, Fraser describes the expectations that Maria Teresa had for all of her daughters, who for all sakes and purposes were being groomed to marry the most prestigious European royalty of the day. “A crucial text in Marie Antoinette’s upbringing
was _Les Aventures de Télémaque_ by Fénelon, written at the end of the seventeenth century for the heir to Louis XIV and imported to Austria by Francis Stephen. This underlined the importance for the female sex of industriousness and dexterity… but also of modesty and submission…the necessity for total obedience from her daughters was something about which Maria Teresa was quite unequivocal.” (Fraser 21) Despite her unrelenting questions and attempts to control her daughter’s marital situation when she and the King failed to produce an heir in a timely fashion, as well as her pleading to behave according to the dictates of Versailles, Maria Teresa was powerless to control the image of her daughter in the court of public opinion. It was the lack of an heir that first caused a stir at court, for it prompted anxiety and jealousy over who was to inherit the throne should Louis and Marie Antoinette fail to produce a successor. Once doubt was cast about the royal marriage, criticism of every part of Marie Antoinette’s character began to circulate. Impotence in the bedroom came to equal political impotence and rumors regarding the legitimacy of the monarchy were in abundance. The delay in producing an heir was the first circumstance that opened up the queen to scathing criticism.

No part of Marie Antoinette was left untouched by those aiming to persecute her. Thomas points to discontent amongst the court with her dismissal of the official hairdresser and his replacement by Léonard and calls this phenomenon her “desacralization through fashion” (Thomas cited in Goodman 105). Seemingly trivial, the lavish, outlandish hair styles created by Léonard, worn by Marie Antoinette, and imitated by the ladies at Court, were criticized for their extravagance. She not only wore her hair in ridiculous styles that sometimes reached three feet in height, she was obsessed with
fashion and with her appearance, keeping a book of fabrics from which she consulted daily before choosing a dress. Thomas describes the phenomenon:

“Crazy about fashion, Marie-Antoinette, as queen, courted disaster. She did so as she decided to entrust her hair to a fashionable hairdresser, thereby flouting the tradition of assigning to the queens of France a titled hairdresser who acquitted the honorific post in sober fashion and who alone had the right to touch the royal head. By calling on the services of a male hairdresser then in vogue, Marie-Antoinette offered up her head to the common touch. Worse, she encouraged the man to diversify his practices in the further exercise of his talent. Marie-Antoinette protected the sovereignty of the ‘creative artist’, Léonard; in so doing, she perpetrated the double scandal of having a hairdresser who was not exclusively attached to the queen’s service and of having a man occupy a function hitherto reserved for women.” (Thomas 90)

Thomas goes on to quote Mme de Genlis, who described the situation in the following way, “At the time, there were lady hairdressers for women; it would have been considered indecent to have one’s hair done by a man. A year later, the hairdresser Larseneur of Versailles was all the rage for young women’s debuts…. Soon male hairdressers were established in Paris; finally Léonard arrived, and all the lady hairdressers fell into disrepute and obscurity.” (Thomas 90-91)

In Marie Antoinette’s Head, Will Bashor describes the humble beginnings of Léonard, who began as a provincial barber and after moving to Paris began working as a hairdresser in the theater. His good looks and talent for styling hair were noticed by a noble woman named the Marquise de Langeac, who promised to introduce Léonard at court in exchange for his services. There was a clear association of Léonard with actresses and noble women of questionable morals, including Madame du Barry, who was once a courtesan. The fact that Léonard later became the hairdresser to Marie Antoinette after having touched the heads of such women of such contentious moral
character was reflected later in the correlation between Marie Antoinette and Nicole Legay, the prostitute who imitated the queen during the Diamond Necklace Affair.

In Dumas’ novel *Joseph Balsamo*, the first book in the Marie Antoinette Romances, there is a chapter entitled “The Queen’s Hair”. The action in this book takes place in the earliest days of her reign, before the beloved dauphiness became the unpopular queen. Dumas used the idea of the queen’s hair as a sort of relic that was stolen from her and used by Cagliostro and Lorenza as an oracle to predict her lack of love for Louis in the presence of the Cardinal de Rohan. Cagliostro was a famous mesmerist during the eighteenth century whose wife’s name was Lorenza Feliciani. The Cardinal de Rohan, one of the first people that Marie Antoinette met after crossing the border into France as a young girl, had fallen out of her favor after she heard him say something negative about her mother. In Joseph Balsamo, Cagliostro exclaims to Rohan, “Quant aux cheveux…il m’a fallu les brûler pour obtenir la révélation par l’essence. En voici les cendres que je vous rends scrupuleusement après les avoir recueillies, comme si chaque parcelle valait un million. (Dumas 747) “I was obliged to burn the hair to obtain the revelation by its essence. Here are the ashes, which I restore to you most scrupulously, after having gathered them up as if each atom were worth a million.” (Dumas 216) The revelation by Cagliostro that Marie Antoinette is not in love with Louis is a precursor to the criticism in public of their unconsummated marriage, which eventually lead to the more outrageous and dangerous slander pertaining to the physical bodies and sexual practices of the royal couple in the years to come.

Another aspect of Marie Antoinette’s image which was highly criticized by the public was her fashion sense. The queen employed Rose Bertin as her official seamstress
and as a reward for her designs afforded her many privileges at court. As Thomas writes in *The Wicked Queen*, “Marie-Antoinette, the ‘Trinket Queen’, perverted the seriousness of affairs of state. Under her reign, the most grave problems were treated with more nonchalance than a point of fashion. Marie-Antoinette’s occult power appeared all the more pernicious symbolizing as it did the power of feminine weakness. The pamphlets denounced a chain of influence: a weak king is manipulated by his wife, who is herself under the thumb of a couturier. The king’s (power) will go no further than the circumstance of the queen’s frocks.” (Thomas 95) This combination of outrageous hair and passion for high fashion lead to Marie Antoinette’s being attacked by the lampoonists. It created the opportunity for critics to condemn her superficiality. If the queen was frivolous with her outward appearance, then by association she must be equally nonchalant with the affairs of state. She was also considered to be manipulative, spending the State’s funds under the nose of Louis XVI. These perceived character flaws eventually left the door open for more vile offensives to be exposed.

In *Queen of Fashion, What Marie Antoinette Wore to the Revolution*, Caroline Weber writes about “the startling consistency and force with which her costumes triggered severe sociopolitical disorder.” (Weber 3) She goes on to explain that “…from her earliest days at Versailles, Marie Antoinette staged a revolt against entrenched court etiquette by turning her clothes and other accoutrements into defiant expressions of autonomy and prestige.” (Weber 3) This same boldness that was associated with Marie Antoinette’s dress was eventually transferred into other choices she made. There was a famous instance where the young *dauphine* posed for a portrait on horseback imitating a similar one featuring Louis XIV. In the portrait, she is wearing breeches and is sitting
astride the horse. The audacity of this move and the masculine costume that Marie Antoinette wore sparked talk that she had too much influence on Louis XVI. The freedom of expression in her dress that Marie Antoinette became associated with eventually lead to public criticism of her perceived masculinity and as time went on fueled charges of her lesbianism. As Caroline Weber writes,

“These allegations implied that Marie Antoinette’s licentiousness went beyond just garden-variety moral turpitude, as practiced by the late, lascivious Louis XV. Her supposed lesbianism—or “tribadism,” perhaps the most prevalent eighteenth-century term for the “German vice”—may have seemed retroactively to account for her long history of childlessness, and to suggest and equation between the attention she lavished on her conspicuous female favorites and the sexual energies that she might have otherwise harnessed for more constructive (procreative) ends. Like her frivolous but powerful fashion ministry, headed by her alleged lover Bertin, the Queen’s “tribadism” also implied an ever graver, twofold political sin: that of seizing the King’s prerogitives and making him irrelevant. Whereas Louis XVI still did not have (and indeed would never have) a mistress, his “German” spouse arrogated to herself two of his best-known royal rights: the right to seek pleasure with other women, and the right to bestow the most dazzling favors upon them.” (Weber 143)

The body of the queen herself eventually became the target of pamphleteers, who denounced her looks, and over time her alleged sexual depravity. In The Wicked Queen Thomas theorizes that the physical body of the queen which was literally seen in the nude by the public at her transfer ceremony when she first arrived in France, as well as the viewing by literally hundreds of witnesses while she was giving birth morphed into pornographic libels over time. In 1789 in a publication entitled Description of the Royal Menagerie of Living Animals (Description de la menagerie royale d’animaux vivans), the queen is described in the following way: “The female of the Royal Veto is lanky, ugly, faded, hideous, frightful; but since the nation is stupid enough to feed its tyrants, she eats France’s money in the hope of one day devouring the French, one by one.” (Thomas 241)
The physical body of Marie Antoinette underwent much scrutiny during her first pregnancy and subsequent delivery of the dauphine in 1778. Court ritual demanded public viewing of the birth so that the legitimacy of an heir could be established without question. However, this act also served to demystify the idea of the sacred nature of a female monarch’s physical body, of a queen who was somehow ethereal and different from the average woman. As time progressed, the association of possessing an unattractive, publicly accessible physical body was eventually linked to having an evil nature and lack of scruples, which the pamphleteers used as an excuse to exploit Marie Antoinette from all sides.

Thomas points out that the previously unconsecrated marriage of Louis and Marie Antoinette fueled accusations by the Comte de Provence—Louis XVI’s younger brother and second in line to the French throne—that the dauphin, born in 1781, was not fathered by Louis, thus calling in to question his legitimacy as the heir. In addition, it was during this time period that pamphlets were hidden where the king and queen would find them in order to outwardly criticize their ability to reign. A visit by Marie Antoinette’s brother Maximilien prompted the following observation, “[Sheets of paper] insinuated themselves everywhere. The Queen would find one at table when she unfolded her napkin; the King would come across one on his writing desk among his official documents, in Marie-Antoinette’s box at the theater, in front of her seat” (Thomas cited in Goodman 105).

Around this time, in 1782, Pierre Choderlos de Laclos published Les Liaisons dangereuses, an epistolary novel which served as a cautionary tale about the lack of morality in the aristocracy. The libertine novel was ironically said to be a favorite of
Marie Antoinette, who was later accused herself of being immoral and sexually depraved, much like the novel’s female antagonist, the Marquise de Merteuil. In 1904, Jacques de Boisjolin and Georges Mossé wrote an essay entitled *Notes sur Laclos et Les Liaisons dangereuses* which described Laclos’ background, motivation in writing the novel and influence it had on the Revolution. Boisjolin and Mossé make note of the fact that *Les Liaisons dangereuses* and *Le Mariage de Figaro*, which appeared in 1782 and 1783 respectively, directly preceeded the Diamond Necklace Affair in 1785-6 (Boisjolin and Mossé 40), suggesting a relationship between libertine literature of the period and the downfall of the French monarchy on the heels of the Marie Antoinette’s perceived participation in the shameful conspiracy. They are careful to note, however, that literary works in and of themselves may influence events, but are not likely to change human behavior as a result.

“Les romans satiriques sont toujours de circonstance, comme peinture, mais non comme enseignement. Les révolutions développent l'esprit humain et adoucissent les lois, sans corriger la conduite. L'Art est indépendant de ses effets sociaux, il influe sur un événement et le précipite; l'événement passé, l'œuvre reste, objet d'exécration pour les contemporains, d'admiration pour la postérité.” (Boisjolin and Mossé 41)

In a similar way, the pamphlets served to spark hatred of the aristocracy and especially of Marie Antoinette by categorizing her as being sexually depraved, but ultimately cannot be blamed for more radical events of the Revolution such as the Terror, for example. Ironically, by unifying the French people against the aristocracy, the pamphlets may have lead to the execution of not only the King and Queen, but of tens of thousands of French citizens accused of acting in opposition to the Nation. Thus,
although the pamphlets were not a direct cause of the Terror, they may have inadvertently added to the number of deaths during this time period. The pamphlets seemed to serve a similar role to libertine literature in that they brought to the public an awareness of the sexual depravity associated with the aristocracy. However, although the intended audience of libertine literature was the aristocracy, pamphlet literature was meant to appeal to all levels of society. Boisjolin and Mossé suggest that human behavior did not change as a result of reading _Le Mariage de Figaro_ or _Les Liaisons dangereuses_. The same could be said of pamphlet literature during the prerevolutionary and revolutionary period in France. It was used to influence thought and to sustain hatred towards the aristocracy that eventually set off the Revolution, but eventually fell out of fashion.

The Diamond Necklace Affair in 1785-6 fueled public and aristocratic hatred of Marie Antoinette from which she never recovered. In 1785, the queen was offered a necklace by Louis XVI that was originally commissioned by Louis XV for Madame Du Barry. In _How to Ruin a Queen_, Jonathan Beckman describes it as “one of the most valuable items of jewelry in Europe—a 2,800 carat diamond necklace worth 1.6 million livres.” (Beckman 1) Marie Antoinette rejected the gift and Louis XVI returned it to Messieurs Boehmer and Bossange, the royal jewelers. In the eyes of the king and queen, the story of the necklace ended there. In the mean time, the Cardinal de Rohan was desperate to find favor with Marie Antoinette, who had failed to acknowledge him due to offences he had made toward her mother while stationed in Vienna. (Beckman 2) When a certain Jeanne de la Motte-Valois, a cunning and unscrupulous aristocrat who had fallen into financial difficulty wanted to better her position approached the Cardinal and told him that the queen had sent him a letter. She continued to forge a correspondence
between the queen and Rohan and eventually told him that she had arranged for a
clandestine meeting between him and Marie Antoinette under cover of darkness in the
park at Versailles. The Cardinal was more than willing to do so and believed that his luck
was about to change concerning his relationship with the queen. In reality, the Comtesse
de la Motte (as she was known) and her husband had paid a prostitute named Nicole
d’Oliva to impersonate the queen and meet the Cardinal. In disguise as Marie Antoinette,
Nicole d’Oliva asked the Cardinal to obtain the necklace from Boehmer and Bossange on
her behalf and to have the bill brought to her. He did so, much to the delight of the royal
jewelers, who for years had been desperate to sell the necklace. The jewels were given to
the Mme de la Motte and her husband via Nicole d’Oliva and the couple proceeded to
break up the necklace and sell the diamonds. Eventually, Messieurs Boehmer and
Bossange came to the palace to ask for payment for the transaction from the queen, who
had no idea what they were talking about. When the Cardinal was questioned, he realized
that he had been duped and made to look like a fool before Marie Antoinette. His vanity
and blind ambition had gotten the better of him, much to the outrage of the king and
queen. A trial followed, and Mme de la Motte and her husband were imprisoned for the
crime. However, Marie Antoinette was also suspected by the public of allegedly
forfeiting payment on the necklace. Such a scandal involving the queen of France was
unheard of. Although she was innocent of any wrongdoing in the affair, Marie
Antoinette’s image as an extravagant spender was popularized and forever tarnished in
the public eye.

The trial following the Diamond Necklace Affair was a precursor to Marie
Antoinette’s trial in 1793 during which her morality and legitimacy were called into
question. Despite her vindication in the Diamond Necklace Affair, Marie Antoinette’s public image continued to spiral downward in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the Revolution. In 1793 a pamphlet entitled *Jugement ou recueil complet de la procédure criminelle de Marie-Antoinette d’Autriche, ci-devant reine de France* was released in Paris by Lerouge and Berthelot. In this publication pamphleteers compared her to such notorious women of Antiquity as Agrippina and Messalina—a powerful and influential woman with a reputation for promiscuity who conspired against her husband (Emperor Claudius) and was executed when the plot was discovered—as well as other hated French queens such as Frédégonde, Brunhaut and Catherine de Medici. This association of Marie Antoinette with other infamous queens is a theme that was repeated in other pamphlets. In 1789 a pamphlet entitled *Antoinette d’Autriche, ou dialogue entre Catherine de Médicis et Frédégonde, reines de France, aux enfers*, the two notorious women are speaking about Marie Antoinette’s vices from their position in the underworld. In this publication, the two former queens are criticizing Marie Antoinette and justifying their own actions. This is significant in that it sets Marie Antoinette apart from some of the most evil women in French history by claiming that her sins are far worse than any of the sins previously committed by her predecessors. In hell, Frédégonde justifies Catherine’s slaughter of the Huguenots for political reasons, while accusing Marie Antoinette of committing crimes of libertinage and debauchery and of being worse than Messalina. (*Antoinette d’Autriche*... 6-7)

The image of Marie Antoinette was likened to that of a prostitute and satisfied the revolutionaries’ use of voyeurism to debase her persona in the eyes of the public and to ultimately create unanimity by identifying an enemy (Thomas cited in Goodman 105).
This image of queen being synonymous with prostitute possibly had its origin in the Diamond Necklace Affair, during which an actual prostitute named Madame d’Oliva doubled as and was mistaken for Marie Antoinette. During the trail, Madame de la Motte, who orchestrated the intrigue of the Diamond Necklace Affair, and the Cardinal de Rohan, who was a victim of his obsessive desire to be in Marie Antoinette’s good graces were found guilty of lèse-majesté and imprisoned. The charge stemmed from the assumption that a prostitute could substitute for Marie Antoinette and that the queen would ever be associated with a woman such as Jeanne de la Motte. Madame d’Oliva was found to be not guilty as she was used as a pawn in the scheme and was unaware of its larger implications. Ironically, although the queen was acquitted of all wrongdoing by the court, in the eyes of the public she was guilty. From this point on, the association of Marie Antoinette and a manipulative prostitute were forever intertwined. The pamphlets reflected this image of queen as whore, which continued up to and on through the Revolution. The Diamond Necklace Affair also served to foreshadow Marie Antoinette’s public trial in 1793, during which she was accused and convicted of such heinous crimes as incest with her young son and treason against the State.

Sara Maza, in her book Private Lives and Public Affairs, traces the evolution of the pamphlets following the Diamond Necklace Affair:

“The antifemale legacy of the Diamond Necklace Affair is abundantly visible in the volley of obscene literature aimed against the queen that began to appear in 1789. Sometimes the connection with the scandal of 1785-86 was explicit. La Reine dévoilée, for instance, a 1789 pamphlet in the form of letters that purport to reveal Marie-Antoinette’s bisexual lusts, was advertised as a sequel to Mme de La Motte’s “candid” memoir of the same year; one of the letters it contains is from Mme de la Motte, claiming once again that she was forced to serve as scapegoat for the queen’s sexual misconduct…The phenomenally successful Essais historiques sur la vie de Marie-Antoinette-first published and suppressed in 1783,
then a runaway success in 1789 and after--picks up the queen’s alleged fondness for nighttime walks in the gardens of Versailles in the company of her ladies-in-waiting; these nocturnal pastimes, according to the author, soon degenerated into orgies with the young princess and her friends and attendants swapping lovers in the gardens of the palace.” (Maza 207-8)

Lynn Hunt, in her book Eroticism and the Body Politic, distinguishes her research on Marie Antoinette from that of Chantal Thomas by citing the fact that she includes references to the queen’s trial, whereas Thomas relies almost solely on the pamphlets themselves to form conclusions about the use of Marie Antoinette’s physical body for political influence. In the chapter entitled “The Many Bodies of Marie-Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution”, Hunt notes that there was really no need to put Marie Antoinette on trial due to the fact that she never had the power to rule the country. In France, only men ruled and therefore, according to Hunt, it was unprecedented that a queen should be brought before a court and judged along with a king. She describes the circumstances surrounding Marie Antoinette’s appearance before the tribunal and the double standard applied to her. “The king’s trial…remained entirely restricted to a consideration of his political crimes. As a consequence, the trial of the queen, especially in its strange refractions of the pornographic literature, offers a unique and fascinating perspective on the unselconscious presumptions of the revolutionary political imagination. It makes manifest, more perhaps than other single event of the Revolution, the underlying interconnections between pornography and politics”. (Thomas cited in Goodman117-18) As a result, Marie Antoinette was made to suffer such indignations as being accused of incest in addition to the accusations of her crimes against the state. She was portrayed as a monster and a traitor.
Ironically, what began as mean-spirited gossip against the queen amongst the courtiers early in her reign eventually came to represent them as a group during the pre-revolutionary period. As Thomas mentions, for those trying to overthrow the *Ancien Régime*, licentiousness equaled class arrogance (Thomas cited in Goodman 112). Indeed, those who originally persecuted Marie Antoinette and tried to distance themselves from her came to eventually have her as the model of their own debauchery in the eyes of the people. The gossip sheets once hidden by courtiers in the King and Queen’s personal items in order to unhinge them eventually evolved into a weapon of destruction by the outside society on the monarchy at large. Despite the fact that some members of the aristocracy were not happy with Marie Antoinette and sought to undermine her authority, in the eyes of the people looking to overthrow the old system of government, the aristocracy and the lewd queen were one in the same. She became the emblem for what was wrong in France, and was not represented alone in the pamphlets. The sexual escapades of the queen almost always included multiple partners, both male and female, from the Court and the Church. In this way, the criticism of the queen’s alleged sexual depravity came to be symbolic of the denunciation of the aristocracy in general as well as the church (the First and Second Estates). Nothing was off limits, from the physical body of Marie Antoinette to the impotence of Louis XVI. In fact, these two concepts seemed to go hand in hand. While the queen is participating in wild sexual romps with her friends, the king is unaware. In an infamous pamphlet entitled *The Royal Dildo* (*Le Godmiché*) which is reprinted in *The Wicked Queen*, Juno (Marie Antoinette) exclaims, “I’ll plant more and more horns on my husband’s head; It’s the sorry wimp’s turn to find out today/What revenge both rage and love can inspire.” (Thomas 200) Hebe, the other
character in the story, written here in the form of a play, represents one of Marie Antoinette’s close friends, either Mme de Lamballe or Mme de Polignac, with whom she was constantly being accused of having lesbian relationships. Chantal Thomas writes, “As though there weren’t enough to worry about with an extravagant, debauched queen transforming the court of France into a bordello and the king into an almighty cuckold. Yet it did not stop there. A further stroke of depravity was to be added: Marie Antoinette liked women. She exhausted men without loving them. In reality, she was only interested in her own sex. The picture gets worse: what was a frisson of impropriety became disgust, nausea, a repulsive image.” (Thomas 119) In 2002, Chantal Thomas wrote a novel about Marie Antoinette called Farewell, My Queen, which gave allusion to the rumored lesbian relationship between the queen and Madame de Polignac. The novel inspired a film by the same name which was released in 2012. In the fictional story, Marie Antoinette is obsessed with her lady-in-waiting, whom she considers to be exquisitely beautiful. She goes to extreme lengths to save her as the Revolution begins, substituting a reader named Agathe-Sidonie Laborde for Mme de Polignac in order to decrease suspicion as she and her husband escape across the French border into Switzerland.

Thomas uses the theme of forbidden love between Marie Antoinette and Madame de Polignac to emphasize the emotional weakness of the queen at the dawn of the Revolution. She is portrayed by Thomas in her fictional work as she is often portrayed in biographies, with a dual nature. On the one hand, she is above all, the Queen of France. She is beautiful, privileged and haughty, commissioning new dresses to be made as the Bastille is being stormed. Marie Antoinette seems to want to ignore the Revolution, or at
least temporarily deny its reality through escapist actions. On the other hand, she is painfully aware that the start of conflict in Paris could very well lead to the downfall of the monarchy and the demise of her family and friends. She therefore must do her duty to save them and call into service those who still have pledged their unquestioning obedience to her. The manner in which she saves Madame de Polignac sums up her personality; she summons her reader who resembles her alleged lover to replace her and essentially act as a decoy to the revolutionaries.

In *Farewell, My Queen*, the reader Madame Agathe-Sidonie Laborde describes several private moments that she witnessed between Marie Antoinette and Gabrielle de Polignac. In one scene, Madame Laborde says, “They remained silent. The Queen held out her hand to her friend. And thus they held one another for a very long time, for the longest time, as though there were no crisis now, no pressure, no problem to be urgently discussed.” (Thomas 169) Later, Madame Laborde recounts another encounter between the two women years earlier during which they were wrestling on the ground in an attempt to figure out who was the stronger. As she describes, “‘You are stronger’-- how true, alas, those words were turning out to be! It was not so much Gabrielle de Polignac’s strength that was now in evidence…, as the Queen’s unbelievable weakness in dealing with her: Gabrielle’s wishes were no sooner formulated than the Queen could think of nothing but how to satisfy them.” (Thomas 173) Any inappropriate relationship between the two women is implied rather than directly described by Thomas. She leaves it up to the reader –here both literally and figuratively-to read between the lines and decide whether or not their relationship was simply friendship or if it was an amorous one. Written from the point of view of Madame Laborde, there are questions as to whether the
queen and her favorite were simply drawn together by circumstance. In any case, Thomas portrays Marie Antoinette as being enamored of Gabrielle’s countenance while Gabrielle seems to be emotionally removed. The queen is described as copying Gabrielle’s manner of speaking without realizing it, and of suffering when not in her presence. On the eve of the Revolution, the royal family makes an appearance on a balcony to a crowd of supporters after the Tennis Court Oath. Madame Laborde describes the stiffness of Marie Antoinette. She alludes to the fact that the queen is not happy with the absence of Madame de Polignac, who at this time was the governess to the Children of France and her closest ally. She writes,

“I had noticed the hard, withdrawn expression of the Queen when she had appeared on the balcony and that motion of her body when, instead of presenting her son, showing him to the public, she had sought rather to conceal him. She had kept him in front of her for barely a few minutes, then moved him so that he was at her side, and little by little the child had become partly hidden by her dress (a maneuver that had drawn spiteful remarks from those around me). Several times the Queen had turned around as though someone had been supposed to come and fetch her son—her only surviving son—and was slow in coming. Someone…the Governess of the Children of France, of course.” (Thomas 62)

This subtlety in Thomas’ text lies in direct opposition with the pamphlets, which left no detail to the imagination. In Farewell, My Queen, Thomas leaves the reader questioning to what degree Gabrielle de Polignac echoed the queen’s sentiments towards her. As described in the excerpt above, her whereabouts in certain scenes are unknown. It is never revealed where she actually spends time when away from the queen, and it is of little consequence. It is the queen and her world that are the center of both the action in the novel and the interest of the French people, who see Versailles and therefore its chief residents as the origins of all vice under the Ancien Régime.
The Queen’s almost debilitating sentiment for Gabrielle de Polignac lies in stark contrast with her willingness to evoke her position and sacrifice her servant Madame Laborde to the revolutionaries, knowing that Agathe-Sidonie has no choice but to do her duty and obey. This is precisely what the pamphleteers chose to exploit in the scandal sheets—a selfish, debauched queen who would stop at nothing to get what she wanted. Thomas did mention the lampoons, and by doing so showed the manner in which Marie Antoinette left herself open to criticism by the French people which lead to her character assassination in the press. The first mention of the scandal sheets at Versailles came the night of July 15\textsuperscript{th}, 1789 when a list was being circulated among the residents, or \textit{logeants} of the chateau. Mademoiselle Laborde uncovers the pamphlet, called \textit{The List of the 286 heads that have to fall to affect the necessary Reforms}. On the top of the list is the name of the Queen. Later in the novel, as Madame Laborde is preparing to escape France with Gabrielle de Polignac and her entourage, she overhears the Count de Rondon’s valet reading a pamphlet aloud. The pamphlet is entitled \textit{Horoscope Set at Naught} and echoes the reputation that Marie Antoinette had for being sexually depraved that was so common at the outbreak of the Revolution.

“O lady, ‘twas in vain that I once courted you,
And told you of my love, and spoke as lovers do.
My prick was hard for you, though this I durst not tell,
And thought by subtle means to let you know full well.
Alas, my feeble cries, you, lady, chose to spurn;
My incense and my heart alike you left to burn.
But time has wrought its change; a maid you are no more,
Yet fresh and fit for love, and lovely as before.” (Thomas 216)
Despite the queen’s reputation outside of Versailles, Agathe-Sidonie Laborde has sworn allegiance to her and even after ten years of service is still awestricken in her presence. She is used as a tool by Thomas through whom the reader can be completely taken in to the intimate world of Marie Antoinette. We are Agathe-Sidonie, voyeurs in our own right, being surrounded by the scent of the queen’s hair pomade and the sight of her, bored, in her day bed looking over samples of clothing. Agathe-Sidonie’s insignificance becomes significant in that it enables us to use her as a window into Marie Antoinette’s private existence.

Madame Laborde’s character acts as a fly on the wall. She is in such a lowly position at court that she is often overlooked or forgotten by the queen, even when they are in the same room. Her almost ghost-like persona allows Madame Laborde to act as an eyewitness to private moments and secretly record them, as it were, for posterity. The speculation of the outside world concerning Marie Antoinette’s private life is contrasted by Thomas to the observations of those who were in closest physical proximity to her. She is careful to portray Marie Antoinette in a gracious light. Madame Laborde herself falls under the spell of the queen, whom she describes as kind and evoking a sentiment of love around her, despite her obvious lack of patience or interest in intellectual pursuits. Although flawed, the queen of France is not shown to be cruel in any way with her servants. She is especially likeable when in her own household at the Petit Trianon, far from the stresses of court life. Thomas writes:

“What Monsieur de Montdragon had told me was true: the characteristic aura you encountered, on coming into the Queen’s presence, indeed, as soon as you stepped into the atmosphere of her Household, was one of gentle kindness. And to anyone who was also familiar with the Households of Monsieur the Count de Provence, or that of Madame, the Count’s wife, or those of the King’s other...
brother, the Count d’Artois or his wife, the difference was quite remarkable. At home in her own place, the Queen avoided giving orders. She would suggest, mention, ask for each thing as a favor that someone might care to do for her and for which she would be ever so grateful. She was absolutely polite to the humblest of her servants and never evinced the slightest impatience or brusqueness in her dealings with them. She was maternal and deliberately playful with her page boys, and she addressed her female attendants in accents not just of friendship but of mutual understanding. Was it an appeal for closer affection? Did the Queen forget who she was? By no means; nor, moreover, did anyone have illusions on that score, but the atmosphere I have described was the affective, affectionate harmony in which she desired to live. The gentleness that distinguished her gestures, her tone of voice, and her dealings with other people was an extension of the tremendous elegance marking everything that came into her orbit—clothing, furniture, décor. Entering Versailles, I had thought I was entering the kingdom of Beauty. My introduction to those domains where the Queen ruled taught me that the beauty I so admired could assume a more personal, subtle, delicate hue.” (Thomas 24-25)

Thomas also mentions the queen’s hair, which she describes as “soft and very fair, her hair spread cloudlike over the pillow, while at the same time a powerful smell of jasmine filled the room…. I sat, motionless, enthralled…I could not make up my mind to leave.” (Thomas 31) And further on, Thomas writes, “At last I contrived to come away, but before I withdrew, I looked at her one last time; she was passionately examining those bits of fabric. At the moment she was fifteen years old, the age she was when she first arrived in France. Fifteen…at most.” (Thomas 31)

Thomas’ descriptions of Marie Antoinette in these passages serve to paint the queen in a personal, yet positive light, the exact opposite of what the pamphleteers sought to do. Thomas seems to be giving us another perspective on what Marie Antoinette was. In her book *The Wicked Queen: The Origin of the Myth of Marie Antoinette*, Thomas addresses several aspects of Marie Antoinette’s personality and physical appearance that were vilified by the tabloid press. Here she seems to take some of the same traits, such as
her clothing and her hair, and one by one associates them with a softer description of the queen. Thomas allows us, through Agathe-Sidonie Laborde’s senses, to be present in Marie Antoinette’s most private, unguarded moments in order that we may see the “true” queen. Instead of condemning what she did in private as being lewd, Thomas brings the queen’s image to a level that is almost relatable to the average person. We, through Agathe-Sidonie can almost reach out and touch her.

The evolution of the pamphlets from scandal sheets to pornographic texts was based on both real-life and fictional relationships that were perverted by the press to create a skewed vision of Marie Antoinette. The pamphlets often included lewd illustrations of the queen to accompany the pornographic text. According to Simon Schama in Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution, during the revolutionary period in France literacy rates were relatively high. It was therefore highly effective to spread propaganda through the use of the written word in addition to the visual. There are countless examples of tribade, or lesbian imagery, such as in Vie privée, libertine, et scandaleuse de Marie Antoinette d’Autriche (1793), where the queen is pictured engaging in lewd acts with the princess de Guémenée, another of her ladies-in-waiting. In another pamphlet dated 1789 and called The Austrian Woman on the Rampage, or the Royal Orgy (L’Autrichienne en gougettes, ou l’orgie royale), the queen is shown having sex with her brother-in-law the Comte d’Artois and Mme de Polignac on the king’s back as he sleeps. During the trist, the Queen exclaims, “The Poor old Monarch! I’m sure that if he woke up right now, I could make him believe he’s seeing things. It’s so easy to get him to believe anything I like.” The scene ends with the following quatrain: On a human Monarch’s back/I see the Mother of Vice/Plunged in
fearful pleasures twice/A whorish queen, a princely hack /A lout of a Prince and a prostitute Queen. (Thomas 213) The publishers of these scandal sheets sought to collectively take the members of First and Second Estates to trial in the public forum in order to sow the seeds of discontent which prompted the Revolution and continued to fuel to the fire once ignited. Inflammatory language together with pornographic images allowed pamphleteers to reach a wide audience.

The pamphlets did not end immediately with the execution of the queen, but rather were published in abundance in the years following her death during the Republic, when she was depicted as a resident of the underworld whose death was not just warranted but over which the people rejoiced. In 1793 appeared the title Descente de la Du Barry aux Enfers, Sa réception à la cour de Pluton par la femme Capet, devenue la furie favorite de Proserpine. Caquetage entre ces deux catins. Even after her trial and execution, those creating slanderous literature about the former Queen of France continued to defame her reputation by describing her as possessing an insatiable sexual appetite for both men and women. In this pamphlet, the Countess Du Barry is descending into hell to meet up with Marie Antoinette, who is there to welcome her into her world of eternal damnation. This particular title encompasses many different aspects of the slander leveled against the queen; her general wickedness, lesbian tendencies, and association with other once-powerful yet hated women of the Court. There is also an association of Marie Antoinette with prostitutes alleged here by her reception of Madame Du Barry, a former courtesan despised by the queen who literally sold herself for many years before arriving at Versailles and figuratively had to sell herself in order to be officially recognized and vie for a respectful position at court. This is another example of how
Marie Antoinette came to symbolize the aristocracy in general and in particular the debauchery associated with them. In the eyes of the revolutionaries, Marie Antoinette and Madame Du Barry were interchangeable in the fact that they were both considered to be self-serving, amoral women. The fact that the queen of France was put on the same level as a woman she had always considered to be nothing more than a common whore was a low blow to the sacred image of the female monarch.

The vilification of Madame Du Barry is taken on by Dumas in his Marie Antoinette series, particularly in the two volumes *Memoirs of a Physician* and *Joseph Balsamo*. The power struggle between Madame Du Barry and Marie Antoinette was well known. Madame Du Barry is shown by Dumas as being an enemy of Choiseul and therefore of the dauphiness, who favored his policies. She was the king’s favorite, yet being a commoner she was denied the privileges afforded those who had been formally introduced at court. Her desperation to be introduced before the new dauphine’s arrival at Versailles is illustrated by Dumas. Like many of the King’s mistresses who preceded her, Madame Du Barry was the victim of lampoonists long before Marie Antoinette became their target. Several different pamphlets were circulated against Madame Du Barry in 1768 under the song title “La Bourbonnaise”. An excerpt from one shows the common themes of debauchery associated with women in the court.

Quelle merveille!
Une fille de rien;
Une fille de rien,
Quelle merveille!
Donne au Roi de l’amour,
Est à la cour!

Elle est gentille,
Elle a les yeux fripons;
Elle a les yeux fripons,
Elle est gentille;
Elle excite avec art
Un vieux paillard.

En maison bonne
Elle a pris des leçons ;
Elle a pris des leçons
En maison bonne,
Chez Gourdan, chez Brisson ;
Elle en sait long.

Que de postures !
Elle a lu l’Aretin ;
Elle a lu l’Aretin ;
Que de postures !
Elle sait en tout sens,
Prendre les sens.

Le Roi s’écrie :
L’Ange, le beau talent !
L’Ange, le beau talent !
Le Roi s’écrie ;
Encore aurais-je cru,
Faire un cocu.

Viens sur mon trône,
Je veux te couronner,
Je veux te couronner,
Viens sur mon trône :
Pour sceptre prends mon V…{Vit}
Il vit, il vit ! (Darnton 365-66)

In 1793 and 1794, an abundance of pamphlets came out both within France and abroad. Those with their origins in Paris were generally libelous in nature, while outside of France, in such places as Amsterdam and Brussels, pro-monarchal publications started to appear. Two examples of pamphlets that defended Marie Antoinette were called *Hymne des Honnêtes-Gens ou Hymne Anti-Marseillais*, and *Le Martyre de Marie-Antoinette d’Autriche, Reine de France: Tragédie en Cinq Actes*. Both were published in 1794. An excerpt from the twenty-one page *Hymne des Honnêtes-Gens ou Hymne Anti-Marseillais* is as follows:

Antoinette nous est ravie!
L’arrêt de sang est consommé ;
Contre ce trait de barbarie
Quand l’univers est courroucé, (Bis)
Guerriers, du sein de l’Allemagne,
Mugissez d’horreur et d’effroi,
Sur les bourreaux d’un si bon Roi,
Sur ceux de sa tendre Compagne !
Aux armes, fiers Germains, vengez-vous, vengez-nous ;
Marchez, frappez,
Que ces tyrans expirent sous vos coups.
Marchez (oui ça va) frappez (oui ça va)
Que ces tyrans expirent sous vos coups.
(Humbelt 1)

At approximately the same time period, Marie Antoinette’s cause had been taken up by Mme de Staël in her famous Réflexions sur le procès de la reine, which appeared in August 1793. Published anonymously (par une femme), Mme de Staël called upon the people to have pity on Marie Antoinette and her position as a mother. The pamphlets had done a good job of slandering the queen’s reputation and influencing the public to believe that she was sexually depraved. During her trial those charging the queen of treason went so far as to accuse her of being incestuous with the dauphin. Mme de Staël saw the injustice in Marie Antoinette’s trial and attempted to repair her damaged reputation. Her impassioned plea in the form of prose begged the French people, in particular the mothers to pity their queen while simultaneously criticizing the direction that the Revolution was taking. In what can be considered an “anti-pamphlet”, she wrote of the hypocritical nature of the slander incurred by the queen not so long after her enthusiastic reception as dauphine:

“La calomnie s’est attachée à poursuivre la reine, même avant cette époque ou l’esprit de parti a fait disparaître la vérité de la terre. Une triste et simple raison en est la cause, c’est qu’elle était la plus heureuse des femmes. Marie Antoinette la plus heureuse ! hêlas ! tel fut son sort, et le destin de l’homme est maintenant si déplorable, que le spectacle d’une éclatante prospérité n’est plus guère qu’un présage funeste. Combien de fois n’ai-je pas entendu raconter l’arrivée en France de la fille de Marie-Thérèse, jeune, belle, réunissant à la fois la grâce et la dignité,
telle que dans ce temps on se serait imaginé la reine des Français ! imposante et douce, elle pouvait se permettre tout ce que sa bonté lui inspirait, sans jamais rien faire perdre à la majesté du rang qu’on exigeait d’elle alors de respecter. L’ivresse des Français en la voyant fut inexprimable ; le peuple la reçut, non seulement comme une reine adorée, mais il semblait aussi qu’il lui savait gré d’être charmante, et que ses attraits enchanteurs agissaient sur la multitude comme sur la cour que l’environnait. Il n’y a pas cinq ans encore, et alors toute sa vie politique, tout ce qui lui a mérité l’amour ou la haine avait eu lieu, il n’y a pas cinq ans, et j’ai vu tout Paris se précipiter sur ses pas avec transport : ces mêmes routes qu’on lui fait parcourir de supplice en supplice étaient jonchées de fleurs sur son passage ; elle doit reconnaître les mêmes traits qui l’ont accueillie, les mêmes voix que s’enlevaient au ciel en l’implorant pour elle. Et depuis ce temps qu’est-il arrivé ? Son courage et son malheur. Cet enthousiasme dont le souvenir ajoute à l’amertume de sa destiné, cet enthousiasme dont le souvenir aussi doit inquiéter les Français et les rendre douteux de leurs nouveaux jugements, on le récuse aujourd’hui comme une erreur ; mais il est pourtant vrai que personne ne diffère autant qu’elle de la réputation que ses ennemis on tente de lui donner ; on n’a pas même cherché la vraisemblance dans le mensonge, tant on a compté sur l’envie que sait si bien répondre à l’affreuse attente des calomniateurs.” (Mme de Staël 21-23)

Mme de Staël was clearly reproachful of the use of the queen as a scapegoat in order to further the professed republican ideals and also gave insight into the misogynistic side of the Revolution. Mme de Staël became the champion for Marie Antoinette’s cause. She idealized her gentle nature and physical beauty. Putting her ideas into print paved the way for authors such as Dumas to resurrect the image of the queen once ample time had passed after her death and the political climate in France had changed sufficiently to support such thought. Reading Dumas, one can see the influence of Mme de Staël’s opinions in his portrayal of the Marie Antoinette.

With the end of the Revolution and beginning of the Restoration, an eventual change in the depiction of Marie Antoinette came about. For the first time, she was not so much openly hated as pitied for her suffering at the hands of the revolutionaries. Beginning in 1815, authors began to show a different side of the infamous queen. The
idea that Marie Antoinette was actually martyred was a new concept during this time period which had its origins in European countries neighboring France. The publishing of Marie Antoinette’s trial in 1816 opened the door for a new, more sentimental depiction of her.

The evolution of the literary device from the low pamphlet to the more dignified genre of the high novel proved to be a perfect form in which to tell the story of the ill-fated monarch. In the early 1830s Alexandre Dumas began to construct what was to become a seven-part series entitled *The Marie Antoinette Romances*. The first book that he wrote, called *The Knight of Maison Rouge*, was originally intended to be a solo project, but it eventually became the last book in the series, with the other books serving to outline the story of Marie Antoinette’s life from her arrival in France as a naïve young dauphine of fourteen to her execution at the guillotine two weeks shy of her thirty-eighth birthday. It is in this book that Dumas shows the maternal and more vulnerable side of Marie Antoinette for the first time. She is desperate to escape from prison and the fate that she knows awaits her. In *The Knight of Maison Rouge*, Dumas develops the character of Maurice Lindey, an officer of the Republican army who falls in love with a sympathizer of the monarchy and who eventually gets embroiled in a plot to save Marie Antoinette from execution in 1793. He employs melodramatic elements such as masks and mistaken identity as well as physical and moral struggle to create the backdrop for the plot to rescue the queen. Dumas describes Maurice Lindey as having “éducation républicaine fortifiée par l’assiduité aux clubs et la lecture de tous les pamphlets de l’époque” (Dumas, 1279-80) “republican education supplemented by fervent participation in the clubs and a heady dose of all the pamphlets of the times.” (Dumas 35)
Certainly if an unlikely protagonist cast in the role of a Republican officer can change his mind and die for the cause of the monarchy, then the reader should be able to be convinced to be sympathetic to her plight as well.

In *The Queen’s Necklace*, the second book in Dumas’ series, the issue of the pamphlets is addressed. In one scene, Marie Antoinette is reluctantly given permission by the king to attend a presentation by M. Mesmer in Paris accompanied by the Princess de Lamballe as a reward for rejecting the necklace he offered to her in favor of spending the money on a ship. Two days after the first meeting of Madame de la Motte and the Cardinal de Rohan, the countess ventures out to a presentation at M. Mesmer’s residence. She has been to Versailles but failed to find the two women that visited her in disguise, but who she suspects were the queen and another member of the court. She is hoping to find them amongst the crowd, since much of the aristocratic society is present. Many of the women are wearing masks, since they are going to a ball later on. One of the women being mesmerized bears a striking resemblance to the queen, and rumors begin to circulate that it is she. Madame de la Motte has realized that a box left at her house by the two anonymous visitors belonged to Marie Antoinette. When the real queen and the Princesse de Lamballe arrive at the party, Mme de la Motte intercepts them at the door after recognizing them and understanding their true identities. She goes to warn them that they should leave in order to avoid being recognized by the already suspicious crowd. She tells the queen that she has the box that she left at her house, and that she will bring it to her if she grants her and audience at Versailles. The queen agrees, and she and Mme de Lamballe leave before they are found out.
In the meantime, a pamphleteer named M. Reteau wants to write a story about the woman that he believes to be Marie Antoinette and circulate it in order to undermine the monarchy. He cannot criticize the monarchs outright, as the punishment is to be thrown into the Bastille. A friend of his proposes a story of Prince Silou and Princess Etteniotna, Queen of Narfec, entitled “The Paroxysms of the Princess Etteniota at the house of the Fakeer Remsem”. He orders two thousand copies to be circulated.

Through the characters of Olivier de Charny and Philippe de Taverney, Dumas seeks revenge on M. Reteau, and by doing so shows an attempt to posthumously protect the image of the Queen. In a scene from The Queen’s Necklace, the two gentlemen hear of the pamphlets ordered by Cagliostro and printed by Reteau. Unbeknownst to one another, they simultaneously descend on Reteau’s house, where they join forces, give him a beating, and confiscate all of the pamphlets. Both men are in love with Marie Antoinette and are seeking to avenge her reputation. After chasing Reteau into his home, Olivier defends the Queen’s honor: “Ah! tu es gentilhomme,” dit-il en se retournant du cote de Reteau, “tu es gentilhomme et tu écris sur la reine de France de pareilles infamies!...Eh bien! ramasse cette épée et prouve que tu es gentilhomme.” (Dumas 265) “Now”, said Charny, throwing down his sword at the feet of Reteau, “you call yourself a gentleman, and you write such infamies against the Queen of France; pick up that sword, and let us see what kind of a gentleman you are.” (Dumas 209) It can be ascertained that Dumas was showing both sides of the story given the comfortable distance between the publishing of his series and the end of the Revolution. Throughout the series, he shows a balanced version of Marie Antoinette—that of a queen who knows the duty associated with her position and of a woman with faults and weakness for the men in her life. While he
hinted that Marie Antoinette had lovers, never in *The Marie Antoinette Romances* did Dumas substantiate any of the ruinous insinuations of the revolutionary pamphlets. He instead showed them for what they were—a propaganda tool used by the republicans to ally peoples’ thoughts in opposition to the *Ancien Régime*, and in particular to the Queen of France. Lewd behavior was not a part of the historical romance created by Dumas. On the contrary, Marie Antoinette is depicted as having could be considered a normal attraction to Olivier de Charny, who she treats as her one true love throughout the novels. Her weakness for him leads her to questionable behavior at times, but nothing that could be considered evil. Most importantly, Dumas portrays Marie Antoinette as being worthy of defense through his chevaliers willing to defend her honor.

The scapegoating of Marie Antoinette in the pamphlets that was used to call into question the legitimacy of the monarchy was shown by Dumas to be an inaccurate portrayal of her character. It is interesting to note that the political situation in France during which time Dumas constructed his version of the French Revolution was one in which a liberal constitutional monarchy was in power. During the July Monarchy (1830-1848), while Dumas’ former employer Louis-Philippe ruled under the title King of the French, he wrote a more humanistic version of the former queen that opposed her former portrayal in the pamphlet literature. Through his varied characters in *The Marie Antoinette Romances*, Dumas represented many facets of revolutionary philosophy, from the moderate to the radical, and gave an intimate view into the thought processes of not only those trying to bring about the Revolution, but also of those who were desperate to avoid it.
Before Dumas, Marie Antoinette had never been shown in popular literature as being anything but completely flawed and beyond reproach. The Diamond Necklace Affair affected public opinion of the queen and damaged her reputation beyond repair. Once Marie Antoinette had been associated with the prostitute who had imitated her, their images would become forever entwined. This allowed the pamphleteers to begin a relentless campaign to calumniate the queen that would ultimately prove her—and the monarchy’s—undoing. And while Dumas did show Marie Antoinette as being worthy of pity, especially toward the end of her life, he also showed the legitimacy of some of the secondary characters who believed in the revolutionary cause. It is not clear as to whether or not Dumas had a particular political motivation when constructing his portrayal of Marie Antoinette. Dumas himself was often criticized for his mass production of literature. It was true that besides possessing the motivation to represent the history of France through the genre of the historical drama, Dumas was also highly desirous of selling great quantities of books to support his lavish lifestyle. His use of melodramatic elements often helped him to portray larger than life characters that often possessed similar characteristics to his heroic father. This heroism was not usually present in Dumas’ female characters, however. The flaws of Marie Antoinette that were emphasized in the pamphlets translated to several of the women in The Marie Antoinette Romances and painted a misogynistic view of some of the female characters in the series. Through her public slander in the pamphlets, the image of the female role model and mother figure that Marie Antoinette was supposed to represent to the French people was desacralized. This opened the door for an open and widely accepted criticism of the legitimacy of the monarchy itself.
Notes—Chapter 1

1 Cagliostro was a well-known charlatan of the revolutionary period of Italian origin. In The Last Alchemist, Iain McCalman refers to Cagliostro as “the greatest enchanter of the eighteenth century…magician, alchemist, healer and Freemason”. (1)

2 Pamphleers were generally men who produced pejorative literature for a profit. In the PBS film entitled Marie Antoinette and the French Revolution, the pamphleteers were defined in the following way: “Hired by powerful leaders of court factions, the pamphleteers themselves were often down-and-out writers who cared less about politics and more about earning a fast buck. The printers and sellers of pamphlets operated outside the law and had no qualms about spreading the most salacious rumors, often accompanied by lewd, pornographic pictures. The French public, like the printers, pamphleteers, and those who paid them, had a seemingly unlimited amount of ire for Marie Antoinette, who became symbolic of all of France’s ills.” The definition of pamphlet literature given in The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French states: “The most famous pamphlets have tended to be polemical…Most of the pamphlets of the 18th c. had been, even when violent in tone, bound by the constraints of literary language. The later years of the century, however, saw the increasingly massive production of scurrilous libelles, generally directed against the alleged corruption and immorality of those in power, and this style of pamphleteering continued to flourish under the Revolution.” (594)

3 In La Reine Margot, Dumas describes Catherine de Medici as being instrumental in influencing the plot to assassinate the Huguenots. Other characters fear her and tremble in her presence. She is portrayed as a woman to fear, who has ulterior motives and will stop at nothing to achieve her ends. In contrast, Marie Antoinette is portrayed by Dumas as being a headstrong, opinionated woman, but never as one with diabolical motives.

4 The Oxford Dictionary defines lèse-majesté as “the insulting of a monarch or other ruler; treason.”

5 According to Simon Schama, “From studying signatures of old wills Daniel Roche has discovered astonishing figures for adult literacy in the capital at the end of the old regime. In Montmartre, for example, where 40 percent of the testators belonged to the artisan and or salaried classes, 74 percent of men and 64 percent of women could sign their names. In the Rue St.-Honoré—a fashionable street, but one where a third of the residents belonged to the common people—literacy rates stood at 93 percent. In the artisanal rue Saint-Denis, 86 percent of men and 73 percent of women made out and signed their own contracts of marriage…In other words, literacy rates in late-eighteenth century France were much higher than in the late twentieth-century United States.” (180)
Chapter 2 - (Secondary) Women in Dumas and the Role of Melodrama

In *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Peter Brooks lists several elements as being essential to melodrama and adds that they are present in “the dramaturgy of Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas.” Among these details are “masked and mistaken identities; lost and refound parents and children, the operation of the *voix du sang*; dramatic and spectacular apparitions; physical struggle and combat; conversion and redemption; bloody villains and innocent victims; rhetorical antitheses and a pervasive moral polarization of the universe.” (Brooks 91) Dumas cleverly uses his female characters to illustrate many of these criteria, especially when they are compared to one another and/or pitted in direct opposition to their male counterparts. In dissecting the many women in the series, one can see Dumas’ satirical view of the eighteenth century revolutionary society and its underlying themes.

Melodrama became popular at the beginning of the nineteenth century, coinciding with the end of the Revolution continuing through the Restoration period. In particular, the use of melodrama served to allow Dumas the possibility to show the betrayal of the Nation during the Restoration through the portrayal of Marie Antoinette and certain other female characters in contrast to the republican ideals assigned to the male characters. The image of the bad mother represented by Marie Antoinette and promoted in the revolutionary pamphlets was in direct opposition to the Republican ideals of women staying home to produce children. In *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, Lynn Hunt outlines the phenomena of the body politic as follows:

“It has long been known that Marie-Antoinette was the subject of a substantial erotic and pornographic literature in the last decades of the Old Regime and
during the Revolution itself. Royal figures have often been the subject of such writing, but not all royal figures at all times. When royalty’s physical bodies become the focus of such interest, we can be sure that something is at issue with the body politic. As Robert Darnton has shown, for example, the sexual sensationalism of the Old Regime pamphlets was a choice means of attacking the entire establishment—the court, the church, the aristocracy, the academies, the salons, and the monarchy itself.” (Hunt 91)

As previously mentioned, Dumas shows the pamphleteers and their quest to undermine the monarchy through the scapegoating of Marie Antoinette. During the Restoration period, the legitimacy of the monarchy was again called into question. In addition, the place of citizen in the new French Nation was still being established. Dumas used the women in his series to show different sides of the Revolution. In *The Marie Antoinette Romances*, the female characters fall into one of two categories. They are either virtuous and powerless or deceptive and powerful. Marie Antoinette traditionally fell into the latter category, with Andrée de Taverney falling into the former. Dumas’ portrayals seem to echo Rousseau’s warning about women in the public sphere, where they can do more harm than good by destroying the natural order. This aspect of Rousseau’s philosophy is discussed by Hunt in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*. (Hunt 90-91) However, although Dumas’ characterization of Marie Antoinette was one in which she asserted her power, unlike the pamphleteers, he did not show her as an evil character, but rather as one with human failings not unlike other women.

Overall, women play a vital role for Dumas throughout *The Marie Antoinette Romances*. Some, like Andrée de Taverney, Lorenza Feliciani and Geneviève Dixmer are the physical embodiment of virtue and suffering, while others such as Nicole
Legay/Madame Oliva and Madame de la Motte Valois are more self-serving (and in the case of the latter rather diabolical) and put the other characters in precarious situations, such as the Diamond Necklace Affair. Dumas uses his female figures to show the contrast between Ancien Régime tradition and Enlightenment philosophy as the women come into contact with their male counterparts. It is not to be suggested that the female characters in Dumas are without faults, even when they are inherently good. Conversely, the more nefarious women are not altogether evil, but rather interested in their own self-promotion and elevating their social status. The character traits of the women in The Marie Antoinette Romances often lie in direct contrast with those of the men, creating tension and drama. Most significantly, all of the secondary women have some connection with the most important female figure in the series, Marie Antoinette herself. If, as the pamphlets suggested, Marie Antoinette served as the epitome of the ills of the aristocracy, and particularly of the aristocratic woman, then it would logically follow that most of her female counterparts in Dumas would reflect her perceived negative traits.

While some of the women do show self-centeredness, others like Geneviève lack arrogance and display devotion to a cause. In a separate category we find such women as Nicole Legay and Lorenza Feliciani who are not of aristocratic background and find themselves in bad relationships with Republican men of questionable character.

Dumas begins the first book in his series entitled Joseph Balsamo, also known as Memoirs of a Physician, by introducing Jean-Jacques Rousseau to the reader via a passage in which he is gathering plants. He is discovered by a young Gilbert who claims to be a disciple of his after having read Discours sur l’inégalité des conditions and Le Contrat social. Later, in passages describing Rousseau as a botanist, Dumas shows
Rousseau’s ideas on nature and the natural order. Rousseau does not identify himself in the beginning and as a stranger to Gilbert, listens carefully to the philosophical musings of the young man and tries to give him insight, incognito, into his true point of view. Rousseau himself is shown as a self-deprecating fellow, who in his older years has more clarity. Gilbert accidentally discovers Rousseau’s true identity at a later point in the book, when he finds a copy of his *Confessions* in the philosopher’s attic. This book sheds more of a human light on Rousseau’s character, and leads Gilbert to admire him even more.

Rousseau’s philosophy is like the Bible to Gilbert, who embraces and uses it as a means of overcoming his circumstances as a servant. He wishes to leave France and obtain a scientific education in America, the land that espoused the Enlightenment ideals of liberty and human rights. Gilbert’s views on natural order come from Rousseau and serve as a way for Dumas to outline the social order found in *The Marie Antoinette Romances*, particularly how it relates to the portrayal of women. As a young man, Gilbert discusses inequality with his former lover Nicole as a means of rejecting her. Rousseau essentially believed that women should stay at home and be in charge of domestic life, thus uniting the family, while leaving politics to the men. Andrée, Gilbert’s love interest, is a young aristocratic girl with a convent education whose goals reach no further than living at Versailles and becoming one of the queen’s ladies-in-waiting while remaining close to her brother Philippe, an officer in the king’s guard. Eventually, Philippe must leave her to perform his military duties outside of Paris. In Philippe’s absence, Andrée becomes closer to the queen. During this time, Gilbert is infatuated with Andrée and goes so far as to disengage himself from her family as a servant and follow her to Versailles. Andrée is disgusted by Gilbert, but to him she is the epitome of feminine virtue. Despite
his frustration with Andrée’s lack of romantic interest in him, Gilbert persists until he is finally put off by her haughty rejection and swears to avenge himself against her.

In Reading for the Plot, Peter Brooks quotes Rousseau’s own thoughts about character development. Referring to La Nouvelle Héloïse, he writes, “As Rousseau contends in the preface to La Nouvelle Heloise, a novel that in so many ways announces the nineteenth-century tradition, to understand his characters one must know them both young and old, and know them through the process of aging and change that lies in between, a process worked out over a stretch of pages.” (Brooks 21) This certainly holds true for many of the female characters in Dumas’ series, in particular Andrée and Marie Antoinette, whose personalities and self-awareness increase over the course of the novels. At the beginning of the series, Rousseau’s younger self is represented by Dumas through Gilbert, who espouses his philosophies without questioning them. In several scenes with Rousseau, Gilbert comes to discover that the philosopher himself has changed and matured in his thinking over a lifetime.

Gilbert’s story is woven into the readers’ first glimpse of Marie Antoinette as he follows Andrée to Versailles. It is 1770 and the dauphine is at the Petit Trianon as a young girl discussing her plan to rearrange the original garden with Louis XV while her husband, the dauphin, is surveying the stars with a telescope. One cannot help but wonder if Dumas is making a statement about Marie Antoinette’s future ability to interfere with the natural order of the monarchy, while Louis XVI sits idly by. In future volumes, as the Revolution develops, Dumas portrays Louis as a well-meaning, yet weak king who tries to avoid catastrophe, but is ultimately ineffective. This scene is also a first glimpse into
the relationship of the royal couple, who at this early point of their relationship was yet to consummate their marriage.

As the series progresses, Dumas begins to introduce Marie Antoinette’s long line of male suitors, although he does not directly address the alleged true to life relationship of Marie Antoinette and the Swedish Count Axel von Fersen. Instead, he chooses to invent other male characters to catch her interest and underscore her feminine weakness and lack of romance with the king. In *The Queen’s Necklace*, for example, Dumas creates a love triangle between Marie Antoinette, Olivier de Charny and Andrée de Taverney. Andrée marries Olivier, but he is the main love interest of the queen, which wreaks havoc on her marriage and causes an uncomfortable rivalry with Marie Antoinette. To complicate matters, Andrée’s brother Philippe falls in love with the queen and is rejected by her. This does not dissuade Philippe from being loyal to Marie Antoinette, however. In *The Knight of Maison-Rouge*, the final book chronologically in Dumas’ series, it is revealed that Philippe, who has been disguising himself as the famous Knight, is the one who has vowed to protect the doomed monarch until the bitter end.

Dumas does however show a non-romantic rapport between Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI that indicates a respect on Marie Antoinette’s side if not for the man/husband, then at the very least for appearances sake at court. They often disagree, but while Marie Antoinette is shown as a passionate, haughty and stubborn woman, Louis XVI is portrayed as a man who knows his position and lives by the rules of the court. Marie Antoinette is shown as a deceptive woman who sneaks out at night, and when caught is able to talk her way out of it to Louis. For example, there is a scene in *The Queen’s Necklace* where Marie Antoinette and Andrée have returned late to Versailles
after an evening spent with the Comtesse de La Motte Valois. The king has ordered that no one be let in once the gates are locked. The two women do everything in their power to coerce the guard to let them in without giving themselves away, but to no avail. They are forced to spend the night outside the palace at one of the homes of the Comte d’Artois and sneak back into the palace in the morning unnoticed. The following morning, Louis gets up early to surprise Marie Antoinette by entering her bedchamber in order to prove that she was missing. Of course, the queen has outsmarted the king and is in bed sleeping when he barges in with a plausible excuse. She continually outwits the king, who is always several steps behind her. There are continual plots and intrigues on the part of the Queen under the nose of the King. He seems happy to oblige her, and she is of course, happy to be obliged. While Louis rules, Marie Antoinette plays.

Only later, with the onset of the Revolution and the subsequent immigration of the court to other countries, does Marie Antoinette finds herself suddenly abandoned by those closest to her and forced to deal with the hatred of the French people whom she has chosen to ignore and the severity of her circumstances. She is forced to behave in a manner befitting a queen and stand by her husband. As previously mentioned, Dumas did make mention of the notorious pamphlets, and showed Marie Antoinette as being too removed to care about what they represented. In reality, she did brush off the negative press, but in the end what was written could not be ignored by the Queen, as the damage had already been done.

The fallible and frivolous nature of both Marie Antoinette and the other women in the series is underscored by Dumas through his introduction of the Count Cagliostro. Cagliostro, an infamous charlatan of the time, was a leader in the science of animal
magnetism and black magic. Dumas took advantage of Cagliostro’s mystery and used him as a sort of puppeteer who directed the political and romantic action throughout the first four novels. He was also a foreigner, being of Italian origin. His point of view was that of an outsider looking in who did all within his power to serve as the impetus for the changes in the political situation in pre-revolutionary France. The fact that Dumas chose to use an outsider as the catalyst for the revolution in this series was probably not accidental. In her book entitled, Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution, Lynn Hunt describes the phenomena of “marginality” that existed at the time. In the chapter called “Outsiders, Culture Brokers, and Political Networks”, she writes, “‘Marginality’ – taken in a structural sense rather than as a term of invidious social comparison-gave the new officials an affinity for the role of culture and power brokers. Just as certain peripheral or marginal regions of the country proved more amenable to the penetration of revolutionary political culture, so too certain kinds of marginal men proved most eager to take on the role of political and cultural middlemen. Such roles were critical since the Revolution was, in essence, the multiplication and diffusion of culture and power. Immigrants, Protestants, Jews, schoolteachers, actors, and merchants had ties to the world outside the city, and in particular to national networks of culture, knowledge, commerce, or religion.” (Hunt 188-9)

In The Marie Antoinette Romances, Cagliostro was a natural choice for the prime source of discord in the series as an immigrant and one knowledgeable in the dark arts. Dumas also incorporated Cagliostro’s real-life association with freemasonry into his character in order to give him an even more mystical image.
In fact, Dumas begins *Joseph Balsamo*, the first book in *The Marie Antoinette Romances*, with a mysterious ceremony atop a mountain in eastern France. The Great Copt, one of Cagliostro’s many aliases, arrives under cover of darkness to greet a group of Freemasons twenty years before the outbreak of the French Revolution. In a ritual reminiscent of hazing, he is surrounded by his brothers, blindfolded and taken up the mountain to a castle where the assembly is awaiting his arrival. He prophesizes of the imminent arrival of Marie Antoinette and predicts that she and Louis XVI will bring about an end to the monarchy. Addressing the assembly, the Great Copt says,

“Si vous lisez dans les physionomies, très illustre frère”, dit-il, “moi je lis dans l’avenir. Marie-Antoinette est fière; elle s’entêtera dans la lutte et périra sous nos attaques. Le dauphin Louis-Auguste est bon et clément; il faiblira dans la lutte et périra comme sa femme et avec sa femme ; seulement, ils périront chacun par la vertu ou le défaut contraire. Ils s’estiment en ce moment, nous ne leur donnerons pas le temps de s’aimer, et dans un an ils se mépriseront….Demain je me mets à l’œuvre, et avec votre concours je vous demande vingt ans pour accomplir notre œuvre ; vingt ans suffiront si nous marchons unis et forts vers un même but.”

(Dumas 58)

“If you read physiognomy, illustrious brethren, I read the future. Marie Antoinette is proud; she will interfere in the coming struggle, and will perish in it. Louis Augustus is mild; he will yield to it, and will perish with her, but each will fall through opposite defects of character. Now they esteem each other, but short will be their love; in a year they will feel mutual contempt….Tomorrow I begin my work. Give me twenty years for it –that will be enough, if we are united and firm.” (Dumas xxvi)

Later in the book, Cagliostro, here under the alias of Joseph Balsamo, is introduced to the dauphine for the first time as a magician. She has just crossed the border from Austria and is being escorted by the royal cortege to Versailles. Along the way she and her party stop for a rest at Maison-Rouge, the Taverney’s country home, and Cagliostro wastes no time in revealing her fate to the future queen at her insistence. As
she sees what is in store for her, Marie Antoinette screams in terror and faints. When she revives, the sorcerer has disappeared. It is not the last time that they are destined to meet, however. In fact, Dumas inserts Cagliostro into moments when the queen is at her most vulnerable as a representation of her inability to overcome the outside circumstances surrounding the Revolution and her untimely demise. For example, he is there when she is on the road to Paris with her family at the moment that she and her family have been forced from Versailles in October 1789, and he is also there as she, the king and their entourage are returned to the Tuileries after their failed escape attempt in July 1792.

In the opening scene of the *The Queen’s Necklace*, which is set in 1784, Cagliostro is a guest at a dinner party at the home of Marshal de Richelieu. Among those invited to the dinner party are such famous people as the Countess du Barry, the King of Sweden, M. de la Perouse, M. de Favras and M. de Condorcet. During dinner, Cagliostro reveals how each person at the table will die. He correctly predicts that the Countess du Barry will die at the guillotine, that the King of Sweden will be killed by a gunshot at a ball, that M. de la Perouse will be lost at sea, that M. de Favras will be hanged, and that M. de Condorcet will be poisoned. He also claims to have found an elixir that contains the fountain of youth, thus making him capable of surviving for thousands of years. Throughout the opening scene, Cagliostro holds the dinner guests spellbound as he recounts adventures in ancient times and his knowledge of magnetism.

In *The Queen’s Necklace*, Dumas places a disguised Marie Antoinette at one of M. Mesmer’s magnetism séances. Her placement at such an event by Dumas reflects the public’s distrust of her. Dumas is continually using Cagliostro as the catalyst for bringing down the monarchy as the antagonist promises at the beginning of the first book. Her
presence is recognized by Cagliostro, who in turn bribes a pamphleteer to circulate vicious rumors about her immediately following the event. He turns to the journalist and suggests that a good subject for an article would be “Du danger qu’il y a de naître sujet d’un pays dont le roi est gouverne par la reine, laquelle reine aime les crises.” (Dumas 178) “The danger of being governed by a king who is governed by a queen who indulges in such paroxysms as these.” (Dumas 143) The queen’s vulnerability at this time in history is what eventually lead to her downfall, and can be argued as being a direct cause of the outbreak of the French Revolution. Dumas represents the slander of Marie Antoinette through the characters of Cagliostro and the pamphleteer. For these characters, Marie Antoinette herself represents all that was considered depraved in the Ancien Régime and was the victim of their hatred. However, while Marie Antoinette is shown to represent the ills of the monarchy and her perverted image is used to question the legitimacy of the monarchy, other female characters in the series serve as the personification of the virtuous female that was valued during the revolution.

Dumas employed the character of Cagliostro to cause intrigue and wreak havoc not only in Marie Antoinette’s world, but in the world of the Court, and in particular with several of the secondary women. In Memoirs of a Physician, Joseph Balsamo, The Queen’s Necklace, Ange Pitou, and The Countess de Charny, Andrée de Taverney, another major character in the Marie Antoinette romances, is also directly influenced by the diabolical Cagliostro. In Andrée’s case, however, it is his disciple Dr. Gilbert who causes her harm. Working with Cagliostro, Gilbert rapes and impregnates Andrée, whose haughty aristocratic manner and unattainable status undermines him throughout his youth. Gilbert, who has been thrown into the Bastille because of a lettre de cachet signed
by Marie Antoinette at the request of Andrée, escapes during the events of July 14th, 1789, goes to Versailles, finds Andrée at court and hypnotizes her. She goes into a state of hysteria, and eventually into a trance, during which time he tries to get her to admit that she has had his property stolen by the King’s secret police. Marie Antoinette is present at this scene, and it is a dark representation of the state of the negative influences on the Court at the beginning of the Revolution. Gilbert blackmails Marie Antoinette into influencing the King to appoint him as a court physician in order to give him direct access to his inner circle. In subsequent books, Gilbert reappears to put Andrée into a trance once more and control her mental faculties. For example, in The Countess de Charny, Gilbert confronts Andrée about the birth and disappearance of their son, Sebastien. He hypnotizes her as a means of using her almost like a crystal ball to see where the young man is in order to save him.

This same method is used repeatedly by Cagliostro against his wife Lorenza, who is arguably the most tragic female figure in Dumas’ series. Ironically, when under the influence of hypnotism, the female characters have a gift of clairvoyance that the men never achieve. It is possible that Dumas is trying to enlighten the reader as to the inability of the male characters to clearly see the outcome of their actions, namely the revolution that they are working so diligently to bring about. He could also be showing that without women, men are not complete, contrary to the revolutionary philosophy that women had no place in politics.

Of all of the female characters in The Marie Antoinette Romances, Lorenza is by far the most tragic. With the exception of her looks, every aspect of her character is marked by extreme distress or sorrow. In Joseph Balsamo, Lorenza is described by
Dumas as being, “une jeune femme de vingt-trois à vingt-quatre ans, au teint brun, mais de ce brun mat plus riche et plus beau que le ton le plus rose et le plus incarnate. Ses beaux yeux bleus levés au ciel, qu’elle semblait interroger, brillaient comme deux étoiles, et ses cheveux noirs, qu’elle gardait sans poudre malgré la mode du temps, retombaient en boucles de jais sur son cou nuance comme l’opale.” (Dumas 78) “about three or four and twenty years of age; a brunette in complexion, but of that rich brown which is more beautiful than the most delicate tint of the rose; her fine blue eyes, raised to heaven, from which she seemed to ask counsel, shone like two stars; and her black hair, which she wore without powder, notwithstanding the fashion of the day, fell in a jetty of curls on her neck.” (Dumas 14) From the moment she meets Cagliostro, she is doomed. Her dark beauty lies in stark contrast with Marie Antoinette and Andrée, who are both blonds and represent what was considered to be physically pleasing during the eighteenth century. Lorenza describes her first encounter with Cagliostro and her subsequent marriage and enslavement by him. His practice of the occult goes against all of her Christian beliefs, and she seeks asylum from his evil ways in a convent run by Princess Louise of France, daughter of Louis XV. She is like an animal in a cage who cannot escape her captor, no matter how hard she tries to resist and how clever she is. While Andrée is physically violated by Gilbert while under a trance, Lorenza is almost constantly kept hypnotized by Cagliostro so that he is able to control her thoughts and emotions under the guise of loving her. Lorenza’s character is thus split in two. She represents the division between the Ancien Régime and Revolutionary France and what each side stood for. Lorenza is a Catholic, Cagliostro is a godless sorcerer. Their relationship shows what happens when the Old Regime and the Republic collide. In a scene when Lorenza is speaking with a
servant who helps her to escape unnoticed from Cagliostro, she says, “Ne vous opposez pas à mon départ. Je fuis un homme que j’aime, mais avant toute chose je suis romaine et bonne catholique. Or, cet homme perdrait mon âme si je restais plus longtemps avec lui ; c’est un athée et un nécromancien, que Dieu vient d’avertir par la voix de son tonnerre. Puisset-il profiter de l’avertissement ! Dites-lui ce que je viens de vous dire, et soyez béní pour l’aide que vous m’avez donnée. Adieu!” (Dumas 80) “Do not oppose my flight. I leave a man whom I love; but my religion is still dearer to me. That man will destroy my soul if I stay with him longer; he is an atheist and a necromancer. God has warned him by his thunders; may he profit by the warning. Tell him what I have said, and receive my blessing for what you have done for me. Farewell!” (Dumas 16) In subsequent scenes while not under hypnosis, Lorenza is often depicted in a rant, telling Cagliostro how much she hates him. Conversely, while under his power, she tenderly caresses him and promises never to leave him.

There are several scenes which depict escape attempts by Lorenza. Although she manages to get away she is always caught by Cagliostro, once at a police station and another time while seeking asylum in a church that is governed by Princess Louise of France, who left the aristocracy and became a nun. Dumas seems to be portraying the drawn out, bloody death of the Ancien Régime through Lorenza’s character. In what can be considered the most gruesome scene in Dumas’ series, Lorenza fights with every fiber of her being to survive, but in the end she succumbs to a brutal death at the hands of Althotas while hypnotized and helpless. In The Melodramatic Imagination, Brooks mentions gothic elements as being present in melodrama, and Lorenza’s death scene is a prime example of this. He writes that the Gothic novel “stands most clearly in reaction to
desacralization and the pretentions of rationalism.” (Brooks 17) He describes melodrama as representing “both the urge toward resacralization and the impossibility of conceiving sacralization other than in personal terms. Melodramatic good and evil are highly personalized; they are assigned to, they inhabit persons who indeed have no psychological complexity but who are strongly characterized. Most notably, evil is villainy; it is a swarthy, cape-enveloped man with a deep voice. Good and evil can be named as persons are named--and melodramas tend in fact to move toward a clear nomination of the moral universe.” (Brooks 16-17)

The relationship between Cagliostro and Lorenza as portrayed by Dumas supports Brooks’ theory of clear-cut good and evil characters. They represent opposite sides of the spectrum that cannot exist together; he the enlightened revolutionary with a deep involvement in the occult, and she the traditional religious character who, because she is a woman, has little power to fit in with the changes being brought about in revolutionary society. Cagliostro’s powerful character serves as the voice in Dumas’ series that loudly questions the legitimacy of the monarchy and the Ancien Régime. Lorenza’s death seems unavoidable, as she has no place in a world that does not guarantee her freedom. The vision of the villain in the dark cloak mentioned by Brooks fits perfectly with Dumas’ portrayal of Cagliostro. From the first scene in the series, the count is wrapped in mystery (literally in a dark cloak), riding a black stallion up a mountain at night in a storm. His powerful, mystical persona drives the action throughout the entire series, the exception being The Knight of Maison-Rouge.

Dumas thus creates a world of women in which Marie Antoinette is at the top of the pyramid, followed by Andrée de Taverney and Cagliostro’s wife Lorenza Feliciani -
who are pitted in direct opposition to men who try to take revenge on them. The women in Dumas seem to be the personification of the Ancien Régime, which is powerless to withstand the revolutionary forces seeking to destroy it. As far as the male characters are concerned, Cagliostro represents the revolutionary ideals that seek to undermine the monarchy. Cagliostro himself kept company with many characters who became major players in the Revolution. His identity as a sorcerer is underscored by the power he exerts over his fellow freemasons. Dumas portrays the freemasons as being responsible for setting off the Revolution, secretly meeting in basements to plot against and overthrow the monarchy. The entire series opens with the reader being introduced to Cagliostro, but he is not named. The esoteric nature of his character is emphasized by Dumas by presenting him on a dark mountain in a storm, climbing blindly to the top to meet with his followers. He is often described in a dark cloak, dressed as a foreigner/Italian. His interest in overthrowing the status quo in France spreads to all parts of Europe, with representatives from many other European nations present and ready to contribute money to fund the Revolution.

One way in which Dumas showed Marie Antoinette as a symbol of the failings of the Ancien Régime was her appearance in Paris at a mesmerist séance in The Queen’s Necklace. The interest on the part of Marie Antoinette in the occult is an example of the way in which Dumas was portraying the queen as representing the perceived depravity of the monarchy which began to stir revolutionary sentiment at the end of the Ancien Régime. Her main interest throughout Dumas’ series is shown to be concentrated with her personal life at court rather than with the best interests of the French people. It is apparent that Dumas, through fictional situations was underscoring the degree to which Marie
Antoinette was out of touch with the reality of her position as an unpopular queen. She is believed to be identified participating in an occult science which has roots in the same movement that is seeking to overthrow the monarchy. The irony of putting Marie Antoinette in such a situation is similar to the irony of her taking part in theatrical productions such as *Le Mariage de Figaro*, which had underlying revolutionary themes. She was shown, along with other members of the court, to be out in public amongst people who ultimately became her enemies. By leaving Versailles, Marie Antoinette compromises herself and her reputation. In the following passage from *The Queen’s Necklace*, Dumas describes a woman under the influence of magnetism who is mistaken for Marie Antoinette. As Dumas writes,

“Au moment ou s’accomplissait cette opération, devenue intéressante surtout par le paroxysme de béatitude furieuse auquel s’abandonnait la jeune convulsionnaire, madame de LaMotte, qui s’était avancée avec les curieux jusqu’à cette nouvelle salle destinée aux malades, entendit un homme s’écrier :

“Mais, c’est elle, c’est bien elle.”

Madame de La Motte se préparait à demander à cet homme : “Qui, elle?”

Tout à coup deux dames entrèrent au fond de la première salle, appuyées l’une sur l’autre et suivies, à une certaine distance, d’un homme qui avait tout l’extérieur d’un valet de confiance, bien qu’il fut déguisé sous un habit bourgeois.

La tournure de ces deux femmes, de l’une d’elles surtout, frappa si bien la comtesse, qu’elle fit un pas vers elles.

En ce moment un grand cri, partit de la salle et échappé aux lèvres de la convulsionnaire, entraîna tout le monde de son côté.

Aussitôt l’homme qui avait déjà dit : “C’est elle!” et qui se trouvait près de madame de La Motte, s’écria d’une voix sourde et mystérieuse : “Mais, messieurs, regardez donc, c’est la reine.”

À ce mot, Jeanne tressaillit.

“La reine!” s’écrièrent à la fois plusieurs voix effrayées et surprises.

“La reine chez Mesmer!”
“La reine dans une crise!” répétèrent d’autres voix….

“Regardez,” répondit l’inconnu avec tranquillité ; “connaissez-vous la reine, oui ou non?”

“En effet,” murmûrèrent la plupart des assistants, “la ressemblance est incroyable.”

“Monsieur” demanda-t-elle à l’homme aux exclamations, lequel était un coups volumineux, un visage plein et colore avec des yeux étincelants et singulièrement observateurs, “ne dites-vous pas que la reine est ici?”

“Oh! madame, c’est a n’en pas douter,” répondit celui-ci.

“Et où cela?”

“Mais cette jeune femme que vous apercevez là-bas sur des coussins violets, dans une crise si ardente qu’elle ne peut modérer ses transports, c’est la reine.”

“Mais sur quoi fondez-vous votre idée, monsieur, que la reine est cette femme?”

“Mais tout simplement sur ceci, madame, que cette femme est la reine,” répliqua imperturbablement le personnage accusateur. Et il quitta son interlocutrice pour aller appuyer et propager la nouvelle dans les groupes.” (Dumas 175-6)

“While this was going on Madame de la Motte heard a man who had approached near to the young lady before-mentioned, and who was in a perfect paroxysm of excitement, say in a loud voice, “It is surely she!” Jeanne was about to ask him who she was, when her attention was drawn to two ladies who were just entering, followed by a man, who, though disguised as a bourgeois, had still the appearance of a servant.

The tournure of one of these ladies struck Jeanne so forcibly that she made a step towards them, when a cry from the young woman near her startled everyone. The same man whom Jeanne had heard speak before now called out, “But look, gentlemen, it is the queen.”

“The queen!” cried many voices, in surprise. “The queen here! The queen in that state! Impossible!”

“But look,” said he again; “do you know the queen, or not?”

“Indeed,” said many, “the resemblance is incredible.”

“Monsieur,” said Jeanne to the speaker, who was a stout man, with quick observant eyes, “did you say the queen?”

“Oh! madame, there is no doubt of it.”

“And where is she?”
“Why, that young lady that you see there, on the violet cushions, and in such a state that she cannot moderate her transports, is the queen.”

“But on what do you found such an idea, monsieur?”

“Simply because it is the queen.” And he left Jeanne to go and spread the news among the rest.” (Dumas 141)

The scene in The Queen’s Necklace acts as foreshadowing to Marie Antoinette’s later involvement in the Diamond Necklace Affair, in which she was accused of being involved in a scheme to clandestinely procure a necklace from the royal jewelers and falling behind in the payments. The woman for whom Marie Antoinette is mistaken in this scene is Nicole Legay, the same woman who misrepresented her in the Diamond Necklace Affair. In contrast to her portrayal in the pamphlets, Marie Antoinette was generally shown in Dumas’ series as being intelligent and aware. Nonetheless, she is also shown as being naïve in her view of her subjects, as she is genuinely shocked by the hatred towards her displayed by the general public.

Although she is haughty and privileged, Marie Antoinette is never portrayed by Dumas as being either cruel or sexually depraved. Dumas also carefully constructs the evolution of Marie Antoinette’s character, from her arrival in France as an inexperienced young dauphine, to her intrigues at court, to her eventual realization of her perceived sins and coming to terms with her death. Dumas also makes a point of showing Marie Antoinette’s suffering at the hands of her captors and the emotional torture she endures when her son is taken from her and never returned. The tension is palpable as she and her children are watched by guards and mocked mercilessly by Simon and Mme Tison. She is resigned at the end of the series to face her fate and is determined not to let anyone else suffer on her account. Dumas gives Marie Antoinette a more human face so that the
reader can relate to her on a basic emotional level. He reiterates both the vulnerability of her position as a queen and her humanity as a mother to young children during the height of the Terror that Mme de Staël wrote about in 1793 in her Réflexions sur le procès de la reine.

In The Melodramatic Imagination, Peter Brooks suggests a definitive connection between the drama, both physical and psychological of the nineteenth century novel and the silent film. Looking backward from the necessity in silent movies to use the body in overly dramatic ways to compensate for the lack of sound, especially in D.W. Griffith’s work, Brooks links the novel as a means of expressing in a melodramatic form the struggle between good and evil. In Dumas, this struggle is seen throughout the Marie Antoinette romances, and particularly through the portrayal of his female characters. Brooks describes a scene in Griffith’s silent film entitled Les deux orphelines which takes place during the Revolution at the height of The Terror. In the scene, one of the main characters, Henriette, is being taken to her execution at the scaffold and sees her sister Louise for the last time:

“As she leans from the tumbrel for a last embrace from Louise, and their lips meet and are held long together, Henriette’s body appears to be in an almost impossible position, tilted from the cart, rigid, already near inanimate, like a mummy or a puppet, a bleached image, pallid morte futura. It is a pure image of victimization and of the body wholly seized by affective meaning, of message converted onto the body so forcefully and totally that the body has ceased to function in its normal posture and gestures, to become nothing but text, nothing but the place of representation”. (Brooks xii)

In the Marie Antoinette Romances, this victimization of the female body is illustrated not by tragic circumstances, but rather when women come into contact with certain men such as Cagliostrio and/or his disciple Gilbert, who magnetize them into a
hysterical state so that they can use them to see present and future events. This clash of male characters who deal in the occult with virtuous female characters leads to the women being put into a hystericized state. The two most virtuous women who come into contact with Cagliostro and Gilbert are Lorenza and Andrée, respectively. Despite their inherent goodness, Lorenza and Andrée are shown as being victimized again and again by the men who supposedly love them, but whom they reject. The direct contact of virtuous women and men trained in mysticism always ends in tragedy for the women, whose physical bodies are affected when they are put into a trance. This fight between good and evil underscores the climate of struggle between the Ancien Régime and Republicanism during the revolutionary period.

In contrast to Lorenza and Andrée, Dumas does not portray Marie Antoinette as being hysterical, even when facing death. Dumas’ portrayal of Marie Antoinette’s trip to the scaffold has none of the melodrama associated with the scene in D.W. Griffith’s film mentioned above. In The Knight of Maison Rouge, Dumas writes, “La reine, qui sans doute, ne songeait pas à ce moment, se réveille et comprit : elle étendit son regard hautain sur la foule…La reine descendit avec précaution les trois degrés du marchepied ; elle était soutenue par Sanson, qui, jusqu’au dernier moment, tout en accomplissant la tâche à laquelle il semblait lui-même condamne, lu témoigna les plus grands égards.” (Dumas 1551) “The cart stopped at the foot of the scaffold. The Queen, who doubtless never imagined this precise moment, snapped out of her trance: she swept her haughty gaze over the crowd…The Queen nimbly descended the three steps of the footstool. She was supported by Sanson, who showed her the greatest consideration up until the last, all the while carrying out the task he himself seemed condemned to perform.” (Dumas 356)
Here, Dumas paints a portrait of Marie Antoinette that is generally more tragic than melodramatic, reserving the hystericized body for Lorenza and Andrée.

The backdrop of the Revolution seems a natural one for melodramatic action. Many of Dumas’ female characters exhibit a tendency toward the melodramatic. Whether it is through fainting spells or screams, the majority of the women in *The Marie Antoinette Romances* are continually shown by Dumas as being physically affected by crises. Despite the general tendency of the female characters to be portrayed as exhibiting stereotypically female traits and being governed by emotion, there are a few notable exceptions to this rule, such as Mme de la Motte, Mme du Barry, and Nicole Legay. Both Mme de la Motte and Mme du Barry are self-serving characters who will stop at nothing to get what they want—namely recognition at court and the social status associated with it. Interestingly, Mme de la Motte and Mme du Barry become entangled with cardinals, gain their trust with their feminine wiles, and then use them to carry out their diabolical schemes. In Dumas’ series, all three women also coincidentally have dealings with the sorcerer Cagliostro, who is a willing partner in bringing down Marie Antoinette. In real life, Mme du Barry and Nicole Legay also had an association with prostitution.

Mme de la Motte is first introduced by Dumas at the beginning of *The Queen’s Necklace*. Her deceptive nature is apparent from the beginning as she feigns illness during a visit from two unknown benefactors disguised as Sisters of Charity from whom she is seeking financial support. The two undercover women are Marie Antoinette and Andrée de Taverney. After their initial meeting with Mme de la Motte, Andrée remarks to the queen that “there is a look of cunning in her face that does not please me” to which Marie Antoinette replies, “Oh! Vous êtes défiante, vous, Andrée, je le sais; et pour vous
Jeanne de la Motte Valois is a member of the cadet branch of the royal family who has fallen into ruin and wishes to exchange her tedious social status for a life at court. She does everything in her power to get into the queen’s good graces at Versailles through a delusive relationship with the Cardinal de Richelieu. Marie Antoinette is duped by her, while Louis XVI, like Andrée, expresses his distrust of her several times and is left shaking his head as he is proved right after she successfully executes her evil plot. Together with Cagliostro, Jeanne de la Motte is responsible for bringing together the plot which resulted in the infamous Diamond Necklace Affair. In the end, Mme de la Motte is found guilty of lese-majesty and is sentenced to public whipping and branding followed by banishment from France, but it is not before she has done irreparable damage to Marie Antoinette’s image. More than being selfish, Mme de la Motte is a ruthless woman who shows no remorse for her actions and represents the perceived corruption of the aristocracy. In The Queen’s Necklace, Dumas contrasts both the notorious, conniving Mme de la Motte and the scheming Mme du Barry with a naïve Marie Antoinette in order to prove the queen’s basic goodness and innocence at the hands of her enemies.

While Mme de la Motte is motivated by money and position, Mme du Barry is motivated by jealousy and hatred for the queen. Mme du Barry lives in constant fear of being replaced as the King’s favorite and knows that her position at court is temporary at best. The favorite of Louis XV is aware that while he is alive she will always live in the
shadow of Marie Antoinette. Mme du Barry is also painfully aware that her expulsion from Versailles will precede Louis XV’s death. Along with her brother and the Cardinal de Richelieu, Mme du Barry schemes against the appointment of Choiseul and in favor of the duc d’Aiguillon, in direct opposition to Marie Antoinette. Once again, Dumas is using polarization to show the opposing forces at work on the eve of the Revolution. Even within the same social class there is no political or moral unity. Both Mme de la Motte and Mme du Barry represent the discord and intrigue of Versailles that surrounded the aristocracy. They are shown by Dumas to be cold and calculating women who act in their own interest and to the detriment of the monarchy. They also represent a striking combination of masculine and feminine traits. Unlike most of the secondary female characters in the series, they are politically motivated and work well with men, believing themselves to be on the same intellectual level. Mme de la Motte and Mme du Barry are cunning and use their femininity to outwit men of their social rank. In the end, however, both women are publicly humiliated and meet with tragic circumstances. Mme de la Motte is sent away to live in England, where she spends the rest of her life in shame. As was the tradition with the royal mistresses, Mme du Barry is expelled from Versailles just before King Louis XV dies. She goes to live in a convent which she eventually leaves to go back to her home at the chateau de Louveciennes. During the Revolution Mme du Barry is tried and found guilty for her involvement with aiding the emigration of the aristocracy, a crime for which she is guillotined. However, Dumas does not directly mention Mme du Barry’s execution in the series.

Like Mme de la Motte and Mme du Barry, Dumas uses other characters in The Queen’s Necklace to represent the deterioration of social morality in the time before the
French Revolution. The relationship between Nicole Legay and M. Beausire is indicative of the questionable position of women in society. Nicole is another female character who is interested in upward mobility, but she is caught in a marriage with M. Beausire, a soldier who is physically and verbally abusive and prone to fits of jealous rage. He is also a gambler who has driven the couple and their young son into poverty and who is not above becoming involved in illegal activities for the sake of money. Beausire’s vices and constant absence leave Nicole to search for creative ways to survive. While she is not directly named by Dumas as a prostitute, she is not above using her intelligence and beauty to achieve financial security by wealthy male sponsors. This, of course, causes more emotional strife with Beausire, until he realizes that he too can benefit from Nicole’s aspirations. Because of Nicole and Beausire’s low social rank and association with the military, they easily fall victim to Cagliostro’s schemes. He promises them money in exchange for doing his bidding. In Nicole’s case, that means impersonating the Queen of France in an effort to cause public outrage when she is seen out in public at questionable events, as well as having clandestine nighttime meetings with the Cardinal de Rohan on the grounds of the palace. Of all of the secondary female characters in Dumas, Nicole is shown as being a survivor. Despite her lowly birth and disastrous marriage, Nicole overcomes her fate and finds a place for herself. She escapes prosecution in the Diamond Necklace Affair because she is in effect an innocent victim of Cagliostro and rises above her past as a servant to achieve some degree of freedom, as she swore to Gilbert she would at the beginning of the series in Joseph Balsamo: “Je crois que, moi aussi, je commence à gravir cette montagne dont tu me parlais; je crois que, moi aussi, je suis destinée à devenir quelque chose; et c’est vraiment trop peu que de devenir
la femme d’un savant ou d’un philosophe.” (Dumas 135) “I also begin to ascend that mountain of which you spoke. I see a wider prospect before me. The wife of a learned man, a philosopher! No, I am destined for something greater than that!” (Dumas 73) By rejecting Gilbert’s philosophical musings, Nicole is also rejecting her assumed position in the eighteenth-century world—that of a wife and mother who has no real aspirations outside the traditional ones that society assigned to women at the time.

Another method of melodrama according to Brooks is the use of external elements such as music to heighten the sense of feeling and struggle. While music does not play any significant role in the series, in The Countess de Charny, one of the later books in the Marie Antoinette romances, Dumas employs paintings as a means of emphasizing the imminent demise of Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI. The first glimpse we have of the foreboding predicted in paintings comes when Louis, under house arrest in the Tuileries Palace, notices a painting of Charles I by Van Dyke. The king sees this as a bad omen since Charles I died at the scaffold and it is unknown how the painting got from Versailles to the Tuileries. A second painting that is associated with the downfall of the monarchy is also mentioned in The Countess de Charny in a scene where Marie Antoinette is walking in a church shortly after the royal family’s capture at Varennes. While walking with Barnave, she sees a depiction of Madame Henriette of England who died at St. Cloud. He speaks to her of another Madame Henriette, the widow of Charles I, who had a similar fate to hers. Barnave tells the Queen that both she and Madame Henriette were foreign queens who gave their husbands bad advice instead of uniting the people, which eventually brought about their demise. (Dumas 443) Dumas uses repetition of bad omens through paintings both at the beginning and the end of the novel in order to
emphasize the drama that is to come in the following chapters and in the final book in the series.

In an earlier scene in The Countess de Charny, Marie Antoinette is lost in thought, reflecting upon the series of bad omens associated with her life and reign. The following passage illustrates the concern the queen had for coming events, and emphasizes the dramatic emotional element of her character:

“La reine alla s’asseoir devant cette table, et, les yeux fixés, elle laissa tomber sa tête entre ses deux poings fermes, sans rien voir autre chose que ce tapis rouge étendu devant elle. Deux ou trois fois, elle secoua machinalement la tête à ce sanglant reflet ; il lui semblait que ses yeux s’injectaient de sang, que ses tempes battaient de fièvre, et que ses oreilles bruissaient. Puis, comme dans un brouillard mouvant, toute sa vie repassait devant elle. Elle se rappelait qu’elle était née le 2 novembre 1755, jour du tremblement de terre de Lisbonne, qui avait tué plus de cinquante mille personnes, et renversé deux cents églises. Elle se rappelait que, dans la première chambre où elle avait couché à Strasbourg, la tapisserie représentait le Massacre des innocents, et que, cette même nuit, à la lueur vacillante de la veilleuse, il lui semblait que le sang coulait des plaies de tous ces pauvres enfants, tandis que la figure des massacreurs prenait une expression si terrible, qu’épouvantée, elle avait appelé au secours, et avait ordonné qu’on partit avec l’aube naissante de cette ville qui devait lui laisser un si terrible souvenir de la première nuit qu’elle avait passée en France. Elle se rappelait qu’en continuant son chemin vers Paris, elle s’était arrêtée dans la maison du baron de Taverney ; que, là, elle avait rencontré, pour la première fois, ce misérable Cagliostro, qui avait eu depuis, lors de l’affaire du collier, une si terrible influence sur sa destinée, et que, dans cette halte, si présente à sa mémoire, qu’il lui semblait que cet événement fut de la veille, quoique, depuis, vingt ans se fussent écoulés, il lui avait, sur ses instances, fait voir dans une carafe quelque chose de monstrueux, une machine de mort terrible et inconnue, et, au bas de cette machine, une tête roulant, détachée du corps, et qui n’était autre que la sienne ! Elle se rappelait que, lorsque Mme Lebrun avait fait son charmant portrait de jeune femme, belle, heureuse encore, elle lui avait, par mégare sans doute, mais présage terrible, donné la pose que Madame Henriette d’Angleterre, femme de Charles Ier, a dans son portrait. Elle se rappelait que, le jour ou, pour la première fois, elle entra à Versailles, lorsque, descendue de sa voiture, elle mettait le pied sur le funèbre pavage de cette cour de marbre ou la veille elle avait vu couler tant de sang, un terrible coup de tonnerre avait retenti, précédant la chute de la foudre, qui avait sillonné l’air à sa gauche, et d’une si effrayante façon, que M. le maréchal de Richelieu, qui n’était pont facile à effrayer cependant, avait secoué la tête en disant : “Mauvais présage !”. ” (Dumas 51)
“She looked through the fingers of the hand on which she rested her head, but saw nothing but the red cover. Twice or thrice something in the red glare made her shake her head mechanically. She seemed to feel her eyes become filled with blood, and her ears to tingle. Then like a tempest her past life swept before her. She remembered that she was born November 2nd, 1755, on the day of the Lisbon earthquake, when fifty thousand lives and two hundred churches were overthrown. She remembered that the first room she slept in at Strasbourg was hung with a tapestry representing the murder of the innocents, and amid the dense light of the fire she saw the blood streaming from their wounds, while the faces of the ruffians assumed so dread and terrible an expression, that she called for aid, and at dawn left a city which had given her so painful a reception in France. She remembered that on her way to Paris she paused at the house of the Baron de Taverney, where for the first time she met the wretch Cagliostro. He had shown her a terrible object, an unknown and terrible machine of death, and afterwards a head, her own, rolling from it. She remembered that when Madame Lebrun painted her portrait, she was then a young and beautiful woman; by some accident she had given her the air of the Henrietta of England, wife of Charles I. She remembered that when she first came to Versailles and placed her foot on that marble pavement, which on the evening before she had seen running with blood, a terrible clap of thunder had been heard, preceded by a flash which divided the whole sky from right to left in so terrible a manner, that the Duc de Richelieu, not easily frightened, shook his head and said, “The omen is bad”. “ (Dumas 26-27)

This is one of the first moments when Marie Antoinette is shown as reflecting inwardly on her life and foreshadows the time in prison when she is awaiting her trial and execution in The Knight of Maison Rouge. Dumas is setting the stage for Marie Antoinette’s conversion and ultimate redemption.

Another aspect of melodrama named by Brooks and found in Dumas is love and revenge. At the beginning of the series in Joseph Balsamo, a young Gilbert is desperately in love with a haughty and cruel Andrée. He has loved her from afar since growing up on her family’s estate, and she professes nothing but disgust with him. Despite the fact that he saves her from being crushed in a rush of the crowd a year earlier, Andrée is unmoved by Gilbert’s loyalty. The young man is so vexed by Andrée’s contempt, that he swears
revenge on her. The words that Dumas gives to Gilbert are purely theatrical. As he watches her walk away, he utters the following,

“O créature sans cœur, corps sans âme, je t’ai sauvé la vie, j’ai concentré mon amour, j’ai fait taire tout sentiment qui pouvait offenser ce que j’appellerai ta candeur ; car, pour moi, dans mon délire, tu étais une vierge qui est au ciel…Maintenant, je t’ai vue de près, tu n’es plus qu’une femme et je suis un homme…Oh ! un jour ou l’autre, je me vengerai, Andrée de Taverney…” Et il s’éloigna, bondissant à travers les massifs, comme un jeune loup blessé qui se retourne en montrant ses dents aiguës et sa prunelle sanglante.” (Dumas 892)

“Oh, creature without heart, without soul! I saved your life, I concentrated all my affection on you, I extinguished every feeling which might offend your purity, for in my madness I looked upon you as some superior being--the inhabitant of a higher sphere! Now that I have seen you more nearly, I find you are no more than a woman--and I am a man! But one day or another, Andrée de Taverney, I shall be revenged! He rushed from the spot, bounding through the thickest of the shrubs like a young wolf wounded by the hunter, who turns and shows his sharp teeth and bloodshot eyes.” (Dumas 417)

From this point on in the series, Gilbert is governed not by love but by hatred towards Andrée. As one reads this passage, it is obvious that Dumas’ theatrical background played a role in the characters’ dialogue and actions. Before leaving Gilbert, Andrée physically pushes him aside so that she may pass. One can imagine the same scene being played out on stage, Gilbert performing his monologue, then exiting. The physicality and deep emotion of this pivotal exchange provide a foreshadowing of the deteriorating relationship between Gilbert and Andrée that lasts throughout the series. Dumas ends a chapter in a book in the same way that he might end a scene on stage—with a definitive feeling being given to the audience, or in this case to the reader.

Dumas used melodramatic elements to portray his female characters and create a plot that pitted the masculine against the feminine. The women in The Marie Antoinette
Romances serve as a representation of the traditional society of the Ancien Régime and their collision with republican ideals. Further, Dumas used the character of Marie Antoinette to call into question the legitimacy of the monarchy, both in pre-Revolutionary France and the France of the Restoration period. Andrée de Taverney and Geneviève Dixmer were among the few examples of virtuous women in the series who selflessly performed their duties to the queen, even at the cost of their own happiness and in the case of Geneviève, of her life. The bravery and selflessness of these two characters is in stark contrast with the more infamous characters of Madame de La Motte and Nicole Legay, who use their feminine wiles to collaborate with and outwit their male counterparts. Rousseau had warned of the bad influence of women in the public sphere in his Lettre à M. d’Alembert sur les spectacles. Based on some of Dumas’ female characters, one might assume that he agreed with Rousseau’s philosophy about women. However, despite portraying misogynistic traits in certain women in his series, Dumas did not show all of his female characters in a negative light. Instead, Dumas’ women were more polarized, some courageously following through with their ideals, others ruthlessly seeking to overcome their lower station in life. This differentiated portrayal of women by Dumas is suggestive that, although many of his female characters were shown in a typically misogynistic light, others rose above their personal interests to act in a way that best served the greater cause, even if it was not the revolutionary cause. The revolution was not just shown as being of and for men by Dumas. He used women to show that strength of conviction could be a feminine trait as well as a masculine one. The women in The Marie Antoinette romances prove that the struggle for personal and
national identity applied to all members of French society, both before the Revolution and continuing through the Restoration period.
Chapter 3 - Courtly Love vs. Misogyny

The relationships between the men and women in *The Marie Antoinette Romances* serve as a microcosmic view of the philosophical struggles of the Revolution. The love that the male republican characters feel for the female characters undermines or challenges their devotion to the revolutionary cause. When they give in to love, they let go of their political convictions, thus letting go of their masculinity, and are converted. When they do not completely give in, or are rejected by women, their inner struggle turns into a renewed interest in Republicanism. Dumas is showing the pride and arrogance associated with the Revolution and its masculine and misogynistic tendencies. The men in the series cannot, it seems, be both devoted revolutionaries and devoted lovers.

Conversely, the aristocratic, chivalric men have the ability to love and fight for their beliefs through their representation of the *Ancien Régime* and reflection of the medieval notion of courtly love. In the aftermath of the Revolution, there was political turmoil in France for most of the nineteenth century as the nation attempted to come to grips with the overthrow of the monarchy and its societal and historical implications. Through the relationships of the male and female characters, Dumas gives the reader a view of what each side represented and the cost that came with their devotion.

Courtly love was a literary device used throughout the Middle Ages which espoused the idea of a knight who is in love with an aristocratic women and vows his undying devotion and protection to her. The love is usually adulterous and unconsummated, yet raises the lovers to a higher level of intimacy. The men in Dumas’ series are often embroiled in a competition for a woman that is either unattainable from a social/class point of view, or else the love they feel for the woman, is unrequited.
role of male protector who receives no real sexual satisfaction from the woman he desires is rampant throughout Dumas’ novels. The idea of courtly love was used by Dumas as the basis of many of the male/female relationships between members of the aristocracy throughout The Marie Antoinette Romances, in particular those surrounding the queen herself. Because of her beauty and position, Marie Antoinette was the object of desire of many men. In real life, the Swedish Count Axel von Fersen was rumored to be her lover, although it has never been proven. Count Fersen was instrumental in organizing the failed escape attempt of the royal family from captivity in Paris in 1791. Dumas did not include Fersen in The Marie Antoinette Romances, but one can assume that his character is represented by Dumas, who employed several male characters, both real and imaginary, who acted as suitors to the queen.

The first man to present himself as a suitor to Marie Antoinette was Olivier de Charny, an imaginary nobleman with whom the queen falls deeply in love. Dumas may have based de Charny’s noble character on Geoffroi de Charny, a famous knight from the fourteenth century who fought in the crusades and was the first known owner of the Shroud of Turin as well as the author of a book called A Knight’s Own Book of Chivalry. (de Charny 1) In Dumas’ series, Olivier de Charny’s rival for Marie Antoinette’s affections was Philippe de Taverney, brother to Andrée de Taverney, one of the queen’s ladies-in-waiting. Philippe and Olivier start as competitors for the queen’s attention and finish as enemies after joining forces to confiscate pamphlets from the journalist Reteau who has created a slanderous libel about her at the order of Cagliostro. They succeed in convincing the pamphleteer that he must destroy the stories upon risk of death. Unfortunately, the two young chevaliers end up challenging each other to a duel, and
Philippe wins. Olivier’s life is spared, but his injury gains him sympathy with Marie Antoinette which grows into love. Philippe is the stronger swordsman but the weaker suitor.

Being stationed at Strasbourg in May 1770, Philippe had the distinct honor of being the first Frenchman to greet the dauphine upon her arrival in France in Dumas’ series. Because of this, Marie Antoinette promises that he will always hold a special place in her heart for him. He is stricken with love for her, a love that never dies throughout the entire series. In a chapter in The Queen’s Necklace called “The Tempter”, Philippe is forced by his father to defend the queen’s honor. M. de Taverney is desperate for his son to find a position at court and calls his manhood into question in regards to Marie Antoinette.

“Tu ne t’es pas aperçu d’une chose?” dit-il
“De laquelle?”
“D’une chose qui fait honneur à ta naïveté.”
“Voyons, dites, monsieur.”
“C’est tout simple, tu arrives d’Amérique, tu es parti dans un moment où il n’y avait plus qu’un roi et plus de reine, si ce n’est la Du Barry, majesté peu respectable ; tu reviens, tu vois une reine et tu t’dis : respectons-la.”
“Sans doute.”
“Pauvre enfant!” fit le vieillard. Et il se mit à étouffer à la fois, dans son manchon, une toux et un éclat de rire.
“Comment,” demanda Philippe, “vous me plaignez, monsieur, de ce que je respecte la royauté, vous, un Taverney-Maison-Rouge; vous, un des bons gentilshommes de France.”
“Attends donc, je ne te parles pas de la royauté, moi, je te parle de la reine.”
“Et vous faites une différence?”
“Pardieu! qu’est-ce que la royauté, mon cher? une couronne ; on n’y touche pas à cela, peste ! Qu’est-ce que la reine? une femme ; oh! une femme, c’est différent, on y touche.”

“On y touche!” s’écria Philippe rougissant à la fois de colère et de mépris, accompagnant ces paroles d’un geste si superbe, que nulle femme n’eut pu le voir sans l’aimer, nulle reine sans l’adorer.

“Tu n’en crois rien, non; eh bien! demande,” reprit le petit vieillard avec un accent bas et presque farouche, tant il mit de cynisme dans son sourire, “demande à monsieur de Coigny, demande à monsieur de Lauzun, demande à monsieur de Vaudreuil.”

“Silence! silence, mon père,” s’écria Philippe d’une voix sourde, “ou pour ces trois blasphèmes, ne pouvant vous frapper trois fois de mon épée, c’est moi, je vous le jure, qui me frapperai moi-même, et sans pitié, et sur l’heure.” (Dumas 122-123)

“You have overlooked one thing, Philippe.”

“What, sir?”

“When you left for America, there was a king, but no queen, if it were not the Dubarry; hardly a respectable sovereign. You come back and see a queen, and you think you must be very respectful.”

“Doubtless.”

“Poor child!” said his father, laughing.

“How, sir? You blame me for respecting the monarchy—you, a Taverney Maison-Rouge, one of the best names in France.”

“I do not speak of the monarchy, but only of the queen.”

“And you make a difference?”

“Pardieu, I should think so. What is royalty? A crown that is unapproachable. But what is a queen? A woman, and she, on the contrary, is very approachable.”

Philippe made a gesture of disgust.

“You do not believe me,” continued the old man, almost fiercely; “well, ask M. de Coigny, ask M. de Lauzan, or M. de Vaudreuil.”

“Silence, father!” cried Philippe; “or for these three blasphemies, not being able to strike you three blows with my sword, I shall strike them on myself!” (Dumas 106-7)
Philippe blames the pamphleteers for the rumors of the queen having many lovers and refuses to believe the gossip spread by his father. He is blinded by his love for Marie Antoinette and later vows to protect her. Through the character of Philippe, Dumas is portraying Marie Antoinette’s reputation as being wrongly calumniated. On the other hand, Philippe’s father maliciously condemns the queen’s morals despite his desire to attain her favor in the form of a commission for Philippe in the King’s army and a position at court for Andrée as a lady in waiting to the queen. Philippe is challenging the desacralization of Marie Antoinette in the pamphlets and asserting his belief in the courtly devotion to the monarchy of the Ancien Régime. In the twelfth century Andreas Capellanus wrote a book called The Art of Courtly Love which outlines the criteria and behavior associated with those in love. One of the rules listed by Capellanus is “The easy attainment of love makes it of little value; difficulty of attainment makes it prized.” (Capellanus 185) Philippe devotes himself to the queen, but the love is unrequited. Despite Marie Antoinette’s rejection of Philippe in favor of Olivier, Philippe remains the most loyal male admirer of the queen throughout her lifetime. In the final book entitled The Knight of Maison Rouge, Philippe is the knight who stops at nothing to attempt to liberate Marie Antoinette from prison, both at the Temple and the Conciergerie. He represents the chivalric code of the chevalier fighting for his lady. In Marie Antoinette’s words to her daughter:

“Ne l’oubliez jamais, ce nom, car c’est le nom d’un gentilhomme plein d’honneur et de bravoure ; celui-là n’est pas dévoué par ambition, car il ne s’est révélé qu’aux jours du malheur. Il n’a jamais vu la reine de France, ou plutôt la reine de France ne l’a jamais vu, et il voue sa vie à la défendre. Peut-être sera-t-il récompensé, comme on récompense aujourd’hui toute vertu, par une mort terrible…Mais…s’il meurt…oh ! là-haut ! là-haut ! je le remercierai…Il s’appelle…La reine regarda avec inquiétude autour d’elle et baissa la voix : Il s’appelle le chevalier de Maison-Rouge…Priez pour lui!” (Dumas 1290)
“Never forget the name, for it is the name of a gentleman full of honor and bravery. This man is not committed out of ambition, he is not some fair-weather friend, for he only came forward when everything collapsed. He has never seen the Queen of France or, rather, the Queen of France has never set eyes on him, and yet he dedicates his life to defending me. Perhaps he will be rewarded, as all virtue is rewarded these days, by a terrible death…But…If he should die…Oh! Up there! Up there in heaven! I will thank him…He is called…He is the Knight of Maison Rouge! Pray for him!” (Dumas 47)

The Knight of Maison Rouge is a true chevalier in the definition of courtly love, showing undying devotion despite the failure of the queen to return his affections. The fact that Marie Antoinette claims never to have laid eyes on the Knight can be explained by his disguise or because Dumas actually wrote this novel before the others in the series. In either case, Philippe’s is the only love that transcends all obstacles and changes in circumstance. While Olivier eventually sees negative qualities in Marie Antoinette, Philippe never does. He worships her from afar and dedicates his life to her service. In the chapter called “The Scaffold” Dumas recounts the execution of the queen and the final moments of Philippe:

“Le quart après midi sonna à l’horloge des Tuileries; en même temps que Marie Antoinette tombait dans l’éternité.

Un cri terrible, un cri qui résumait toutes les patiences : joie, épouvante, deuil, espoir, triomphe, expiation, couvrit comme un ouragan un autre cri faible et lamentable qui, au même moment, retentissait sous l’échafaud.

Les gendarmes…revinrent, amenant par le collet un jeune homme dont la main pressait sur son cœur un mouchoir teint de sang…

“À mort l’aristocrate! À mort le ci-devant!” crièrent quelques hommes du peuple en désignant le jeune homme; “il a trempé son mouchoir dans le sang de l’Autrichienne: à mort!”

“Grand Dieu!” dit Maurice à Lorin, “le reconnais-tu? le reconnais-tu?”
À mort le royaliste! répétèrent les forcenés; ôtez-lui ce mouchoir dont il veut se faire une relique: arrachez, arrachez!

Un sourire orgueilleux erra sur les lèvres du jeune homme; il arracha sa chemise, découvrit sa poitrine, et laissa tomber son mouchoir.

Messieurs, dit-il, ce sang n’est pas celui de la reine, mais bien le mien; laissez-moi mourir tranquillement.

Et une blessure profonde et reluisante apparut béante sous sa mamelle gauche.

La foule jeta un cri et recula.

Alors le jeune homme s’affaissa lentement et tomba sur ses genoux en regardant l’échafaud comme un martyr regarde l’autel.

Maison-Rouge! murmura Lorin à l’oreille de Maurice.

Adieu! murmura le jeune homme en baissant la tête avec un divin sourire; adieu, ou plutôt au revoir!

Et il expira au milieu des gardes stupéfaits. (Dumas 1552)

The quarter hour after midday rang out from the clock at the Tuileries. And at that very moment Marie Antoinette fell into eternity.

A terrible cry, a cry that summed up all that forbearance could possibly contain, such as joy, horror, grief, hope, triumph, expiation, smothered like a hurricane another cry, feeble and lamentable, which came from beneath the scaffold at the same moment…

…the gendarmes…came back, dragging by the collar a young man who was pressing to his heart a handkerchief stained with blood….

‘Death to the aristocrat! Death to the ci-devant!’ shouted a few men of the people, pointing to the young man. ‘He dipped his handkerchief in the Austrian woman’s blood: put him to death!’

‘Good God!’ cried Maurice. ‘Lorin, do you recognize him? Do you recognize him?’

‘Death to the royalist!’ repeated the maniacs. ‘Get that handkerchief off him! He wants to keep it as a relic. Take it off him! Take it off him!’

A proud smile fluttered across the young man’s lips. He tore his shirt, baring his chest, and dropped his handkerchief.

‘Messieurs,’ he said, ‘this blood is not that of the Queen; it is my own. Let me die in peace.’
And a deep and streaming gash appeared, gaping, under his left breast. The crowd screamed and moved back as the young man slowly fell to his knees, gazing at the scaffold as a martyr would gaze at an altar.

‘Maison-Rouge!’ Lorin murmured in Maurice’s ear.

‘Adieu!’ murmured the young man, bowing his head with a divine smile. ‘Adieu, or rather au revoir!’

With that, he expired in the midst of the stunned guards.” (Dumas 357-358)

Philippe commits suicide at the moment Marie Antoinette is executed. He has dedicated his life to her service and protection and has lived only for her. Once she is gone, he has no more reason to live. Along with the death of the queen goes the end of the royalist cause and for Dumas, the end of the series. The Marie Antoinette Romances end almost immediately after the queen’s demise.

Another sworn protector of the queen who never had his love returned by her was Barnave, a member of the National Assembly and famous orator who was for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. Based in reality, Barnave is said to have had fallen under Marie Antoinette’s spell following her failed escape attempt in 1791. He accompanies her in the carriage back to Paris and in Dumas’ version of the story found in The Countess de Charny, the two have a strong flirtation, although Dumas makes it clear that she is playing upon his attraction to her to get what she wants—a political ally in the new government. Olivier de Charny is angered by the flagrant coquetry displayed for Barnave by the queen when he is forced to sit in the same carriage with the two of them and witness the entire scene. At this point Olivier and his brothers have all given their lives in service to the royal family, and all but Olivier has perished in their service.
Olivier is also the only male character to actually reject the queen towards the end of the series, choosing to reconcile with Andrée, his long neglected wife upon realizing her virtues. In the final scene between the two of them, Olivier chastises Marie Antoinette for having hidden the real cause of Andrée’s suffering:

“Madame,” dit-il, “j’ignorais que Mlle de Taverney eut été si malheureuse; j’ignorais que Mme de Charny fut si respectable ; sans quoi, je vous prie de le croire, je n’eusse pas été six ans dans tomber à ses genoux, et sans l’adorer comme elle mérite d’être adorée!”

Et, s’inclinant devant la reine stupéfaite, il sortit dans que la malheureuse femme osât faire un mouvement pour le retenir.

Seulement, il entendit le cri de douleur qu’elle jeta en voyant la porte se refermer entre elle et lui.

C’est qu’elle comprenait que, sur cette porte comme sur celle de l’enfer, la main du démon de la jalousie venait d’écrire cette terrible sentence: *Lasciate ogni speranza!* (Laissez toute espérance)” (Dumas 712-713)

“Madame…I was ignorant that Mademoiselle de Taverney had been so unfortunate—I was ignorant that Madame de Taverney was so much respected—or I beg you will believe me, I should not have been six years without falling on my knees before her, and adoring her as she deserves to be adored!”

And bowing before the stupefied queen, he left, without the unhappy woman daring to make a movement to detain him. He heard only her cry of grief as she saw the door shut between him and her.

Then she understood that it was upon this door that the hand of the demon of jealousy would come and write, as upon that of hell, these terrible words: *Lasciate ogni speranza!* (Abandon all hope)” (Dumas 465)

At this moment, Andrée is elevated by Dumas as the woman of virtue that she has always been--the neglected, long-suffering wife to Olivier and loyal friend to Marie Antoinette, while the queen is brought down to a level of emotional suffering that she has never previously experienced. While Andrée’s ending is a happy one, Dumas is setting
Marie Antoinette up for the adversity she is about to face leading to her execution in the final book in the series. This tearing down of Marie Antoinette’s emotional state eventually leads to her own maturation and transformation as she comes to terms with the end of her life.

Barnave, another of Marie Antoinette’s male admirers, suffers tremendously from the queen’s unrequited love for him. He is even mentioned in The Knight of Maison-Rouge as one of Marie Antoinette’s so-called victims by Lorin and Maurice, two Republican officers who are gossiping about her reputation one day:

“So you believe in the story of the Knight’s love for the Queen?”

“I don’t believe it; I’m just saying it like everyone else. Anyway, she’s made plenty of others fall in love with her, so it wouldn’t be surprising if she’s seduced him too, would it? She certainly got to Barnave, if you believe what you hear.”

“…She’s beautiful enough. I’m not saying she’s been in love with them, but they’ve certainly been in love with her. Everyone looks at the sun but the sun doesn’t look on everyone.” (Dumas 31-32)

It is easy to see the influence of the queen’s alleged affairs and effect on men that would have also contributed to the rumors of her sexual depravity and inextinguishable sexual appetite that became the subject of the pamphlets. Dumas presents this idea without directly calling the queen a whore. He instead shows the circumstances which
lead to her character assassination in the tabloid press. The failure of courtly love against the backdrop of the Revolution is representative of the end of the aristocracy and its associated ideals. In the above passage, Dumas is contrasting the increasingly antiquated notion of courtly love with the misogynistic tendencies of the Revolution.

From a more modern standpoint, Chantal Thomas also addresses the concept of unrequited love, or at least of obsession for Marie Antoinette in *Farewell, My Queen*. In the chapter called “Omnipresence of The Queen’s Unrequited Lover”, she creates a character named Monsieur de Castelnaux, who is known around Versailles simply by his nickname. He is the eighteenth-century version of an obsessed stalker who is never far from Marie Antoinette, even going so far as to follow her on her trips outside of Versailles and to lurk outside the Petit Trianon in the dead of winter waiting for a glimpse of her. He himself is a member of the nobility and a loyalist, but is described as being not in his right mind. Whereas Dumas’ male characters truly portrayed the knightly image associated with courtly love, Thomas’ courtier is not there to save the queen, but rather to serve as a reminder of the singular, unquestioned worship of the monarchy that was on the verge of extinction. His outward appearance is the physical embodiment of the Ancien Régime that was about to come to a permanent close. Thomas writes,

“The Queen’s unrequited lover was a tall, thin man, his greenish face marked with the scabs of small cuts, which he scratched at, causing them to bleed…He was a sinister sight, painful to behold….In all weathers, he wore the same garments, a green jacket and yellow britches. His waistcoat, which must once have been elegant, was in tatters. From the jacket, pieces of lining protruded. The colors were washed out. His faded clothes showed lighter streaks, giving the impression that water never stopped trickling down him, even when the sun was shining. He held in his hand a plumed hat, whose feathers were almost completely reduced to their central shaft. Leaves and twigs caught in his jacket collar.” (Thomas 125-6)
The Queen’s unrequited lover carried with him a book in which he recorded every observable move of Marie Antoinette, thus preserving her memory if not saving her actual life. Both he and Sidonie serve as witnesses to the queen’s life at Versailles and her final moments there.

Another aspect of courtly love was the touching of clothing or hands, feet or hair rather than actual physical consummation of love. There are several examples of this device in Dumas’ depiction of men in love with aristocratic women. The first mention of touching that which is out of reach takes place at the beginning of the series in Joseph Balsamo between Gilbert and Andrée. Andrée, under the hypnotic power of Cagliostro, is sleep-walking in the house late at night. Gilbert discovers her and takes advantage of her altered state to approach her more closely than he would normally dare to. In a semi-erotic moment, Gilbert falls to the ground and buries his face in Andrée’s dress as she sways back and forth in between waking and sleep.

“…au milieu de toutes ces fiévreuses alternatives de crainte et d’espérance, Gilbert, avançant toujours, se trouva à deux pas d’Andrée. De lors, ce fût comme une magie ; il eût voulu fuir que la fuite lui eût été impossible ; une fois entré dans le cercle d’attraction dont la jeune fille était le centre, il se sentait lié, garroté, vaincu ; il se laissa tomber sur ses deux genoux.

Andrée demeura immobile, muette: on eût dit une statue. Gilbert prit le bas de sa robe et la baissa.

Puis il releva la tête lentement, sans souffle, d’un mouvement égal : ses yeux cherchèrent les yeux d’Andrée.

Ils étaient tous grands ouverts, et cependant Andrée ne voyait pas.

Gilbert ne savait plus que penser, il était anéanti sous le poids de la surprise. Un moment il eut l’effroyable idée qu’elle était morte. Pour s’en assurer, il osa prendre sa main; elle était tiède et l’artère y battait doucement. Mais la main d’Andrée resta immobile dans la main de Gilbert. Alors Gilbert se figura, enivre sans doute par cette voluptueuse pression, qu’Andrée voyait, qu’elle sentait, qu’elle avait deviné son amour insensé ; il crut, pauvre cœur aveugle, qu’elle
attendait sa visite, que son silence était un consentement, son immobilité une
faveur.

Alors il souleva la main d’Andrée jusqu'à ses lèvres, et y imprima un long et
fiévreux baiser.

Tout à coup, Andrée frissonna, et Gilbert sentit qu’elle le repoussait.” (Dumas
115-116)

“In the midst of all these feverish alternations of fear and hope, he still advanced,
and at last found himself within two paces of Andrée. Then he felt as if
fascinated. He would have fled, were flight possible; but once within the circle of
attraction, of which she was the center, he felt himself rooted to the spot, and,
conquered, subdued, he fell on both knees.

Andrée remained motionless as a statue. Gilbert took the hem of her dress in both
hands, and kissed it; then he looked up slowly, breathlessly—his eyes met hers,
which were wide open, yet she saw him not.

Gilbert no longer knew what to think; he was overwhelmed with astonishment.
For a moment the horrible idea that she was dead flashed across his mind; he
seized her hand—it was warm, and the pulse beat softly; but this hand remained
unresistingly in his. Then, bewildered by having touched it, he imagined that she
saw, that she felt, that she had discovered his maddening passion—poor blinded
heart!—that she expected his visit, that her silence indicated consent, her
immovability favor. He raised her hand to his lips, and imprinted on it a long and
burning kiss. Immediately a shudder ran through her frame, and Gilbert felt that
she repelled him.” (Dumas 55)

The boldness of his approach foreshadows a future encounter between the two
when Gilbert goes so far as to violate Andrée while she is under hypnosis. In this
relationship, the result of unrequited love is violence which drives a permanent wedge
between Gilbert and Andrée that is never repaired. The influence of the occult in Gilbert
and Andrée’s encounters taints the previously pure sentiments of the young man.

Through hypnotism, Gilbert is able to control Andrée. When they are young, he puts
Andrée in a trace in order to get physically close to her, which would otherwise have
been impossible due to her disdain for him. There lack of compatibility is also reflected
in their social backgrounds. Andrée is born into an aristocratic family, while Gilbert is of the working class. Once he embraces Rousseau’s philosophy and ultimately becomes a republican, there is a realization on Gilbert’s part that he will never be able to attain Andrée’s affection. Both characters undergo transformations as they mature, and in the end Dumas portrays Andrée as an innocent victim, while Gilbert is haunted by his past crimes and resigns himself to accept her love for Olivier de Charny.

The other scene that involves a male character prostrating himself before a love interest is found in Ange Pitou between Olivier de Charny and Marie Antoinette. As the Bastille is stormed and Paris is plunged into the first stages of the Revolution, Olivier arrives at Versailles to warn the queen of the imminent danger posed by the rebellion. Dumas allows Marie Antoinette to show her vulnerable side while alone with Olivier.

“Votre Majesté souffre?” demanda le comte.
“Non! non! monsieur, venez vous asseoir près de moi, et plus un mot sur toute cette affreuse politique…Tachez que j’oublie.”
Le comte obéit avec un triste sourire.
Marie Antoinette posa sa main sur son front.
“Votre front brule,” dit-elle.
“Oui, j’ai un volcan dans la tête.”
“Votre main est glacée.”
Et elle pressa la main du comte entre les deux siennes.
“Mon cœur est touché du froid de la mort”, dit-il.
“Pauvre Olivier ! je vous l’avais bien dit, oublions. Je ne suis plus reine. Je ne suis plus menace; je ne suis plus haîe. Non, je ne suis plus reine. Je suis femme, voila tout. L’univers, qu’est-ce pour moi ? un cœur qui m’aime, cela me suffirait.”
Le comte se mit à genoux devant la reine, et lui baisa les pieds avec ce respect que les Egyptiens avaient pour la déesse Isis.” (Dumas 881)
“Does your Majesty suffer?” asked the count.

“No, no sir. Come and sit down near me, and not a word more about those politics. Try to make me forget them.”

The count obeyed with a sad smile. Marie Antoinette placed her hand upon his forehead.

“Your forehead burns,” said she.

“Yes, I have a volcano in my head.”

“Your hand is icy cold.”

And she pressed the count’s hands between both of hers.

“My heart is affected with a deathlike coldness,” said he.

“Poor Olivier! I had told you so. Let us forget it. I am no longer queen; I am no longer threatened; I am no longer hated. No, I am no longer a queen. I am a woman, that is all. What is the whole universe to me? One heart that loves me would suffice me.”

The count fell on his knees before the queen, and kissed her feet with the respect the Egyptians had for the goddess Isis.” (Dumas 402-3)

In contrast to the tainted relationship between Gilbert and Andrée, Olivier and Marie Antoinette share one of consensual affection. While it is never mentioned by Dumas whether or not the two ever consummate their love, Marie Antoinette mentions a promise made between them that Olivier would remain faithful to her despite his arranged marriage to Andrée. He and his brothers all have sworn service to the King and Queen, and his chivalrous character is evident throughout the series, even after he and Marie Antoinette break off their love affair.

Philippe, the most loyal of all of Marie Antoinette’s suitors, begins his relationship with the queen as an admirer who has hope that the she will return his sentiments. In The Queen’s Necklace, he spends a day pulling her around the ice on a sled and competing with other men for her attention. Dumas describes his emotional state
after being summoned by the queen as follows: “Philippe courut à elle, aveugle, étourdi, ivre. En posant sa main sur le dossier du traîneau, il se sentit brûler; la reine était nonchalamment renversée en arrière, ses doigts avaient effleuré les cheveux de Marie-Antoinette”. (Dumas 124) “Philippe ran to her, giddy, and hardly knowing what he did. He placed his hand on the back of the sledge, but started as though he had burned his fingers; the queen had thrown herself negligently back in the sledge, and the fingers of the young man touched the locks of Marie Antoinette.” (Dumas 108) Again in The Countess de Charny, there is a scene which depicts Marie Antoinette and a suitor who finds her impossible to win over completely but nonetheless worships her. The man in question this time is Barnave. It is towards the end of the royal family’s time at the Tuileries, before their transfer to the Temple prison where they will spend their last days. Against the tragic backdrop, Barnave realizes that he has done all that he can for Marie Antoinette and that in all likelihood it will not be enough to save her. Their last exchange is described by Dumas as follows:

“En attendant, monsieur Barnave, pouvons-nous quelque chose pour vous?”
“Beaucoup… vous personnellement, madame… Vous pouvez me prouver que je n’étais pas tout à fait un être sans valeur à vos yeux.”
“Et que faut-il faire pour cela?”
Barnave mit un genou en terre.
“Me donner votre main à baiser, madame.”
Une larme vint jusqu’aux paupières sèches de Marie-Antoinette : elle étendit vers le jeune homme cette main blanche et froide que devaient, à un an de distance, toucher les lèvres les plus éloquentes de l’Assemblée: celles de Mirabeau et de Barnave.” (Dumas 802)

“…What…M. Barnave, can we do for you?”
“You, madame, personally, can do much. You can show that I have not been entirely without value to you.”

“What can I do thus?”

Barnave knelt.

“Give me, madame, your hand to kiss!”

A tear rushed to Marie Antoinette’s dry eyelids. She gave the young man her white, cold hand, which had been kissed by the lips of the two most important men of the Assembly, Mirabeau and Barnave.

Barnave merely touched it. The poor madman was afraid that if he kissed, he would never be able to tear his lips away. (Dumas 505)

In all of these scenes, the female character is seen as being physically unattainable by the male character, which elevates her to a higher status, in exact opposition to the image of the prostitute assigned to Marie Antoinette by the pamphleteers. Dumas portrays his female romantic characters as being worthy of worship and inspiring the highest emotion in their male love interests. This contradicts the previously held revolutionary idea that the female aristocracy was lewd and represented a class where debauchery was the rule.

In contrast with courtly love and pure, though unrequited love, there are some relationships which profess to be pure, but instead are tainted by men who embrace revolutionary ideals. The lack of compatibility between these two concepts lead to disastrous consequences for the couples involved because they negate the ability of those involved to transcend the purely physical and reach a higher level of love. The grotesqueness of the relationship between Cagliostro and Lorenza is evidence of this. They both profess to both love and hate each other. Because of the restraints put on their relationship by the distrustful Cagliostro, the two can never come to agree on the terms of
their arrangement. He cannot come to terms with her intelligence and beauty and lives in constant fear of her escaping him. The solution for Cagliostro is to force Lorenza to live in a hypnotized state where she agrees to love him and live her life within the confines of his prison-like home. His misogynistic view of women does not allow the fantasy of courtly love to fully develop, as he cannot truly honor Lorenza while she is in a dreamlike state devoid of real emotion. His involvement in revolutionary plots and the occult interferes with their marriage, and she is left alone and vulnerable in his hands. The legitimacy of Cagliostro and Lorenza’s marriage is called into question by Dumas, who writes a lengthy passage in which Lorenza describes her abduction by Cagliostro. She tells Louise de France that she woke up in a wedding dress after being unconscious for three days time. She herself is a devout Catholic, while Cagliostro is a sorcerer. Their two worlds never fit together on any level and show the incompatibility of the Ancien Régime with the new Republican thought.

In The Knight of Maison Rouge, the relationship of Maurice Lindey and Geneviève Dixmer poses an interesting question concerning the concept of courtly love. In the beginning their relationship fit the definition of a knight falling for a married woman. She is unattainable for him at first, which only stimulates his interest in her. Two problems exist for them, however: first, Maurice is not technically an aristocrat, although he is described by Dumas as:

“…enfant de cette demi aristocratie accordée aux gens de robe. Ses aïeux avaient marque, depuis deux cent ans, par cette éternelle opposition parlementaire qui a illustré les noms des Mole et des Maupeou. Son père, le bonhomme Lindey, qui avait passé toute sa vie à gémir contre le despotisme, lorsque, le 14 juillet 1789, la Bastille était tombée aux mains du peuple, était mort de saisissement et d’épouvante de voir le despotisme remplacé par une liberté militante, laissant son
…a child of that deminobility to which those belonging to the legal profession—the Robe—had been promoted. For the past two hundred years, his ancestors had invariably belonged to the parliamentary opposition that had made the names Mole and Maupeou famous. His father, Lindey senior, had spent his life attacking despotism but when, suddenly, on 14 July 1789, the Bastille fell to the hands of the people he died of shock and horror to see despotism replaced by militant liberty. His death left his only son independent of fortune and republican by inclination.” (Dumas 34-5)

He is also described as being present at several key battles in the early stages of the Revolution, leading to a fundamental difference in political convictions between the two. Second, they do eventually consummate their relationship which leads to their downfall when their affair is discovered by Dixmer. It is interesting to note, however, that Dumas points to some inner struggle on Maurice’s part concerning the strength of his political ties. In the chapter in The Knight of Maison Rouge entitled “What King of Man Maurice Lindey Was”, Dumas writes,

“…Il y a plus: Maurice, le sourcil fonce par une sombre colère, l’œil dilate, le front pale, le cœur étreint par un singulier mélange de haine morale et de pitié physique, assista le sabre au poing a l’exécution du roi, et, seul peut-être dans toute cette foule, demeura muet, lorsque tomba la tête de ce fils de Saint Louis, dont l’âme montait au ciel ; seulement, lorsque cette tête fut tombé, il leva en l’air son redoutable sabre, et tous ses amis crièrent : “Vive la liberté!” sans remarquer que, cette fois par exception, sa voix ne s’était pas mêlée aux leurs.” (Dumas 1281)

“There is more: with his brow furrowed by a somber rage, his eyes wild, face pale, heart seized by a singular mix of moral hatred and physical pity, Maurice was there, sword in hand, at the execution of the King; and perhaps alone in all that crowd, he remained silent when the head of this son of Saint Louis, whose soul rose to heaven, fell and all his friends cried out: “Long live liberty!” They did
not notice that, though Maurice raised his fearsome sword in the air, this time, for once, his voice did not mingle with theirs.” (Dumas 36-7)

It is clear that Dumas was leaving the door open for Maurice to be converted later on in the novel, or rather to have the courage to do what he truly felt was right instead of putting self-preservation ahead of everything else. Whether or not he actually gave up his republican convictions, he is found to be a traitor by his association with Geneviève and therefore, in the eyes of the revolutionaries becomes a royalist. As in the case of Cagliostro and Lorenza, Maurice and Geneviève are star-crossed. The social and political circumstances surrounding them make their relationship impossible. For both couples, the death of one or both partners brings a tragic end to their struggles.

Another example of courtly love exists in the relationships between Ange Pitou and Catherine Billot in Ange Pitou. Although Catherine is not married, she is deeply in love with Isidor de Charny, the youngest of the de Charny brothers who belong to the aristocratic family that is devoted to the king and queen’s service. Pitou cannot compete with Isidor’s looks and gallantry. His love for Catherine is pure. He desires to protect her and is intimidated by her beauty and kindness. In the following passage, Catherine tries to reassure Pitou after he realizes that she is in love with Isidor:

“Ah! mon Dieu!” dit Catherine, “qu’avez-vous donc, Pitou?”

“J’ai,” répondit le pauvre garçon, “que je n’oserai jamais danser avec vous, après vous avoir vu danser avec monsieur de Charny.”

“Bah!” dit Catherine, “il ne faut pas vous démoraliser comme cela; vous danserez comme vous pourrez, et je n’en aurai pas moins de plaisir à danser avec vous.”

“Ah!” dit Pitou, “vous dites cela pour me consoler, mademoiselle; mais je me rends justice, et vous aurez toujours plus de plaisir à danser avec ce jeune noble qu’avec moi.”
“Ah! Good heaven!” she exclaimed, “what is the matter with you, Pitou?”

“The matter is,” replied the poor youth, “that I shall never dare to dance with you, after having seen you dance with Monsieur de Charny.”

“Pshaw!” said Catherine, “you must not allow yourself to be cast down in this way; you will dance as well as you are able, and I shall not feel the less pleasure in dancing with you.”

“Ah!” cried Pitou, “you say that, Mademoiselle, to console me; but I know myself, and I feel assured that you will always feel more pleasure in dancing with this young nobleman than with me.”

Catherine made no reply, for she would not utter a falsehood, only, as she was an excellent creature, and had begun to perceive that something extraordinary was passing in the heart of the poor youth, she treated him very kindly; but this kindness could not restore to him his lost joy and peace of mind. Father Billot had spoken truly: Pitou was beginning to be a man—he was suffering.” (Dumas 96)

Unfortunately for Pitou, Catherine is won over by Isidor, with whom she runs away and has a child. Pitou is distraught by her love for Isidor, but never has the courage to pursue her. His aunt Angelique mistakenly believes that Pitou and Catherine are engaging in a secret affair and insults Catherine. Pitou comes to her defense, showing his strong moral character and purity of feeling:

“Ah! malheureux! vous voyez bien que vous étiez avec elle.”

“Mais ma tante,” reprit Ange rougissant, “il ne s’agit point ici de mademoiselle Billot.”

“Oui, appelle-la mademoiselle, pour cacher ton jeu impur! mais j’avertirai son confesseur, à cette mijaurée!”

“Mais, ma tante, je vous jure que mademoiselle Billot n’est pas une mijaurée!”
“Ah! vous la défendez quand c’est vous qui avez besoin d’excuse. Bien, vous vous entendez! de mieux en mieux. Où allons-nous, mon Dieu!...Des enfants de seize ans!”

“Ma tante, bien au contraire que nous nous entendions avec Catherine, c’est Catherine qui me chasse toujours.”

“Ah! vous voyez bien que vous vous coupez! Voila que vous l’appellez Catherine tout court, maintenant! Oui, elle vous chasse, hypocrite…quand on la regarde.” (Dumas 684-685)

“Ah, wretch! you see that you were with her!”

“But, Aunt,” rejoined Pitou, blushing, “Mademoiselle Billot has nothing to do with this affair.”

“Yes, call her mademoiselle, in order to conceal your impure conduct. But I will let this minx’s confessor know all about it.”

“But, Aunt, I swear to you that Mademoiselle Billot is not a minx.”

“Ah! you defend her, when it is you that stand in need of being excused. Oh yes, you understand each other better and better. What are we coming to, good heaven! and children only sixteen years old.”

“Aunt, so far from there being any understanding between me and Catherine, it is Catherine who always drives me away from her.”

“Ah! you see you are cutting your own throat; for now you call her Catherine, right out. Yes, she drives you away from her, hypocrite, when people are looking at you.” (Dumas 52)

This is another example of unrequited love in Dumas’ series, but not the last. The chivalry associated with Pitou’s affection for Catherine comes in his resolve to love her from afar while knowing that she will not return his feelings. Unlike Gilbert, who vows revenge as a result of Andrée’s rejection, Pitou remains honorable in his behavior toward Catherine. Although Pitou is not an aristocrat, he shows chivalry in his behavior toward Catherine. Pitou himself goes from a being a child of nature to embracing the republican
ideals brought back from America by Gilbert. Eventually, he and Catherine’s father leave their small town and go to Paris just in time to take part in the storming of the Bastille.

A parallel example of unrequited love that remains chivalrous is found in the relationship between the Cardinal de Rohan and Marie Antoinette. As in real life, Dumas portrays the Cardinal de Rohan as seeking favor with the queen. In *The Marie Antoinette Romances*, and in particular in *The Queen’s Necklace*, the Cardinal de Rohan is depicted as being in love with Marie Antoinette and is overjoyed with the thought of being invited to court and acknowledged by her. His vanity gets the better of him and he is completely duped by Madame de la Motte into believing that if he puts down a large sum of money to secure the diamond necklace that Marie Antoinette has been longing for, he will earn his way into her good graces. In a twist on the traditional notion of courtly love, the cardinal’s true love and devotion for the queen is proven at the end of the novel when he willingly goes to the Bastille instead of substantiating Madame de la Motte’s story about their clandestine meetings. Marie Antoinette never forgives him for his participation in the affair, but the Cardinal can never find fault with the queen despite her loathing of him.

An abundance of Dumas’ characters are involved in love triangles where the emotions, though genuine, do not always guarantee mutual adoration. Sometimes relationships between male and female characters are destined to fail because of the social and political circumstances that surround them. Such relationships are often made more complex set against the complications of a political and social shift which challenge the ability of those involved to find their own identity/social status. In particular, female
characters face difficulty in finding their place in the social order once the Revolution begins.

As was previously mentioned, a study of Lorenza’s character reveals that Dumas was attempting to portray a strong woman who could not escape her terrible fate. There is a great difference in the male and female characters in the *Marie Antoinette Romances* concerning their ability to move beyond their surrounding circumstances. Their portrayal by Dumas reflects the misogynistic nature of the Revolution. For the most part, the female characters fight bravely but are at the mercy of greater forces, while the men are the ones who make things happen. There is a notable contrast between the characters of Lorenza and Gilbert, for example. Both were for all sakes and purposes enslaved by higher powers-Lorenza by Cagliostro and Gilbert first by the de Taverney family at Maison-Rouge and then by the Comtesse Du Barry and her confidante Chon at Luciennes. Lorenza was no less determined to secure her freedom than Gilbert, but in the end it is he who does escape.

Gilbert, a follower of Rousseau and a philosopher himself, believes in personal liberty. He is the physical embodiment of Rousseau’s ideas, while Nicole and Lorenza represent the lack of equality between men and women during the Revolution. Lynn Hunt writes in detail about the division of gender roles in *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, citing Rousseau as a primary source of being against the influence of women in society. In his *Letter to M. d’Alembert on the Theater* (1758), Rousseau warned of the feminization of men in theatrical productions. According to Hunt, there was a common belief at the time that “the two sexes were unequal in nature, and destroying this natural order would have nefarious consequences.” (Hunt 91) She goes on to describe the role
Marie Antoinette and other famous female members of the Court played in influencing the social order:

“With her strategic position on the cusp between public and private, Marie-Antoinette was emblematic of the much larger problem of the relation between women and the public sphere in the eighteenth century. This issue, as Rousseau himself argued, concerned not only the specific status of women but also the grounds of sexual differentiation itself. Women in public might turn men into women, Rousseau warned ominously. Such concerns took very concrete form in the underground pamphlets published against the influence of Louis XV’s mistresses, the marquise de Pompadour and especially the countess Du Barry. According to pamphlets such as *Les Fastes de Louis XV* (1782), the rising influence of such women on public life feminized both the king’s ministers and the king himself, who was depicted as drawing into a ‘private, slothful and voluptuous life’.” (Hunt 90)

This dragging down of the king into a “private, slothful and voluptuous life” was exactly what Marie Antoinette represented to the French people before the onset of the Revolution. She was depicted as spending money foolishly while being completely out of touch with her subjects’ misery. Her elaborate dresses and hairstyles, along with her escapism to le Petit Trianon and le Hameau gave the impression that she was playing a theatrical role and made a mockery of the monarchy. She was depicted as having an influence on Louis XVI in politics while he remained weak.

This division of the roles of men and women that Rousseau wrote about was shown by Dumas on all levels of society in *The Marie Antoinette Romances*. In Dumas’ series, Nicole sees herself as the equal to Gilbert, who outwardly scoffs at her but inwardly fears her ambition. Both characters desire to overcome their lower station in life, and they both succeed. Gilbert achieves this end through formal education while Nicole does so by manipulating men with her physical charms in a similar way to Marie Antoinette in the pamphlets.
Nicole, unlike the other female characters in the series, is also content to achieve success within the parameters that she is given. She in a sense sells herself by using her feminine wiles to seduce powerful men who in turn act as her protectors. During the series, Nicole is in love with Beausire, but he is a swindler who physically abuses her. She allows Cagliostro to use her as a decoy, playing the role of Marie Antoinette in order to mislead people into thinking the queen is looking for trouble outside the palace. She also becomes Mirabeau’s much younger mistress just before his death at the start of the Revolution. By this time he has provided a sanctuary for her and her young son at his country estate. Nicole represents two ideas of women at the time of the Revolution—that their place was in the home, and that if left to their own devices they would be seen as prostitutes, an image that trickled down from the debauchery associated with the queen. She knows that she can be prosperous through her ability to rise above her social status by playing up her sexual attractiveness.

It is said that Marie Antoinette’s involvement in politics did not begin until the outbreak of the Revolution. It is clear that Dumas’ writing reflected the public outlook towards Marie Antoinette and her influence over Louis. In a scene from Ange Pitou she insists on being present at a meeting between the king and Gilbert during which they intend to discuss what the king’s actions should be concerning his possible appearance in Paris after the storming of the Bastille. She will not be denied by the king, and goes so far as to sit down as a matter of showing him that she has no intention of taking no for an answer. The queen takes over the meeting, essentially emasculating him. In the following exchange, Dumas shows Marie Antoinette’s insistence and Louis’ frustration:
“J’attendais le docteur,” repliqua le roi en s’assobrissant, pour causer politique avec lui.

“Ah! fort bien!” dit la reine. Et elle s’assit comme pour écouter.

“Venez, docteur,” reprit le roi en se dirigeant vers la porte.

Gilbert salua profondément la reine et se prépara à suivre Louis XVI.

“Où allez-vous?” s’écria la reine; “quoi! vous partez?”...

“Sire,” répondit Gilbert, “puisque la reine provoque elle-même la vérité, puisque je sais l’esprit de Sa Majesté assez noble et assez puissant pour ne la pas craindre, je préfère parler devant mes deux souverains.”…

 “…Tout cela c’est fort beau,” continua le roi, qui s’entêtait, suivant sa coutume; “mais enfin la question est délicate, et je sais bien que, quant à moi, vous m’embarrassez beaucoup.”

La reine ne put retenir un mouvement d’impatience; elle se leva, puis se rassit en plongeant son regard rapide et froid dans la pensée du docteur.

Louis XVI, voyant qu’il ne restait aucun moyen d’échapper à la question ordinaire et extraordinaire, s’assit avec un gros soupir dans son fauteuil en face de Gilbert.” (Dumas 931-932)

“I was waiting for the doctor,” replied the king, looking gloomy, “to speak politics with him.”

“Ah! very well,” said the queen.

And she seated herself as if to listen.

“Come, Doctor,” rejoined the king, taking a step towards the door.

Gilbert made a profound bow to the queen, and was about to follow Louis XVI.

“Where are you going?” exclaimed the queen. “What! are you going to leave me?”…

“Sire,” replied Gilbert, “since the queen herself calls for the truth, and as I know her Majesty’s mind is sufficiently noble and powerful not to fear it, I prefer to speak in presence of both my sovereigns.”…

“All this is very well,” continued the king, who was growing obstinate, according to his custom, “but in short, the question is a delicate one; and I know well that, as to myself, you will greatly embarrass me by being present.”
The queen could not withhold a gesture of impatience. She rose, then seated herself again, and darted a penetrating and cold look at the doctor, as if to divine his thoughts.

Louis XVI, seeing that there was no longer any means of escaping the ordinary and extraordinary inquisitorial question, seated himself in his armchair, opposite Gilbert, and heaved a deep sigh.” (Dumas 36-38)

Marie Antoinette’s involvement in politics goes in direct opposition to Rousseau’s philosophy of the inequality of the sexes. Her presence in political discourse alarms the king, but she clearly sees herself as being his equal in making decisions affecting the country. While Gilbert and Louis decide that it would be in the king’s best interest to make an appearance in Paris, Marie Antoinette is dead set against it, fearing his assassination. Although she tries to dissuade Louis from making the voyage into the capital, in the end her opinion is overruled by her husband and Gilbert.

While Marie Antoinette remained mostly at Versailles, she as queen was able to physically escape the monotony of the palace and court life in order to enjoy an occasional outing to Paris or a longer stay at the Petit Trianon. Lorenza, on the other hand, remained in captivity in Cagliostro’s home, with only a glimpse of the outside world. When these women do appear in public, it is almost always associated with scandal. The visitation of Marie Antoinette and Andrée to Madame de la Motte Valois leads to cases of mistaken identity and eventually to the Diamond Necklace Affair, while on a lesser scale Lorenza appearing at the police station leads to her downfall. She is intercepted by Cagliostro who redoubles his efforts to keep her hidden away from society in an attempt to prevent any further escape attempts on her part. Men are always able to penetrate the women’s world, whether physically or emotionally. Cagliostro never fails to show up and reclaim Lorenza just as she is about to beg for her freedom. He convinces
other men that he is all powerful and they succumb to his wishes by returning Lorenza to him. In another example, Gilbert rapes and impregnates Andrée, who is doomed to hide her shame throughout her marriage to Olivier de Charny. The irony of the men’s actions is that Dumas shows them as being in love with the women they outwardly appear to despise. On the other hand, the characters of Andrée and Lorenza can be seen as the most pure. The most that they wish for is freedom of thought and the ability to express themselves without fear of recrimination by Gilbert and Cagliostro, respectively. They show the way in which revolutionary thought left women behind. While the idea of fraternity was at work, women still had a long way to go to achieve the professed equality of Republicanism.

On rare occasions Dumas reverses the roles of the male and female characters, as in *Joseph Balsamo* in the chapter entitled “The Physician Against His Will” when Gilbert is held captive by the Comtesse du Barry. In this chapter, Dumas is reflecting Rousseau’s idea that it is unnatural for people to be enslaved. Try as she might, Mme du Barry is unsuccessful at keeping Gilbert prisoner in her home. Gilbert outwits Madame du Barry, runs away and regains his freedom from being forced into the aristocratic world. As he escapes, Gilbert pens a note to the countess that reads, “Madame—Liberty is the first of blessings. Man’s most sacred duty is to preserve it. You endeavored to enslave me—I set myself free.—Gilbert.” (Dumas 348) The Countess du Barry has a young black male slave from Chittagong (in what is now Bangladesh) named Zamore who she treats as a plaything and mockingly gives the title of Governor of Luciennes in a chapter called “Zamore’s
Commission”. In Dumas’ series, he does not escape his servitude. The real, historical Zamore denounced Madame du Barry to the Committee of Public Safety in 1792 and was instrumental in her arrest and execution. This was not addressed by Dumas in his series, as his last book focused on Marie Antoinette’s final days in prison and the efforts of the monarchists to launch escape plots. It is ironic, however, that Zamore escaped Mme du Barry, but that Mme du Barry did not escape the Revolution.

In *The Marie Antoinette Romances* series, both woman and servants were portrayed as playing an ornamental role. For example, in *Memoirs of a Physician* and *Joseph Balsamo*, Gilbert is at once fascinated and disgusted by both Nicole and Andrée. He views Nicole as beautiful but common. Gilbert cannot escape his attraction to Andrée, who is out of his league and treats him as a sort of lower-class adoptive brother who is at best to be tolerated and at worst, despised. Her beauty and lack of respect for him drive Gilbert to distraction and eventually to resentment and hatred throughout the series. In a similar way, Cagliostro is completely in love with Lorenza, but he treats her like an object to be possessed rather than someone he truly loves. In both relationships, the women come to be repulsed by the men who try to subdue them and the couplings are doomed to fail. In the case of Mirabeau and Nicole, she is propositioned by him to be his lover in exchange for his financial support. Mirabeau was infamous for his libertinage but did not suffer the same degree of criticism as Marie Antoinette, who was accused of the same behavior. This can be seen as a metaphor for the Revolution itself. Relegating women to a place of inferiority dooms the cause to fail.

The image of the bad mother is another phenomena associated with women during the French Revolution according to Lynn Hunt. In *The Family Romance of the*
French Revolution, she takes into consideration the image of father and mother normally afforded the King and Queen and how they translated to men and women in general. Hunt describes the way in which the ideas of liberté, égalité and fraternité required the patricide of the father figure in order to be realized. Even if reluctant to kill the father figure/king, revolutionaries had to do so in order to spread republican ideals. The Terror, she adds, was a means of creating enemies and forcing them into submission. This is the same unifying factor used in the pamphlets that demonized Marie Antoinette as discussed by Thomas in previous chapters. Hunt goes on to point out that “queens in France had no status as actors in their own right, since women could not inherit the throne. They could act as regents for their underage sons but could not hold power in their own names. Yet French queens often attracted considerable attention—usually negative attention. As in the case of Marie Antoinette, they were often foreign and frequently portrayed as evil influences. They never seemed to qualify as mothers of the people.” (Hunt 89) The distrust of the outsider queen translated to a bad mother figure, which is precisely where the pamphlets lead by defaming her image publicly. According to Hunt, “The question of Marie Antoinette and the issue of the status of women more generally were closely connected, even though Marie Antoinette herself probably had no interest in women’s rights and the early French feminists had little concern for the queen. The two issues were tied together, if only unconsciously, because the queen was the most important example of a woman acting in the public sphere.” (Hunt 89-90) So like it or not, in the same way that Marie Antoinette came to represent all that was wrong with the monarchy, she was also emblematic of the entire feminine sex and their place in revolutionary society.
In her book *Private Lives and Public Affairs*, Sarah Maza outlines the damage following the Diamond Necklace Affair to the image of the Queen and consequently to the image of French women in general. Maza cites several popular pamphlets of the time which served to implicate Marie Antoinette in scandalous sexual behavior in the years after the Diamond Necklace Affair. Two such publications were *La Reine dévoilée* (1789) and *Essais historiques sur la vie de Marie-Antoinette* (1783), the latter of which was published before the queen’s trial but gained new popularity in 1789 and beyond. In *Essais historiques sur la vie de Marie-Antoinette*, moonlight rendez-vous between the queen and her ladies-in-waiting “degenerated into orgies with the young princess and her friends and attendants swapping lovers in the gardens of the palace.” (Maza 208) The encounters included women from all classes, from women in the court down to servants. (Maza 208) The fact that the publisher made no distinction between the women based on class accustomed the public to the idea that all women were the same--debauched and morally corrupt.

Once the Revolution began and the ban on censorship was decreed, literature criticizing females in position of power circulated more easily. Maza points to a 500-page essay called *Les Crimes des reines de France*, which was published in 1791 by a woman named Louise de Keralio. According to Maza, “Keralio’s chronicle of the iniquities of female power begins in the dark ages, with the mind-boggling crimes of early queens like Frédégonde and Brunehaut, moves on to the “Italian vices” of Catherine and Marie de Médicis, and culminates in a denunciation of the worst of them all, the Austrian monster Antoinette. The introduction to the volume warns readers that if absolute power corrupts, absolute female power does so with a vengeance; ‘A woman for whom all is possible is
capable of anything’. ” (Maza 208) It is not the actual power but rather the public’s perception of this power that applies to Marie Antoinette. As was argued by Mme de Staël, the fickle nature of the public is frightening when it comes to political personalities, and especially to women, who are held to a different standard than men. While the King was the actual head of state in France, Marie Antoinette as queen consort was much more widely slandered in the press. The worst that could be said of the King was that he was incompetent and a cuckold. The Queen, however, was a vicious, sexually depraved demon who would stop at nothing to satisfy her lusts while simultaneously using her influence to rule behind the scenes.

In The French Revolution and Human Rights, Hunt discusses Olympe de Gouges, a feminist and abolitionist of the time, wrote about the stark contrast in the treatment of men and women presented in the The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. She wrote her own version, which she addressed to Marie Antoinette, called The Declaration of the Rights of Women in 1791 and was met with resistance by revolutionaries. She argued that women were left out of the Revolutionary ideals. (Her thinking reflected Enlightenment thought and she was associated with the Jacobins). In her list of rights, de Gouges contradicted Rousseau’s belief in the inequality of the sexes, beginning with the argument that “woman is born free and remains equal to man in rights”. (Hunt 125) The other rights are essentially rewritten from the original Declaration of the Rights of Man, requiring that women be considered as having inalienable rights in the same way that men were. The most striking part of de Gouges’ Declaration of the Rights of Women is found in the postscript and the subsequent sample “form for a social contract between men and women” that she included at the end of the declaration. The postscript begins,
“Women; wake up; the tocsin of reason sounds throughout the universe; recognize your rights. . . .Oh women! Women, when will you cease to be blind? What advantages have you gathered in the revolution? A scorn more marked, a disdain more conspicuous”. She goes on to put some of the blame on women for their state of affairs: “Women have done more harm than good. Constraint and dissimulation have been their lot. What force has taken from them, ruse returned to them; they have had recourse to all the resources of their charms, and the most irreproachable man has not resisted them. Poison, the sword, women controlled everything; they ordered up crimes as much as virtues”. (Hunt 127) She calls upon women to unite and find their place in the Republic and not to sit idly by and accept the one that men were assigning to them.

In addition to women’s rights, de Gouges also was a champion in the cause of abolitionism. In 1788, she wrote a play called *Zamore and Mirza, ou l’heureux naufrage* about the possibility of achieving love across ethnic lines, a truly radical concept in the eighteenth century. She also wrote a play in 1790 called *Le Marché des Noirs* which dealt with the subject of slavery. Although de Gouges started out as a staunch supporter of human rights for all, she became disenchanted during the first years of the revolution by the exclusion of women in the republican ideal of equality. De Gouges was executed in 1793 after she published a paper criticizing Robespierre. Although not a royalist, Olympe de Gouges suffered the same fate as Marie Antoinette and other aristocratic women who were considered to be enemies of the revolutionary cause. She was branded an “unnatural woman” and was made to serve as an example for other women who were considering following her the ideals outlined in *The Declaration of the Rights of Women*. 
As mentioned in *The French Revolution and Human Rights*, another feminist point of view regarding women’s rights came from Condorcet a year earlier, in July 1790. His essay was entitled “*On the Admission of Women to the Rights of Citizenship*”. He argued for equality of all citizens under the new Republic, including women, Protestants, and Jews, and advocated for the freeing of slaves and the end of the slave trade. (Condorcet cited in Hunt 119) He criticized the popular thinking of the philosophers by posing the following questions, “…have they all not violated the principle of equality of rights by quietly depriving half of mankind of the right to participate in the formation of the laws, by excluding women from the rights of citizenship? Is there a stronger proof of the power of habit even among enlightened men than seeing the principle of equality of rights invoked in favor of three or four hundred men deprived of their rights by an absurd prejudice and at the same time forgetting those rights when it comes to twelve million women?” (Hunt 119-120) An opposing point of view came from Louis-Marie Prudhomme, a publisher of radical pamphlets before the Revolution. He wrote an article called “*On the Influence of the Revolution on Women*”, which not surprisingly contained a lengthy dissertation of the evils of the women at court, especially the Kings’ mistresses (Madame du Barry for one) and Marie Antoinette. His provocative text included the following passage:

“The reign of the courtesans precipitated the ruin of the nation; the empire of queens consummated it. We saw a prince [Louis XV], too quickly loved by the people, degrade his character in the arms of several women [his mistresses] without modesty, and become, following the example of Nebuchadnezzar, a brute who wallowed with a disgusting cynicism in the filth of the dirtiest pleasures. We saw his successor [Louis XVI] share with the public his infatuation with a young, lively, and frivolous princess [Marie Antoinette], who began by shaking off the yoke of etiquette as if practicing for one day shattering that of the laws. Soon following the lessons of her mother [Maria Theresa, empress of Austria], she
profited from her ascendancy over little things to interfere in great ones and to influence the destiny of an entire people…” (Prudhomme cited in Hunt 130)

There is an obvious contrast between the inflammatory language of Prudhomme and the feminist writings of Olympe de Gouges and Condorcet. Both sides provided insight into the fate of women from the queen on down in the eyes of the men devoted to the republican cause. De Gouges and Condorcet do more than simply outline the condition of women and their right to equality. They also called upon women as a group to take their fate into their own hands. Prudhomme, on the other hand, wrote provocative text that pointed to the aristocratic women as the root of evil in society. Prudhomme takes a back-handed approach to women’s rights. Instead of likening all women to prostitutes as he did the queen, the former pamphleteer essentially condescends to describe women as children who never grow up, and identifies their role in the Revolution as one best fought from the home, through the education of children and support of husbands. (Prudhomme cited in Hunt 131) He writes, “Destined to pass all of their lives confined under the paternal roof or in the house of their marriage; born to a perpetual dependence from the first moment of their existence until that of their decease, they have only been endowed with private virtues….She need only know what her parents or her husband judge appropriate to teach her about everything that takes place outside her home.” (Prudhomme cited in Hunt 130-31)

The idea that a virtuous woman stays home while the men fight for the Republican cause is present throughout The Marie Antoinette Romances. Andrée de Taverney is portrayed as upholding her virtues more than any other female character in the series. Although she is of noble birth, her family has fallen into financial ruin, like so
many other aristocratic families. Once she has found the favor of Marie Antoinette as one of her ladies-in-waiting, Andrée is put in the position of marrying Olivier de Charny against his will in order to hide the queen’s affair with him. She is abandoned by de Charny almost immediately following their nuptials, and she goes directly to a convent, swearing to cut off all ties with the queen, who has ruined her life in order to protect herself. At a young age, she was raped by Gilbert, resulting in the conception of their son, Sebastien, who was forcibly taken from her immediately after his birth and raised by him. At the end of the series, Andrée is finally reunited with both her son and her estranged husband, who learns of her shame and realizes the suffering that she has endured both at the hands of Gilbert and of himself. Olivier sees Marie Antoinette as a selfish woman who used Andrée, and leaves her to reunite with his wife and finally declare his love for her after many years. Olivier is the only male character in the Marie Antoinette series that rejects the queen and chooses a more virtuous woman. Rather than condemning Andrée for her past, Olivier pities her and begs her forgiveness. The two are reunited and begin a real marriage after years of estrangement. Others, such as the orator Barnave and Philippe de Taverney, are never granted more than a passing flirtation from Marie Antoinette, yet they are the men who seem to be the least likely to see her for what she really is—a powerful, beautiful woman with selfish motives who is accustomed to getting what she wants.

Dumas portrays Marie Antoinette as being remorseful in a scene where she visits Andrée in the convent in order to explain why she forced her to marry Olivier. In reality, she was acting to save her own reputation as a seemingly virtuous queen. Andrée performs the sacrifice required of her by Marie Antoinette, but she suffers greatly
because of it and their former relationship of friendship turns into one that Andrée merely tolerates out of a sense of duty to the crown.

The image of the bad mother is another phenomenon associated with women during the French Revolution, according to Lynn Hunt. In *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, she takes into consideration the image of father and mother normally afforded the King and Queen and how they translated to men and women in general.

Hunt was following Freudian philosophy when assigning the role of the once good father gone bad to Louis XVI. In assessing the image of the king during the pre-revolutionary period, Hunt points to his public humiliation in the form of engravings and literature in which he was likened to a pig, a cuckold and an impotent husband. (Hunt 49) The ideas that one can be impotent and a father do not go hand in hand. His physical inability to consummate his marriage early on was forever entwined with his image as an incompetent monarch/father figure. Further complicating this image was Marie Antoinette’s reputation for extramarital affairs with both sexes. Notwithstanding the hatred of the monarchy at the time, it was not a foregone conclusion that the king should be executed. Along with being considered a father figure, the king was believed to be consecrated by God, and therefore beyond the reach of human jurisdiction. The Republicans had to come to grips with killing their father figure king in order to carry out their philosophical ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity.

With the revolutionary idea of fraternity came the question of how and if women fit into the picture. Hunt defines the idea of family romance as “the collective, unconscious images of the familial order that underlie revolutionary politics”. (Hunt xiii) Hunt writes,
“The republic had displayed its antipatriarchal direction: the political father had been killed, and ordinary father had been subjected to the constraints of the law or replaced by the authority of the state. As the radical revolution proceeded, the drama of the father disappeared from center stage, to be replaced by tensions about the nature of fraternal bonds and the place of women in the new republic. Was the family romance of fraternity to be a romance in which the brothers united gloriously to fight their common enemies or a tragedy of conflict and division? Were women the trophies of the victory, the dangerous harpies of division, the help meets in struggle, the ideal representatives of virtue, or simply to be ignored? If the father was now absent, should one or more of the sons be imagined as taking his place, or would they remain brothers?” (Hunt 67)

Following Hunt’s line of argument, if Marie Antoinette were to serve as the example for French women--that is to say as the mother figure of all mother figures--she would naturally be the one looked to for the answers to these questions. When considering the role of the pamphlets and the manner in which the ultimate mother figure/queen was incriminated in print, then eventually in reality, one begins to wonder if women in general were left behind in revolutionary thought. As was previously discussed, part of Marie Antoinette’s trial was based on trumped up accusations of incest, the worst possible charges that could be brought against a mother.

The role of Marie Antoinette as mother is only addressed by Dumas towards the end of the series during her incarceration. Of course, he was writing an historical romance, so the role of mother would naturally take a back seat to that of monarch and wife and/or lover. Dumas finally portrays Marie Antoinette’s actual relationship with her children in The Knight of Maison-Rouge, as she is imprisoned in the Temple with her young daughter and son following the execution of Louis XVI. He uses this novel to focus on the self-awareness that Marie Antoinette finally reached and her redemption in the eyes of the reader. She has lost her husband and her former lovers and is faced with
imminent death. In the face of these life changing circumstances, Marie Antoinette finally realizes who she is. In The Knight of Maison Rouge, Dumas describes the queen’s reaction to the death decree that was issued to her by the Tribunal as follows:

“She listened without blanching, without batting an eyelid, without giving any appearance of emotion. Then, she turned to the Knight and addressed a long and eloquent gaze to him, as though to thank this man whom she had never seen other than as a monument of devotion. Then, leaning on the arm of the officer of the gendarmerie who commanded the armed forces, she walked out of the tribunal, calm and dignified.” (Dumas 338-9)

Dumas’ portrayal of Marie Antoinette precedes Stefan Zweig’s assessment of her character when Zweig concluded that the queen’s realization of her historical significance came once she was denied her freedom and understood her situation to be hopeless. (Zweig 270) Zweig describes the change in Marie Antoinette as she emerges into maturity: “the new Marie Antoinette is as remote from the old one as unhappiness is from happiness, despair from overweening confidence. It is upon soft and malleable minds, upon persons who by nature are inchoate and pliable, that unhappiness stamps its imprint most clearly. In this case, a character that seemed unstable as water acquired the fixity, the firmness of ice. “When will you at length become your true self?” had been, again and again, the distressful question of Maria Theresa. Now, when the hair on her temples was beginning to turn gray, Marie Antoinette was developing into her true self.” (Zweig 275) She is quoted as saying, “Tribulation first makes one realize what one is.” (Zweig
This transformation also fulfils one of Peter Brooks’ criteria for melodrama—that of conversion and redemption.

In real life, Marie Antoinette’s feelings for her children are well-documented. She suffered a great deal with the deaths of two of her children, one in infancy and the other just before the start of the Revolution. However, it is documented that Marie Antoinette also experienced great joy from being a mother. In Marie Antoinette, La dernière reine, Evelyne Lever mentions several first-hand accounts of Marie Antoinette’s relationships with her children following their births and sadly, during times of ill health. Lever writes, “La reine ne fut pas une reine heureuse. Sa fille, Madame Royale, était hautaine et revêche. Le dauphin tomba gravement malade. Elle re porta tout son amour sur son second fils (le futur Louis XVII) qu’elle appelait “son chou d’amour”.” (Lever 120)

In a letter to Mme de Tourzel, the new governess to the Children of France, dated July 24, 1789, Marie Antoinette wrote with great pride and emotion about Louis Charles, the young dauphin. An excerpt from the text is as follows:

“Mon fils a quatre ans quatre mois moins deux jours...il est bon enfant, tendre et caressant même, quand son étourderie ne l’emporte pas. Il a un amour-propre démesure qui, en le conduisant bien, peut tourner un jour à son avantage. Jusqu’à ce qu’il soit bien à son aise avec quelqu’un, il sait prendre sur lui, et même dévorer ses impatiences et colères, pour paraître doux et aimable. Il est d’une grande fidélité quand il a promis une chose ; mais il est très indiscret ; il répète aisément ce qu’il a entendu dire ; et souvent, sans vouloir mentir, il y ajoute ce que son imagination lui fait voir. C’est son plus grand défaut et sur lequel il faut bien le corriger. Du reste, je le répète, il est bon enfant ; et avec de la sensibilité, et en même temps de la fermeté, sans être trop sévère, on fera toujours de lui ce qu’il voudra. Mais la sévérité le révolterait, car il a beaucoup de caractère pour son âge. Et, pour en donner un exemple, des sa plus petite enfance, le mot « pardon » l’a toujours choqué. Il fera et dira tout ce qu’il voudra quand il a tort ; mais le mot pardon, il ne le prononce qu’avec des larmes et des peines infinies. On a toujours accoutumé mes enfants à avoir grande confiance en moi, et, quand ils ont eu des torts, à me le dire eux-mêmes. Cela fait qu’en les grondant, j’ai l’air
plus peinée et affligée de ce qu’ils on fait que fâchée. Je les ai accoutumés tous à
cel que oui ou non prononce par moi est irrévocable ; mais je leur donne toujours
une raison à la portée de leur âge, pour qu’ils ne puissent pas croire que c’est
humeur de ma part. Mon fils ne sait pas lire et apprend fort mal ; mais il est trop
étourdi pour s’appliquer. Il n’a aucune idée de hauteur dans la tête, et je désire
pour que cela continue : nos enfants apprennent toujours assez tôt ce qu’ils sont. Il
aime sa sœur beaucoup, et a bon cœur. Toutes les fois qu’une chose lui fait plaisir,
soit d’aller quelque part ou qu’on lui donne quelque chose, son premier
mouvement est toujours de demander pour sa sœur de même. Il est ne gai ; il a
besoin pour santé d’être beaucoup à l’air, et je crois qu’il vaut mieux le laisser
jouer et travailler à la terre sur les terrasses que de le mener plus loin. L’exercice
que les petits enfants prennent en courant et jouant à l’air est plus sain que d’être
forces à marcher, ce qui souvent leur fatigue les reins.” (Lever 123)

Reading this letter, one can sense the profound love that Marie Antoinette had for
her young son. It can therefore be substantiated that Marie Antoinette was an
affectionate, dedicated mother who cared deeply for her children and suffered
considerably during her lifetime with their sickness and eventual maltreatment in prison.
Dumas sustained a portrait of the queen’s emotional strife in The Knight of Maison
Rouge in the chapter entitled “The Temple”. In this chapter, he combined melodramatic
elements and failed escape plots to sustain the horror of a child being forcibly taken from
its mother.

The female characters Dumas’ Marie Antoinette Romances represent the
polarization associated with societal change during the Revolution either by playing a
virtuous, traditional role or by acting in their own self-interest. The interaction of the
female characters with male characters leads to their absolution and elevation if the men
were chivalrous, or conversely to their struggle and downfall when facing men who
adhere to a more republican, misogynistic philosophy. However, for most of the women
in the Marie Antoinette Romances, the introduction of men willing to protect them does
not guarantee their deliverance. The struggle of the traditional aristocratic nobleman against the new republican ideals was a lost cause, much in the way the Ancien Régime lost out to the Revolutionary forces. Together, women in Dumas represented the multifaceted side of politics and the struggle to gain equality when the long-established court traditions of the Ancien Régime and new ideals of the Nation collided. Dumas’ influence in portraying strong feminine characters is seen in modern interpretations of Marie Antoinette’s story, such as Chantal Thomas’ Farewell, My Queen, which demonstrates the effects of the Revolution on secondary female characters and their significance in the breakdown of aristocratic society from the point of view of those surrounding the queen on a daily basis. The place of women in both revolutionary and post-revolutionary society took on new dimension. With the ideas of liberté, égalité and fraternité being circulated, the concept of equality for all people came into question. During Marie Antoinette’s trial, the accusations of incest by the Revolutionary Tribunal prompted Mme de Staël to appeal to all the mothers of France for sympathy to the queen’s plight. Although it was too late to save Marie Antoinette, in the shadow of her death remained the question of who was to serve as a female role model to the new French nation.
Chapter 4 – Masks and Mistaken Identities/Doubles

One of the literary devices used by Dumas throughout *The Marie Antoinette Romances* series that is reminiscent of the theater is that of mistaken identity. Hiding true character identity was a tool widely used in eighteenth-century comedy. Beaumarchais, in *Le Mariage de Figaro*, had the roles of the Count and his servant Figaro confused throughout the play. Bested by Figaro, the Count is made to look foolish, fueling the increasingly popular public thought of undermining the aristocracy during the time preceding the revolution. Through his use of masks, disguises, and doubling Dumas transferred the use of mistaken identity from the play to the nineteenth-century novel. Based in the reality of the Diamond Necklace Affair where the prostitute Madame d’Oliva was mistaken for the queen having a secret rendez-vous in the gardens at Versailles with the Cardinal de Rohan, doubling is rampant in the ongoing plot that Dumas constructed. In Peter Brooks’ definition, masks are often associated with melodrama. Hiding and exchanging characters’ identities gives the reader a feeling that things are not always what they seem, and that something subversive is going on in the plot. In the grander scheme of things, Dumas also uses masks and mistaken identities to emphasize the perceived debauchery of the monarchy that was criticized by those trying to overthrow it and used as an excuse to question its legitimacy.

Throughout the series, masks and doubles appear as a means to cause confusion and drive the plot in a cyclical fashion towards eventual resolution. The twists and turns associated with mistaken and hidden identities allow for otherwise unacquainted historical figures to meet in person. The idea of masks that hid identity or of a person physically resembling someone who actually existed afforded Dumas the ability to
involve fictitious characters in the story line. Several examples of masks and mistaken identity exist throughout *The Marie Antoinette Romances*. From the first book, we are introduced to Nicole LeGay, a dead ringer for Marie Antoinette who also happens to be an opportunist and social climber. She is the servant and rival of Andrée de Taverney—she once had an affair with Gilbert—and accompanies her to live at Versailles. Before leaving for Versailles, she is discovered by Cagliostro at Maison-Rouge, the de Taverney family home. He sees an opportunity to use Nicole in his schemes to ruin Marie Antoinette’s reputation. When Cagliostro next meets Nicole years later in Paris, she has changed her name from Legay to d’Oliva in an attempt to separate herself from her past life. There is a scene where Nicole, a natural blonde, changes her hair color so that she will be able to work for Andrée at Versailles and not be mistaken for Marie Antoinette, who she closely resembles. The physical transformation accompanies the changes in Nicole’s aspirations. She is vain by nature and is pleased by the attention she gets and as a member of the lower classes, is happy to benefit from her looks for social gain. Under the influence of Cagliostro, Nicole and her tempestuous lover Beausire become involved in various plots to bring shame to the queen. Most significantly, Nicole/Oliva is one of the key players in the Diamond Necklace Affair.

*The Queen’s Necklace* is the book in the Dumas’ series dealing with the Diamond Necklace Affair and therefore affords the author with many opportunities to outline the deception associated with the plot. Perhaps the most obvious use of masks and mistaken identity comes in *The Queen’s Necklace* in a chapter entitled “The Ball at the Opera”. In this chapter Dumas places the characters of Cagliostro, Nicole/Oliva, Madame de la Motte and the Cardinal de Rohan at a masked ball dressed in different colored dominoes.
As is so often the case in The Marie Antoinette Romances, it is Cagliostro who is behind the trickery. He calls forth his knowledge of Nicole’s past love affair with Gilbert to gain her trust. She is shocked and saddened by hearing his name after so long a time has passed. The sorcerer promises her riches if she plays along with his charade, and she agrees. Once he is in her good graces, Cagliostro uses her resemblance to Marie Antoinette to fool the Cardinal de Rohan into believing that she was communicating with him in German through an interpreter. The cardinal believes the mysterious woman to be Marie Antoinette, and unknowingly gives away his interest in the queen to Cagliostro and to Madame de la Motte, who is also disguised. Throughout the scene, Cagliostro is the only character who is aware of all of the other characters’ true identities. He is continually shown as being all-knowing and uses his words to convince others that he is someone who is dangerous and not to be questioned. By hiding the faces of the characters in this scene, Dumas creates uncertainty which leads to the successful execution of Cagliostro’s diabolical plot to permanently damage Marie Antoinette’s reputation.

In The Queen’s Necklace, in a different chapter called “Faces Underneath Their Masks” Dumas begins with the following line, “Deux hommes se trompent en se donnant la main. Un homme et une femme se trompent dans un baiser. Mais ici chacun ne trompait l’autre parce que l’autre voulait être trompé. Chacun avait un but. Pour ce but, l’intimité était nécessaire.” (Dumas 336) “Two men often deceive each other as they shake hands, a man and a woman as they kiss; but here, each only deceived the other because they wished to be deceived: each had an end to gain, and for that end intimacy was necessary.” (Dumas 261) Thus, there is a relationship between physical deception
and achieving goals in the plot of Dumas’ novels. Intertwined with the idea of masks and hidden intentions is the deception both within and across class lines. The Diamond Necklace Affair in particular was brought about by an intermingling of desires and deceptions. The vanity of the Cardinal de Rohan’s desire to be accepted socially by Marie Antoinette combined with the queen’s desire for extravagance set the stage for one of the greatest and most complex deceptions in history. In Dumas’ novel, as in real life, a double was used to lure the Cardinal de Rohan into the scheme. Playing upon the natural resemblance to the queen of a prostitute named Nicole d’Oliva, Madame de la Motte and her husband send her to meet the cardinal under cover of darkness in the park at Versailles. She fools the cardinal and he is convinced that if he puts up money for a down payment on the infamous necklace, he will be in her good graces. Of course, once it is learned that someone posing for Marie Antoinette has duped the cardinal, Marie Antoinette is outraged and the cardinal is convicted in the plot, along with Jeanne de la Motte Valois. The doubling of Marie Antoinette’s character by a low-class prostitute is particularly interesting. The image of the queen as a common whore is one that was picked up by the pamphleteers and grew more and more hostile after The Diamond Necklace Affair. Although the concept of queens and other aristocratic women being associated with debauchery was far from a new one, from this moment on, they were inextricably linked. Interestingly, Dumas does not ever mention that the real Nicole was actually a prostitute. Instead, she is shown as an ambitious and unscrupulous girl who wants to achieve monetary gain through deception. In this case, Dumas is detaching Marie Antoinette’s image from that of a whore that was so widely accepted in the pamphlets and during the Diamond Necklace Affair. In fact, Dumas repeatedly shows
the queen as being a victim of the pre-revolutionary movement to break with the monarchy.

There is, however a link between the role of a prostitute and Marie Antoinette if one views both from a theatrical standpoint. Besides performing sexual acts, prostitutes play a role to please their audience in a similar way that an actor or an actress would. Marie Antoinette was often caught up in escapism as she fled the court for her sanctuary at Le Petit Trianon, dressing up in rustic attire, which actually caused a fashion trend. Le Hameau was constructed as the representation of an English village, complete with a working farm, animals and country cottages, a playground for the queen and her closest friends. During these outings, removed from the palace, Marie Antoinette often performed in plays. Recalling Rousseau’s critique of women in the theater in his Lettre à M. d’Alembert sur les spectacles, one can see the way in which the queen being on stage lead to the emasculation of the king and confused the private life of the monarchy with one that centered around public exhibition. The actor/prostitute correlation could also be linked back to Marie Antoinette’s attempts to evade palace etiquette by running off to Le Petit Trianon. What could not be seen could only be imagined, and the public imagined lewd acts involving the queen and her friends taking place behind the king’s back. The mysterious, unknown side of Marie Antoinette was reflected in the use of masks and hidden identities in Dumas’ series.

In an earlier scene from The Queen’s Necklace, Jeanne de la Motte Valois recognizes Marie Antoinette at a séance being held at M. Mesmer’s residence. At the same time, Madame d’Oliva, her double, has been put in a trance by Mesmer and is being mistaken by many at the party for the queen. Since she is in the dubious physical position
of being out of control of her own body, the other partygoers begin to talk. It is at this moment that M. Reteau, the journalist decides to publish a pamphlet about the queen to calumniate her. Madame de la Motte is the only one at the party to see the real queen, and offers her own mask so that Marie Antoinette may escape unnoticed. Of course, Madame de la Motte wants an audience with the queen in exchange for her help, which is granted. Dumas uses the mask to protect the identity of the queen as she puts it on, while simultaneously revealing the true intentions of Madame de la Motte as she removes it. As the queen escapes in the mask that Madame de la Motte has given her, she says to herself, “Oh!...j’ai bien fait de faire ce que j’ai fait; mais pour la suite...réfléchissons.” (Dumas 178) “I have done right in this—for the rest I must consider.” (Dumas 142) This scene also illustrated the diabolical nature of both Madame de la Motte and the pamphleteers, who work together to damage Marie Antoinette’s image. The calling into question of the legitimacy of a queen who is seen publicly in a compromised state reflects the political situation in France in the years preceding the Revolution. Through Marie Antoinette’s character, Dumas may have also been questioning the legitimacy of the Restoration.

In the Diamond Necklace Affair, Nicole d’Oliva was the prostitute who doubled for Marie Antoinette in her clandestine meetings in the park of Versailles with the unwitting Cardinal de Rohan. Dumas expanded upon her significance in The Marie Antoinette Romances, using her to deceive several of the characters. One of the famous men represented in the series was Mirabeau, the well-known orator and notorious womanizer of the early revolutionary period. In The Countess de Charny, he is shown on a balcony trying to decide whether or not to rent a property outside Paris when he glimpses Nicole and her son in the garden next door. Upon first glance, he is convinced
that she is in fact the queen outdoors with her young son, but then realizes it is probably not her:

“This woman had not only the royal step, but as her lace veil flew aside, her features seemed those of Marie Antoinette. The child increased the resemblance; he was just the age of the second son of the queen. The gait, the countenance, the least movement of the queen, had remained so firmly fixed in the mind of Mirabeau, even since his first and last interview, that he believed he should have been able to have recognized her…How strange that in the park of the house of Mirabeau was about to rent, there should be a woman who, if she were not the queen, was so nearly her living portrait! The next day Mirabeau bought the chateau.” (Dumas 279)

Upon seeing her, Mirabeau is instantly smitten by Nicole and pursues her as his mistress. Never one to turn down a chance at upward mobility, she accepts and remains with him until his death in 1791.

In The Knight of Maison-Rouge, the last book in the series, Dumas hid the identity of the eponymous Knight under the cover of the character called Monsieur Morand, who is posing as a business associate of Dixmer, but who in reality is a co-conspirator in the plot to liberate Marie Antoinette from the Temple prison. Morand is described as:
“un homme de petite taille, brun, aux sourcils épais ; des lunettes vertes, comme en portent les hommes dont la vue est fatiguée par le travail, cachaient ses yeux noirs, mais n’empêchaient pas l’étincelle d’en jaillir. Aux premiers mots qu’il dit, Maurice reconnut cette voix douce et impérieuse a la fois qui avait été constamment, dans cette terrible discussion dont il avait été le victime, pour les voies de douceur ; il était vêtu d’un habit brun a larges boutons, d’une veste de soie blanche, et son jabot assez fin fut souvent, pendant le souper, tourmente par une main dont Maurice, sans doute parce que c’était celle d’un marchand tanneur, admira la blancheur et la délicatesse. …Le citoyen Morand parlait peu, mangeait moins encore, ne buvait presque pas et riait rarement : Maurice, peut-être à cause des souvenirs que lui rappelait sa voix, éprouva bientôt pour lui une vie sympathie ; seulement, il était en doute sur son âge, et ce doute l’inquiétait ; tantôt il le prenait pour un homme de quarante à quarante-cinq ans, et tantôt pour un tout jeune homme.” (Dumas 1305)

“a short man with dark hair and bushy eyebrows; green glasses, the sort worn by people who work so hard their eyes get tired, screened his black eyes but did not obscure their twinkle. At his first words, Maurice recognized the voice, at once gentle and imperious, that had urged clemency in the terrible deliberations of which he had been the victim Morand was dressed in a brown suit with great big buttons and a vest of white silk. His rather fine jabot was often agitated over dinner, tormented by a hand whose whiteness and delicacy Maurice was impressed by, no doubt because it belonged to a merchant tanner….Citizen Morand spoke little, ate even less, scarcely drank a drop, and laughed rarely. Maurice, perhaps because of the memories his vice recalled to mind, soon felt a strong liking for him. But he couldn’t figure out the man’s age and this gnawed at him. At times, Morand looked to him to be in his early forties; at other times, he seemed very young.” (Dumas 64)

Lindey is suspicious of Morand from the start. His strange appearance and unlikeness that he worked with dyes used in the tanning process were evidenced by the cleanliness and almost effeminate nature of his hands. In contrast, officers who claimed to have caught a glimpse of the Knight of Maison-Rouge described him as “cinq pieds trois pouces, cheveux blonds, yeux bleus, nez droit, barbe châtain, menton rond, voix douce, mains de femme. Trente-cinq à trente-six ans.” (Dumas 1433) “five foot three inches tall, blond hair, blue eyes, straight nose, chestnut-colored hair, round chin, softly spoken, hands of a woman. Thirty-five to thirty-six years old.” (Dumas 216) Dumas
obviously took great care to change the swashbuckling Knight as much as possible when choosing his disguise. Maurice’s curiosity about Dixmer, Geneviève and Morand’s true identities is also heightened as they are discussing slips of the appellations Monsieur and Madame in certain conversations, instead of the accepted Citoyen(ne) (Citizen/Citizeness), giving the reader and Lindey a clue to their possible aristocratic ties. It is not until the final scenes that Dumas reveals that the Knight’s true identity is Philippe de Taverney, brother of Andrée from the previous books. In the initial books of the series, Philippe is rejected romantically by Marie Antoinette in favor of Olivier de Charny. Nonetheless, Philippe makes an oath to be the queen’s sworn protector, and he does so until the bitter end. In The Knight of Maison Rouge, he is the mysterious hero who reappears in Paris at the moment of truth for the ill-fated monarch. Earlier in the novel, however, his true identity is alluded to by Lindey. At dinner, Lindey confidently tells Dixmer, Geneviève and Morand that the Knight has not left Paris despite the danger of remaining in the city. When questioned by Geneviève why the Knight would take such a chance, Lindey replies,

“Vous êtes femme, citoyenne; vous comprendrez donc une chose qui a dû l’emporter, chez un homme du caractère du chevalier de Maison-Rouge, sur toutes les considérations de sécurité personnelle possibles.”

“Et quelle chose peut l’emporter sur la crainte de perdre la vie d’une façon si affreuse?”

“Eh! mon Dieu! citoyenne,” dit Maurice, “l’amour.”

“L’amour?” répéta Geneviève.

“Sans doute. Ne savez-vous donc pas que le chevalier de Maison-Rouge est amoureux d’Antoinette?”

Deux ou trois rires d’incrédulité éclatèrent timides et forcés. Dixmer regarde Maurice, comme pour lire jusqu’au fond de son âme. Geneviève sentit des larmes mouiller ses yeux, et un frissonnement, qui ne put échapper à Maurice, courut par
tout son corps. Le citoyen Morand répandit le vin de son verre qu’il portait en ce moment à ses lèvres, et sa pâleur eût effrayé Maurice, si toute l’attention du jeune homme n’eût été en ce moment concentrée sur Geneviève.” (Dumas 1309-1310)

“You are a woman, citizeness, so you’ll understand that there is one thing that must have won out, with the sort of man the Knight of Maison-Rouge obviously is, over all possible considerations of personal safety.”

“And what could win out over fear of losing your life in such a ghastly way?”

“Good God, citizeness!” said Maurice. “Love.”

“Love?” repeated Genevieve.

“Without a doubt. Don’t you know the Knight of Maison-Rouge is in love with Antoinette?”

Two or three hoots of fairly feeble forced laughter burst forth. Dixmer’s eyes bored through Maurice as though trying to see into his soul. Geneviève felt her eyes mist with tears, and a shiver that did not escape Maurice ran the length of her body. Citizen Morand spilled the wine he was bringing to his lips and his marble pallor would have frightened Maurice if that young man’s entire attention had not been riveted on Geneviève.” (Dumas 70)

Ironically, Lindey himself ends up succumbing to the same fate after he falls in love with Geneviève. Dumas is using the female characters of Marie Antoinette and Geneviève Dixmer to affect the convictions of the male characters in Knight, thereby changing the course of the action. As the novel progresses, Lindey says to himself, “Tout m’apparaît grossi comme à travers un microscope.” (Dumas 1435) “Everything looks bigger to me, as though I’m seeing it all through a microscope.” (Dumas 220) This realization goes hand in hand with Lindey’s change in character. He is beginning to see that everything is not black or white, including what he has been fighting for. The polarization of his character that previously reflected the one-sided ideals of the republican cause is beginning to change. For the male characters, there is melodrama
associated with love. Despite their best efforts, they become victim to their feelings for the female characters and play the role of the chevalier. One could argue that the knight in title of the novel chosen by Dumas could represent not only Morand/Philippe, but Lindey as well. In a similar fashion that the pamphlets had in unifying people based on hatred of Marie Antoinette, the romantic sentiment of love was used by Dumas to unify characters from all sides of the revolution. Loyalty to a cause was shown in a different form. Instead of tearing apart a monarchy, loyalty comes into play to unite the plot and characters in *The Knight of Maison Rouge*. This is a fitting end to the series, as the tragic element of the Terror is exposed.

In a pivotal scene in *The Knight of Maison Rouge*, the Knight is caught by Lindey with Genevieve. He reveals to Lindey that “Morand le chimiste et le chevalier de Maison-Rouge ne font qu’un. Et allongeant la main vers une table voisine, il eût en un instant coiffé cette perruque noire qui l’avait si longtemps rendu méconnaissable aux yeux du jeune républicain”. (Dumas 1445) “Morand the chemist and the Knight of Maison Rouge are one in the same” and reaching to a nearby table he instantly grabbed and clapped on his head that old black wig that had for so long made him unrecognizable to the young republican.” (Dumas 231) Here, the “costume change” occurs on stage rather than offstage as Lindey is used to unmask Morand and reveal his alter ego. It is not until the end of the series, however, that the Knight’s actual identity is discovered. Here Dumas is actually creating a triple identity, hiding Philippe de Taverney’s true persona until much later in the novel.

Geneviève is another character in *The Knight of Maison-Rouge* who serves as a double. As the action of the story progresses, so does the urgent need to save Marie
Antoinette. After several foiled plots to free her from the Temple prison, the queen is moved to the Conciergerie awaiting her trial and execution. In this novel, Geneviève is sent by her husband Dixmer to trade places with Marie Antoinette and be sent to the guillotine in her place. Marie Antoinette is forewarned of the plan via a note sent to her in prison by the Knight of Maison Rouge. Upon reading the note, the queen responds, “Je ne puis ni ne dois accepter le sacrifice de la vie de personne en échange de la mienne.” (Dumas 1514) “I cannot and should not accept the sacrifice of anyone’s life in exchange for mine.” (Dumas 313) Although it was Geneviève’s intention to trade places with Marie Antoinette and prove her loyalty to the monarchy by sacrificing herself, in the end her husband forces her to do so as revenge for her adultery with Lindey. Ultimately, Dixmer wins out. He gives her instructions for creating the deception that is supposed to save the queen:

“Au moment où je le frappe…vous vous élancez dans la seconde chambre, dans celle où est la reine. Il n’y a pas de porte, vous le savez, seulement un paravent, et vous changez d’habits avec elle, tandis que je tue le second soldat. Alors je prends le bras de la reine, et je passe le guichet avec elle.”

“Fort bien,” dit froidement Geneviève.

“Vous comprenez?” continua Dixmer; “chaque soir on vous voit avec ce mantelet de taffetas noirs qui cache ce visage. Mettez votre mantelet à Sa Majesté, et drapez-le comme vous avez l’habitude de le draper vous-même.” (Dumas 1519)

“…The moment I stab him, you rush into the back room, the room the Queen’s in. There is no door, you know, just a screen; you change clothes with her while I kill the second soldier. Then I’ll take the Queen’s arm and walk her out through the wicket gate.”

“Very well,” said Geneviève coldly.

“Do you follow?” Dixmer continued. “Every night you’re seen wearing this mantle of black taffeta that hides your face. Put your mantle on Her Majesty and drape it the way you usually drape it on yourself.” (Dumas 319)
The actual costume change behind a screen has ties to the theater, where actors change offstage, hidden from the audience. Here, the audience is the guards and the theater is Marie Antoinette’s prison cell at the Conciergerie.

In *The Marie Antoinette Romances*, the Count de Cagliostro is the character with the most aliases. Unlike previously mentioned instances in which female character were often mistaken for one another because of physical similarities/attributes, Dumas confined Cagliostro’s other identities to changes in his name. In reality he was an infamous criminal, so the idea that he would have to keep his true identity hidden or constantly changing was not a far-fetched concept. Dumas emphasized Cagliostro’s mysterious nature by assigning him many pseudonyms. His names varied from titles such as the Count de Fenix, the Marquis Danna and the Marquis Pellegrini to such strange names as Acharat and Somini to the more conventional Joseph Balsamo. In addition to his false names, he is often referred to by Dumas as ‘the stranger’ and ‘the young man’. In *Joseph Balsamo*, M. de Sartines, the police lieutenant of Paris before the Revolution, describes Cagliostro in the following way, “…tantôt grand seigneur semant l’or, tantôt charlatan cherchant les secrets naturels, tantôt affilié sombre de quelque confrérie mystérieuse qui jure dans l’ombre la mort des rois et l’écroulement des trônes.” (Dumas 947) “He is sometimes a great lord scattering money on all sides—sometimes a charlatan, searching into the secrets of nature—sometimes a gloomy member of some mysterious brotherhood which meets by night, and swears ‘Death to kings and the overthrow of all thrones’.” (Dumas 490) Later, after being fooled by Cagliostro, Sartines exclaims, “Le misérable est sorcier….Je suis lieutenant de police du roi, moi; il est lieutenant de police du diable, lui.” (Dumas 957) “The wretch is a sorcerer!...I am the lieutenant of police to
the king, but he is lieutenant of police to the devil!” (Dumas 504) The variation in the Count’s identity gives the reader the idea that Cagliostro has something to hide--that all his activities are not necessarily above board. He is drawn to the occult and is therefore a marginal character. As Lorenza describes him, “C’est un athée et un nécromancien” (Dumas 80) “He is an atheist and a necromancer.” (Dumas 16) His use of different names accompanies his multitude of public personas. Dumas is able to transform Cagliostro by simply introducing him under a new name.

The multiple identities used by Cagliostro also symbolize his role as the mystic responsible for doing everything in his power to incite change in the French political system. He claims to be thousands of years old and to have traveled not only through time but through space, rubbing elbows with all manner of notorious historical figures. Cagliostro holds his audiences spellbound with his knowledge of past and modern science, using his insight to win over the supposedly enlightened and frighten the less intelligent. He is the Revolution itself, stemming from unresolved problems of the past and causing social and political upheaval in the present. His disappearance from the series differs than his actual departure from France following the Diamond Necklace Affair, which helped to orchestrate. Although the real Cagliostro was deported following the Diamond Necklace Affair, Dumas keep him around longer in the series. He after all plays an integral part in insuring that all events within his sphere of influence lead to the outbreak of the Revolution and the overthrow of the monarchy. Like the first description of Cagliostro at the beginning of the series, Dumas’ last description of him is veiled in mystery. In The Countess de Charny he writes, “La reine comprit que la était la tempête. Elle se détourna épouvantée, et ses yeux se portèrent involontairement sur l’homme de la
colonne. Elle crut lui voir faire un signe de commandement auquel tout le parterre obéit:
En effet, d’une seule voix terrible, le parterre cria: --Plus de maître ! Plus de maîtresse!
Liberté! ” (Dumas 796) “The queen knew the tempest was come; terror-stricken, she
turned aside, and her eyes fell involuntarily on the man who leaned against the column.
She saw him make a sign, which the whole pit obeyed as an order. With one voice it
cried: ‘No master! No Mistress! Liberty’!” (Dumas 498) Here Cagliostro, the man who
leaned against the column, shows his omnipresence and omnipotence through a singular
action. He has achieved his goal of turning the French people against the monarchy and
awakening their revolutionary ideals. It is unfortunate that Dumas did not include
Cagliostro in The Knight of Maison Rouge. One could see the opportunity for Cagliostro
to do more damage in Knight, such as thwarting attempts by royalists to liberate Marie
Antoinette from prison, or being present to observe her execution. However, Dumas
wrote The Knight of Maison Rouge before the other books in the series and obviously
added the character of Cagliostro and the elements of freemasonry after this work was
completed. Despite his absence in the final book, Cagliostro’s character did ultimately
serve to set off the events that lead to the deaths of the King and Queen.

The Marie Antoinette Romances were not the only historical romances in which
Dumas used the literary device of doubling and mistaken identity. The idea of doubling is
also used in his novel The Man in the Iron Mask (1848), in which a prisoner named
Philippe was discovered to be the forsaken twin brother of King Louis XIV. In this final
adventure of the Musketeers, the two only meet briefly as a power struggle for the throne
ensues. In the following passage from a chapter entitled “The False King”, Dumas
describes the first time that the two come face to face:
“Un cri terrible partit de tous les coins de la chambre, cri douloureux poussé par le roi et les assistants… C’est ce qui arriva pour Louis XIV, lorsqu’il se montra pâle et le sourcil fonce sous la portière de l’escalier secret… La reine mère, qui aperçut Louis XIV, et qui tenait la main de Philippe, poussa le cri dont nous avons parlé, comme elle eût fait en voyant un fantôme… Madame fit un pas en avant, croyant voir se refléter, dans une glace, son beau-frère. Et, de fait, l’illusion était possible. Les deux princes, défaits l’un et l’autre, car nous renonçons à peindre l’épouvantable saisississement de Philippe, et tremblants tous deux, crispant l’un et l’autre une main convulsive, se mesuraient du regard et plongeaient leurs yeux comme des poignards dans l’âme l’un de l’autre… Cette ressemblance inouïe du visage, du geste, de la taille, tout, jusqu’à une ressemblance de costume décidée par le hasard… cette parfaite analogie des deux princes acheva de bouleverser le cœur d’Anne d’Autriche. Elle ne devinait pourtant pas encore la vérité. Il y a de ces malheurs que nul ne veut accepter dans la vie. On aime mieux croire au surnaturel, à l’impossible. Louis n’avait pas compté sur ces obstacles. Il s’attendait, en entrant seulement, à être reconnu. Soleil vivant, il ne souffrait pas le soupçon d’une parité avec qui que ce fut. Il n’admettait pas que tout flambeau ne devint ténèbres à l’instant où il faisait luire son rayon vainqueur. Aussi, à l’aspect de Philippe, fut-il plus terrifié peut-être qu’aucun autre autour de lui, et son silence, son immobilité, furent ce temps de recueillement et de calme qui précède les violentes explosions de la colère.” (Dumas 619-620)

“A terrible cry resounded from all corners of the chamber, a painful cry uttered by the King and all present…. So it happened with Louis XIV, when he showed himself pale and frowning in the doorway of the secret stairs…. The Queen Mother, who perceived Louis XIV, and who held the hand of Philippe, uttered the cry of which we have spoken, as if she had beheld a phantom… Madame made a step forward, thinking she saw the form of her brother-in-law reflected in a glass. And, in fact, the illusion was possible. The two princes, both pale as death—for we renounce the hope of being able to describe the fearful state of Philippe—both trembling, and clenching their hands convulsively, measured each other with their looks and darted their eyes like poniards into each other… The unheard of resemblance of countenance, gesture, shape, height, even to the resemblance of costume, produced by chance…. the perfect analogy of the two princes completed the consternation of Anne of Austria. And yet she did not at once guess the truth. There are misfortunes in life that no one will accept; people would rather believe in the supernatural and the impossible. Louis had not reckoned upon these obstacles. He expected he had only to appear and be acknowledged. A living sun, he could not endure the suspicion of parity with anyone. He did not admit that every torch should not become darkness at the instant he shone out with his conquering ray. At the aspect of Philippe, then, he was, perhaps, more terrified than any one round him, and his silence, his immobility were, this time, a concentration and a calm which precede violent explosions of passion.” (Dumas 357)
Dumas is once again using melodramatic elements to make the plot more interesting and bring up the question of the legitimacy and corruption of the monarchy by holding up a fictional “mirror” in the form of a twin. As was previously mentioned, the use of masks and costume changes in Dumas has obvious ties to the theater. Doubling as a literary device is also useful in heightening the reader’s interest by actively capturing his attention. As the reader, we are sometimes privy to who is being disguised, while other times we are left to figure it out with the characters in the novel. In The Man in the Iron Mask, the final book in LeVicomte de Bragelonne series, Louis XIV’s legitimacy as sovereign is questioned by his fictional twin brother Philippe, who has spent most of his young life hidden away in the Bastille and escapes with the help of Aramis. Louis’ absolute power is not challenged for long as his ruthlessness is displayed by reclaiming the throne from Philippe and sending him to prison once again, this time wearing the infamous iron mask mentioned in the title. In this novel, Dumas used the fictional character of Philippe to emphasize the need to end of the monarchy’s unscrupulous ways. He was also trying to portray the end of the era of chivalry, as all of the musketeers with the exception of Aramis have aged beyond their usefulness and are killed off one by one. Ironically, Aramis is the only musketeer poisoned by ambition, hoping to be appointed Pope by Philippe once he is restored to the throne. In a scene with Philippe in the Bastille, the prisoner accuses Aramis of wearing a mask that hides his true intentions. “Mais vous,” répondit le prisonnier, “vous qui me faites dire de vous demander, vous qui, lorsque je vous ai demandé, entrez ici en me promettant tout un monde de révélations, d’où vient que c’est vous maintenant qui vous taisez et moi qui parle? Puisque nous portons chacun un masque, ou gardons-le tous deux, ou déposons-le ensemble.” (Dumas
“And you,” returned the prisoner, “who bade me to ask to see you; you who, when I did ask for you, came here promising a world of confidence; how is it that, nevertheless, it is you who are silent, and ‘tis I who speak? Since, then, we both wear masks, either let us both retain them or put them aside altogether.” (Dumas 177) In this case the masks that Philippe is speaking of are metaphorical, suggesting the secret motives of both men when trying to ascertain the other’s purpose. Dumas may also be calling into question the legitimacy of the monarchy during the July Monarchy at which time he wrote both The Three Musketeers and The Knight of Maison Rouge. The possibility that Louis XIV may have illegitimately inherited the crown would further undermine the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI.

The use of doubles and disguises was also rampant in The Marie Antoinette Romances. In The Marie Antoinette Romances series, Dumas generally lets the reader in on his big secrets. It is usually the other characters in the book that are left wondering who this masked man is and why he is disguised. Dumas reveals Cagliostro’s many aliases to the reader while the police commissioner is left scratching his head, in the same way that we learn that the Knight of Maison-Rouge, Morand and Philippe de Taverney are one in the same before Maurice figures it out. The secrecy afforded the characters who wear disguises and masks allows them to hide in plain sight and cause drama that often interrupts the action but inevitably leads to a more interesting story. As their true identities are revealed, the action in the story develops and comes to an inevitable conclusion. The theatrical aspect of disguise also serves to entertain the audience, or in the case of the novel, the reader by taking the action in different, unforeseen directions. In the case of the historical novel, secret identities also allow the author to take liberties with
the plot and add interesting imaginary characters alongside actual historical figures. It also gives the ability to exaggerate real people from history, such as Cagliostro. He was a known sorcerer of the time, but Dumas gives him an endless supply of alter-egos which serve to dramatize his persona and overstate his influence on actual events and people. In addition to drawing the reader in to the plot, Dumas also used masks and hidden identities to critique the political upheaval in France before, during, and after the Revolution. By hiding monarchs and aristocrats behind masks, he gave the impression that the monarchy had something to hide and was therefore illegitimate. Dumas’ use of doubles also served to call into question the legitimacy of the monarchy, allowing Marie Antoinette to be mistaken for a woman of questionable morals that played directly into the hands of those trying to bring about the downfall of the Ancien Régime.
Chapter 5 – Melodramatic Evolution-From Low to High and Beyond

As has been discussed in depth in previous chapters, the portrayal of Marie Antoinette in pamphlets was abundant throughout her reign and went beyond her execution then seemed to stop abruptly after within a year after her execution in 1794. In researching the extensive collection of revolutionary pamphlets in the Newberry Library, I discovered that there was an abundance of pamphlets that referenced Marie Antoinette from the late 1780s up until 1794. After 1794, there were no documents written containing Marie Antoinette’s name in the title until the Restoration in 1814. Between 1814 and 1816, reprints of Mme de Staël’s Réflexions sur le suicide, suivies de la défense de la reine and facsimiles of the queen’s trial were published. One such document was entitled Fascimile du testament de Marie-Antoinette d'Autriche, reine de France et de Navarre, morte martyre le 16 octobre 1793/calqué et gravé avec la plus scrupuleuse exactitude sur un exemplaire distribué aux membres des deux chambres. This seems to be the first moment when Marie Antoinette was identified as a martyr. During the time period between 1822 and 1826 memoirs of those close to Marie Antoinette were first published, including those of Mme Campan, the queen’s First Lady of the Bedchamber and the Princess de Lamballe, one of Marie Antoinette’s closest friends at Versailles. There were other accounts that appeared at this time, such as Mémoire de M. le baron de Goguelat, lieutenant-général: sur les événemens relatives au voyage de Louis XVI à Varennes: suivi d’un précis des tentatives qui ont été faites pour arracher la reine à la captivité du Temple and the memoirs of Rose Bertin, Marie Antoinette’s dressmaker, which is largely regarded by historians to be fake. During the July Monarchy of 1830-1848 there was a void in publications with Marie Antoinette as the subject. However, the
period between 1858 and 1867 showed resurgence in publications which ran the gamut from biographies to testaments of Marie Antoinette’s trial to “secret” correspondence between Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette from 1777-1792. It is my intention to show the way in which the pamphlets of the revolutionary period bridged the gap between libertine literature and the advent of melodrama in the early nineteenth century and the way that melodrama was used by Dumas in his historical fiction.

While the Revolutionary pamphlets had theatrical elements, some being written in the form of plays, they focused more on making known the evil nature of their victims—that is to say the aristocracy in general and Marie Antoinette in particular. The evolution from libertine literature to pamphlet to melodrama reflected not only a change in style but in intended audience. Libertine literature was popular before the outbreak of the Revolution and was written by and for the aristocracy, as is evidenced in such examples as Choderlos de Laclos’ *Les Liaisons dangereuses* and the Marquis de Sade’s *L’histoire de Juliette*. This genre focused on anti-clericalism, anti-establishmentarianism and eroticism. While the pamphlets certainly contained all three of these elements, there was a fundamental difference in intended audience. The transition to pamphlet literature marked an expansion of the audience to all social classes—a convergence of high and low. When melodrama came on the scene at the end of the Revolution, its appeal was more to the lower classes. Its theatrical roots certainly had a correlation to this fact.

It was during the end of the eighteenth century that a shift of melodramatic elements that were previously reserved for the stage began to appear in the literature of the day. In *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Peter Brooks writes that although it is impossible to identify the first “true” melodrama, a number of authors and critics have
attempted to point to the moment in time that melodrama first appeared as a genre. Brooks names the early 1790s as a period of “proto-melodrama” in the theater. He points to several authors who choose the period of 1798-1800 as the time when melodrama first officially appeared. As Brooks argued, the need for physical dramatization on stage to convey emotion was transferred to the novel. This reflected a need/desire to appeal to the masses. He points to this moment in time as the birth of French melodrama. Peter Brooks makes the following claim in The Melodramatic Imagination, “My point of reference in melodrama proper is almost exclusively “classic” French melodrama as it came to be established at the dawn of the nineteenth century-in the aftermath of the Revolution-and as it endured, with modifications and complications, into the 1860s, to be relayed, eventually, by the cinema and then by television.” (Brooks xvi)

From the point of view of plot construction and character development, Georg Lukacs gives the following definition of an historical novel: “What matters therefore in the historical novel is not the retelling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality. And it is a law of literary portrayal which first appears paradoxical, but then quite obvious, that in order to bring out these social and human motives of behavior, the outwardly insignificant events, the smaller (from without) relationships are better suited than the great monumental dramas of world history.” (Lukacs 42) Dumas, however, was writing historical novels in the dramatic form, which allowed him to invent characters who, once associated with and connected to real historical persons, could be used to bring out the real characters’ true, but generally unknown personality traits and
what incited them to action. In contrast to Lukacs’ criteria for recounting history in a manner that represented the realist tradition that came into fashion after 1848, Dumas’ historical melodramas served the purpose of retelling historical events in a form that had its roots in the theater and therefore lent itself to larger than life characters and events, such as Marie Antoinette and the 1789 Revolution.

Dumas himself began as a playwright, then started to write historical melodrama later in his career, which seems to be a natural evolution given the dramatic basis of melodrama. Dumas eventually came full circle, adapting his melodramatic historical novels to the stage. His ability to appeal to the masses afforded Dumas great popular and commercial success both with his plays and his serial novels. In choosing Marie Antoinette as a subject, Dumas breaks through the mythical version of her life that was constructed in the pamphlets and reconstructs another version in which she is worthy of pity and even martyrdom. On a certain level, Dumas makes Marie Antoinette herself more relatable to the reader on a human level. She has her emotional ups and downs and is a victim of her historical circumstance. Although the Marie Antoinette Romances does center around the queen, Dumas does not offer the reader (audience) a one-sided view of the Revolution, nor does he show any of his characters as being without flaws. His characters represent both sides of the political ideology and social structure of the Revolutionary time period. Dumas began this series during the July Monarchy, a time period when France was still struggling with coming to terms with the restored, albeit constitutional monarchy. The fact the Dumas gave both sides of the story may have had something to do with softening the image of the queen so as not to offend the regime
while simultaneously giving credence to the revolutionary causes represented in the novels.

What then are the characteristics of melodrama that are so prevalent in Dumas’ writing? Brooks gives the following detailed definition of melodrama: “The connotations of the word are probably similar for all of us. They include: the indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good, and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plottings, suspense, breathtaking peripety.” (Brooks 11-12) He advises the reader,

“In considering melodrama, we are in a sense talking about a form of theatricality which will underlie novelistic efforts at representation—which will provide a model for the making of meaning in fictional dramatizations of existence. The nineteenth-century novel needs such theatricality, as we shall see, to get its meaning across, to invest in its renderings of life a sense of memorability and significance. With the rise of the novel and of melodrama, we find the entry into literature of a new moral and aesthetic category, that of the “interesting”. Its first theoretician may be Diderot, in his effort to establish the new genre of drame, which owes much to the novels of Richardson and in some ways prefigures melodrama. Diderot’s definition of le genre sérieux, intermediate between tragedy and comedy—but explicitly not a mixture of the two—addresses itself to the “interesting” in life.” (Brooks 13)

David Coward, who has edited eight novels by Alexandre Dumas, substantiates Brooks’ explanation of the melodramatic elements as found specifically in the novelist’s works. In his Introduction to La Reine Margot, Coward claims, “The Dumas touch is unmistakable: unflagging drama, twisting plots, artful suspense, strongly differentiated characters, the injection of horror, violence, and humor, the unfailing wholesomeness, and the clear, though not uncomplicated victory of Good over Evil.” (Coward cited in Dumas xiv) Dumas’ Marie Antoinette Romances are ripe with melodramatic elements, as

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is illustrated in both the plot development and in the personality traits assigned to his characters.

In addition to trying to convey a subversive criticism of the July Monarchy through historical fiction in such works as *The Man in the Iron Mask* and *The Knight of Maison Rouge* which called into question the legitimacy of the monarchy, Dumas was also using such melodramatic effects to sell books. He was, after all, a serial novelist who was known to produce stories at record speed, accompanied by a team of collaborators and his partner Auguste Maquet. Dumas was well known for his extravagant lifestyle and endless string of love affairs. According to Coward, his methods were questioned by his contemporaries:

“His friends might well have wondered how he managed to produce so much in the gaps left by stormy love affairs, travels abroad, hob-knobbing with grandees, the opening of his own theater in 1847, the attention he lavished on the Château de Monte-Cristo—the splendidly garish house he built for himself at Marly—and his unsuccessful attempt to be elected to Parliament in 1848. Those who envied his success, however, believed they had the answer. In 1845, Eugène de Mirecourt, a journalist, published a tract in which he accused him of running a ‘fiction factory’ staffed by hacks who turned out, to order, all the novels and plays which appeared under his name. Dumas sued and won. He cheerfully admitted that his novels and plays were frequently produced in association with what would now be called ‘research assistants’, ‘story-consultants’ and the like. ‘I have collaborators’, he said, ‘the way Napoleon had generals’.” (Coward cited in Dumas xiii)

Not only did Mirecourt criticize Dumas’ writing, but he also attacked him personally. In *Alexandre Dumas: A Great Life in Brief*, André Maurois gives a detailed account of the slander of Dumas undertaken by Mirecourt. He writes,

“In 1845 a pamphleteer, Eugène de Mirecourt (in reality named Jean-Baptiste Jacquot), published a brochure that caused a great stir: *A Factory for Novels, the House of Alexandre Dumas and Company.*
It may be significant to point out that, before attacking Dumas, Mirecourt had offered to work for him and even proposed the basis for a novel that would surely be ‘an important affair.’ This pure critic was thus not altogether pure, and he would gladly have participated in the ‘undertaking,’ had he been able to.

Having failed, he angrily appealed first to the Society of Men of Letters of France in a protest against methods that permitted a single writer to corner all the newspapers, furnish all the serials, and deny the young any possibility of earning their livelihood. The Society showed him the door, too…..

Perhaps the attack might have carried had it been conducted in moderation and without hatred. But Mirecourt showed his bad faith by vilifying Dumas in the basest manner. He reproached him with being a Negro. Now, even if that charge had been true, it was neither a crime, a fault, nor a defect. Besides, it was false. Dumas, a quadroon, had only one black grandparent….

In short, the pamphlet was so course that even Dumas’ enemies were disgusted by it. Balzac, who would have been delighted to see any rival looming over him wounded to the quick, judged Mirecourt with severity: ‘I have been given’, he writes, ‘the pamphlet on the House of Alexandre Dumas and Co. It is unspeakably doltish, but it is, sadly enough, true…And since in France a witty slander is more readily believed than stupidly uttered truth, it will do little harm to Dumas…’.’” (Maurois 127-129)

Being a victim of an unscrupulous journalist himself may have given Dumas insight into Marie Antoinette’s character. Neither Dumas nor the Queen of France in The Marie Antoinette Romances accepted the public criticism of their morals. Dumas emerged triumphant from his case against Mirecourt, who was sentenced to fifteen days in prison for libel. (Maurois 129)

Dumas’ use of dramatic elements also coincided with new laws in Europe regarding censorship in the theater. In his articles “Censorship in French Theater: Fighting French Censorship: 1815-1881” (1998) and “Political Theater Censorship in Nineteenth-Century France in Comparative European Perspective” (2010), Robert Justin Goldstein outlines the French government’s focus on regulating theatrical performances and their effects on the public. In both articles, Goldstein emphasizes a policy for
suppressing political dissent among the masses. In his research, Goldstein points to the French population’s demanding more freedoms in the period following the Revolution. In his words, “French authorities were even more afraid of the potential impact of the visual…such as might be offered by caricature and the theater.” He goes on to explain that “a large percentage of the especially-feared “dark masses” were illiterate and thus “immune” to the written word, but they were not blind and thus were perceived as highly susceptible to subversive imagery, which was, moreover, viewed as having a far greater visceral impact than was the written word.” (Goldstein 785) According to Goldstein, authorities were especially focused on theatrical productions that were presented in venues that were known to house the lower classes. These ideas were certainly not new in French society. In 1758, Rousseau wrote his widely read *Lettre à M. d’Alembert sur les spectacles*, in which he criticized the theater and those associated with it as having potentially damaging effects on the public at large. Rousseau was particularly concerned with the domain of comedy. Contrasting tragedy with comedy, he wrote,

“…Mais il n’est pas ainsi de la Comédie, dont les mœurs ont avec les nôtres un rapport plus immédiat, et dont les personnages ressemblent mieux à des hommes. Tout en est mauvais et pernicieux, tout tire à conséquence pour les Spectateurs ; et le plaisir même du comique étant fondé sur un vice du cœur humain, c’est une suite de ce principe que plus la Comédie est agréable et parfaite, plus son effet est funeste aux mœurs…” (Rousseau 45)

Rousseau’s critique of the theater included a criticism of Molière’s characters in *Le Misanthrope* as having been assigned traits opposite to how they were expected to be, as well as warnings about the detrimental effects of establishing a permanent theater in Geneva which would promote the more French aristocratic ideals of art for pleasure and impose them upon the virtuous Genovese. *Lettre à M. d’Alembert sur les spectacles*
served as a precursor to the French government’s renewed censorship laws in the first half of the nineteenth century.

It is not difficult to see the evolution from the pamphlets to low theater in the post-Revolutionary period. Both served the purpose of social and political criticism. However, while the pamphlets were overtly used to spread political propaganda before and during the Revolution and were free from fear of censorship once the Revolution broke out, the theater of Dumas’ time was under the constant scrutiny of Restoration censorship laws. Both Dumas and Hugo were victims of the censors in their early years as playwrights. In Alexandre Dumas, Genius of Life, Claude Schopp writes of Dumas’ and Hugo’s struggle with the censors:

“Mlle Mars picked over Hernani with distaste. The censors nit-picked Christine: they wanted no ecclesiastical costumes. When, in the play, Descartes asked: “Do they not say that I was an atheist?” “Suppressed,” answered the censor. Then Christine: “(The crown) was a royal rattle that I found in my cradle.” “Suppressed.” The censor, more royalist than the King, more papist than the Pope, looked for the mere shadow of allusions to the throne or the altar. On January 8, 1830, the suppressed lines were indicated to Dumas. He tried to coax the censor, who insisted on the heresies that studded poor Christine. “You attack altogether the legitimacy, the law, and its succession! The scene of Christine sending her crown to Cromwell is dangerous. Is it historic? To remind mankind of it was incendiary.” Dumas made an appeal to the chief of censors, Monsieur de Lourdoneix. The interview, arranged by a lady subscriber to the Academie’s prize-winning works, was short: “Finally, monsieur,” Lourdoneix said curtly, “all you might add would be useless for as long as the oldest royal branch is on the throne and as long as I am censor, your work will be suppressed.” “Very well, monsieur, I will wait,” and Dumas bowed out coldly.” (Schopp 127)

Although Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI were executed years earlier, along with the Restoration came new concern for political dissent as is evident in the above quote. Peter Brooks points to this same time period as the moment when melodrama first came into existence in France. He, however, mentions that melodramatic elements
appealed not only to the lower classes, but in fact crossed class boundaries. “The classic examples of French melodrama were written for a public that extended from the lower classes, especially artisans and shopkeepers, through all sectors of the middle class, and even embraced members of the aristocracy.” (Brooks xvi) He wrote that the phenomena of divergent high and low culture did not come to pass until much later on. Brooks calls French melodrama “radically democratic in style, pitched to a popular audience… (it) strove toward more coherence as an entertainment, toward greater aesthetic self-consciousness in regard to its effects and their means.” (Brooks xvi) It is impossible not to notice the correlation between the unifying effects of both the pamphlets and the theatrical presentations during times of political upheaval.

According to Claude Schumacher in his introduction to Victor Hugo: Four Plays, Dumas’ theatrical debut came in 1829 with the Romantic historical drama Henri III et sa cour, considered to be the first of its kind to be performed on the Paris stage, preceding Victor Hugo’s Hernani by one year. In 1832, Hugo’s play Le roi s’amuse was banned after only one performance. Although it is written about Francis I, censors were convinced that buried within the subtext were veiled references to King Louis-Philippe. (Schumacher in Hugo xx) Defending freedom of speech, Hugo brought a lawsuit to try to reinstate the performance of Le roi s’amuse. Despite his loss in court, Hugo was hailed for his audacity. It was also in 1832 that Dumas wrote La Tour de Nesle, a historical melodrama that openly criticized Queen Marguerite de Bourgogne as being a murderous man-eater who staged secret amorous trysts with random men outside the palace, then had them killed to protect her reputation. La Tour de Nesle did not suffer the censorship that Le roi s’amuse did that same year, likely because the villain was a princess and not a
king. Since the birth of the Republic and Marie Antoinette’s death, there no longer
existed an obvious female target for the censors to be concerned with. While the
pamphlets were used during the Ancien Régime and became rampant during the
Revolution once censorship laws were erased, the Bourbon Restoration of 1830-1848
brought renewed challenges in the area of controlling what was seen and heard in public.
Around 1838, the end of censorship laws coincided with the increasing unpopularity of
Louis-Philippe’s regime. It was at this precise moment in time that Dumas began to shift
genres from the theater to the novel and to change his focus closer to the recent past.

In 1845, Dumas wrote two historical novels that would deal with the subject of
evil queens. The first was La Reine Margot, which told the story of Marguerite de Valois,
(a.k.a. Margot) and her mother Catherine de Medici. Dumas based his novels on
historical fact, but used artistic license to slightly change details in order to create a more
interesting story. David Coward wrote:

“La Reine Margot carries a political charge, for its abhorrence for the murderous
methods of Catherine…and the religious intolerance which divided France was a
stinging commentary on the values of the reign of Louis-Philippe….In giving the
French a sense of their own history, Dumas reminded them that the permanent
condition of political life is instability, secrecy, and injustice…But if Dumas
projects this political subtext successfully, it is because he makes us care so much
for his heroes and endures that we detest their enemies. Through a marvelously
sustained series of adventures seasoned in gothic horror, violence, and suspense,
he creates a world in which we always know where we stand: with love, honor,
and courage and against the power of evil, which is real and must never be
underestimated. The good may not end happily, but Dumas’ constitutional
optimism also denied victory to the wicked.” (Coward cited in Dumas xxi)

In La Reine Margot, it is Margot’s mother, Catherine de Medici who is the
diabolical ruler who will stop at nothing to put her son, the future Henri III, on the throne.
Set against the backdrop of the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of 1572, the novel is
full of melodramatic elements, such as the erroneous poisoning and slow, hideous death of King Charles IX caused by his own mother and the slaughter of thousands of innocent French Huguenots.

Dumas’ portrayal of Catherine de Medici in *La Reine Margot* can be contrasted with his portrayal of Marie Antoinette in *The Marie Antoinette Romances* in several ways. It is a fact that Catherine de Medici was a ruthless queen who was instrumental in the slaughter of thousands of innocent Huguenot victims and who would stop at nothing to assure that her son inherited the French throne. In the revolutionary pamphlets, Marie Antoinette was often put in the same category as Catherine de Medici when the public demanded an explanation of her alleged crimes as an excuse to prosecute her. In reality, the two monarchs had little in common. Unlike Catherine de Medici who acted as a regent for fourteen years, Marie Antoinette was a queen consort with no real power. It was her perceived influence that turned the public against her, but she never was guilty of committing anything like the acts of mass murder that Catherine de Medici was guilty of. Nonetheless, the two were somehow linked together by the pamphleteers and the public bought into this image of Marie Antoinette as an evil queen similar to her predecessor. Dumas, in writing novels about both queens, presented opposite assessments of their personalities and aspirations. As was previously discussed, Dumas allowed the reader to witness a transformation of Marie Antoinette’s character brought about by self-realization during a time of crisis. In this way, he elevated her image to that of a martyr in conjunction with her depiction by Mme de Staël. This was perhaps for the first time since the Revolution ended that Marie Antoinette’s image was defended in a significant literary work. On the other hand, Dumas did not attempt to show Catherine de Medici for
anything other than what history proved her to be—a ruthless queen who dedicated her life to assuring that her sons remained on the French throne.

The second novel that Dumas wrote in 1845 was *The Knight of Maison Rouge*. This novel, originally written as a self-contained story about Marie Antoinette’s final days in prison and the plots launched by royalists to help in her escape, evolved into the final book in what was to become *The Marie Antoinette Romances* series. Of all of the books that make up this series, Marie Antoinette is shown to be the most vulnerable and the most pitiable in *The Knight of Maison Rouge*. The novel begins in March 1793, two months after the execution of Louis XVI. The queen, her two children and sister-in-law Elisabeth are locked in the Temple prison awaiting their fate. Despite the fact that the royal family is under heavy surveillance, numerous plots for escape attempts unfold. When caught, the conspirators are put to death, yet there exists an underground group of loyalists who are willing to risk their lives in exchange for the queen’s freedom.

In his introduction to the Oxford World Classics edition of *The Man in the Iron Mask*, David Coward theorizes that Dumas’ characters are clearly black and white. (Coward as cited in Dumas x) When describing the personalities of the Musketeers, he claims that they do not change much over the course of time. However, this leaves little room for character development and growth, as in the case in some of the personages in *The Marie Antoinette Romances* series. In certain cases, Dumas does not make a clear demarcation between sides from a moral standpoint. With the exception of Geneviève’s husband Dixmer and Simon the evil cobbler, it appears that everyone else in *The Knight of Maison Rouge* has good intentions no matter what their personal beliefs are concerning the monarchy. Dixmer’s change of heart comes from revenge once he is
abandoned by Geneviève for Lindey. In the end, after the queen has met her demise and the protagonists are awaiting their own execution, political ideals become drowned out by the guillotine. Death is the great equalizer. In the final chapters, loyalty, love and friendship surpass the desire to live in a revolutionary society. The fight does go on, but the absurdity that accompanies the mass killings during the Terror is made strikingly evident. Interestingly, it appears that Dumas has Lindey and Dixmer switch positions in Knight. Although Lindey was formerly a staunch Republican, he falls in love with Geneviève and throws away all of his prior political convictions. For Dixmer, the opposite is true. As he loses his wife to Lindey, the evil side of his personality emerges. He is so bent on revenge that his previous loyalist tendencies are abandoned in order to see Genevieve and Lindey sent to the guillotine. Although Lindey kills Dixmer in a swordfight, in the end no one escapes death; not Dixmer, not Lindey and Geneviève, not Marie Antoinette. The collateral damage even reaches Lindey and Geneviève’s faithful companion Lorin, who chooses to join them at the scaffold rather than live without them. Following Coward’s theory of polarization, there are two antagonists to be identified in The Knight of Maison Rouge. The first, as mentioned, is Dixmer, Genevieve’s husband, who turns on her once he discovers her affair with Lindey. The second antagonist is Simon the cobbler who in reality was in charge of Louis XVII after he was taken from his mother, but in The Knight of Maison Rouge is also responsible for prosecuting Lindey, Geneviève and Lorin.

As was previously discussed, Geneviève Dixmer, the protagonist is a royalist who has plotted with her husband to save Marie Antoinette from prison. As the story develops, she has an affair with Maurice Lindey, a devoted Republican officer who is won over to
the loyalist cause because of his love for Geneviève rather than for any real change in political conviction. When Geneviève’s husband Dixmer learns of the affair, he vows revenge on the pair and he assures that they are sentenced to death at the guillotine. While being transported in the cart to meet their fate, Geneviève faints as Maurice is attempting to free his hands from the ropes. Dumas writes, “En effet, pour accomplir cette opération, Maurice s’était détourné un instant de la pauvre femme, et, comme si toute sa force venait de lui, elle avait ferme les yeux et laissé tomber sa tête sur sa poitrine.” (Dumas 1584) “Indeed, to accomplish the rope operation, Maurice had turned his back for a moment from poor Geneviève, and as though all her strength came from him, she simply closed her eyes and dropped her head to her chest.” (Dumas 396)

This idea of “love, honor and courage against the power of evil” mentioned by Coward is brought out by Dumas through Lindey, Geneviève and Lorin, who fight together to free Marie Antoinette from prison and ultimately suffer death at the hands of the revolutionaries. The “denial of victory to the wicked” that is mentioned by Coward is emphasized by Dumas in the final scene of The Knight of Maison Rouge as the three main characters go to their execution together. Lorin is the last of the friends to be executed. The final words of the series belong to him and are as follows:

“Voyons, dit Lorin, c’est la mode de crier vive quelque chose quand on meurt. Autrefois, on criait: “Vive le roi!” mais il n’y a plus de roi. Depuis, on a crié : “Vive la liberté!” mais il n’y a plus de liberté. Ma foi, vive Simon! qui nous réunit tous trois.”

Et la tête du généreux jeune homme tomba près de celles de Maurice et de Geneviève !” (Dumas 1585)

“Let’s see…It’s the done thing to call out ‘Long Live’ something or other when you die. Once upon a time they used to cry ‘Long Live the King!’ but there is no
more king. After that, they cried ‘Long Live Liberty!’ but there is no more liberty. Why not ‘Long Live Simon,’ who has joined all three of us together.”

With that the head of the generous young man fell next to the heads of Maurice and Genevieve!” (Dumas 398)

An earlier reference in Brooks describes a scene from D.W. Griffith’s silent film entitled *Orphans of the Storm* in which one of the two female protagonists is being carried in a tumbrel to be executed during the Revolution. Brooks writes about the “convergence in the concerns of melodrama and of psychoanalysis”, which he says is “the hystericized body”, that is a body invested with meaning. He goes on to explain that the hystericized body is often that of a woman, “on which desire has inscribed an impossible history, a story of desire in an impasse. Such an impasse will be typical of Hollywood domestic melodrama. It is pertinent as well to Griffith’s bodily enactments of moments of emotional crisis, and in general to the moments in which melodrama distorts the body to its most expressionistic ends.” (Brooks xii) Coming face to face with death is one of the driving factors behind the hystericized body as described by Brooks. In Griffith’s *Orphans of the Storm*, Brooks describes the contortion of Henriette’s body as she stretches to say a final goodbye to Louise. He calls it “a pure image of victimization and of the body wholly seized by affective meaning, of message converted onto the body so forcefully and totally that the body has ceased to function in its normal postures and gestures, to become nothing but text, nothing but the place of presentation.” (Brooks xii) The final execution scene from *Le Chevalier de Maison Rouge* ties directly into this definition of “message converted onto the body” by Brooks.

In Dumas’ series, they hystericized female body that is mentioned by Brooks is shown in different ways. Fainting spells are one example of how Dumas’ illustrated this
phenomenon, as is evidenced toward the very beginning of the series in Memoirs of a Physician, as Cagliostro reveals Marie Antoinette’s fate to her at the hands of the revolutionaries. Upon seeing the image of the guillotine, a machine not yet invented in France at the time, a very young Marie Antoinette faints in horror as she sees her own beheading. Later in the series, in The Countess de Charny, the queen faints again as she imagines her fast-approaching fate while captive in the Tuileries. Dumas wrote, “La reine jeta un cri terrible, se leva, fit deux tours sur elle-même, battant l’air et l’obscurité de ses bras et tomba évanouie” and “…l’évanouissement de Marie-Antoinette était si profond, que ce ne fut qu’au bout de dix minutes qu’elle poussa un soupir.” (Dumas 52-53) “She uttered a cry of agony, and rising from her seat in the dark, tossed her arms around, and fell on the floor” and “the queen had fainted so completely, that not for ten minutes did she breathe.” (Dumas 27-8) The drama of the fainting spell as described by Dumas can be said to be theatrical in nature. Marie Antoinette does not simply lose consciousness, she first staggers around in the dark, her arms flailing about, emphasizing the physicality and emotional nature of the scene. It is interesting to note that these melodramatic moments which serve as omens reflect actual events that occurred in Marie Antoinette’s young life.¹

In Dumas, the hystericized female body is portrayed in scenes when good and evil in the form of non-republican women and republican men come into contact. In particular, Dumas employs the occult and mesmerism to bring about the contortion of the female (usually aristocratic) body and ultimately is showing the triumph of revolutionary doctrine over the monarchy. The female aristocrat becomes the representation of the Ancien Régime and falls victim to men involved with inciting the Revolution. Many
examples of this phenomenon occur between Gilbert and Andrée de Taverney. In *Ange Pitou*, which is set in 1789 at the beginning of the Revolution, Andrée de Taverney is transported to a hysterical state while coming face to face with her nemesis Gilbert for the first time since he violated and impregnated her years earlier. Gilbert is a former student of Cagliostro and has learned occult science from him. Dumas writes, “À l’aspect de Gilbert, la comtesse chancela. Ses jambes frémirent sous elle. Elle se renversa en arrière, comme une femme qui va s’évanouir, et ne resta debout qu’à l’aide d’un fauteuil sur lequel elle s’appuya dans l’attitude morne, insensible, presque inintelligente d’Eurydice au moment où lui gagne au cœur le venin du serpent.” (Dumas 855) “At the sight of Gilbert, the countess staggered. Her limbs shook beneath her. She fell backwards, as does a person who is about to faint, and only maintained a standing position with the assistance of an arm-chair, on which she leaned in the sorrowful, motionless, and almost unconscious attitude of Eurydice at the moment when the serpent’s venom reaches her heart.” (Dumas 357) As Gilbert puts her into a hypnotic trance, the physical movements of Andrée become more and more uncontrolled and violent. “Andrée se tordit dans de violentes convulsions”, “Andrée étendit les bras et fit un mouvement pour respirer, comme si elle eût été sous la pression d’une machine pneumatique” and “Tous les muscles de la jeune femme parurent prêts à se rompre. Une frange d’écume apparut sur ses lèvres, et un commencement d’épilepsie l’ébranla de la tête aux pieds.” (Dumas 858-859) “Andrée was writhing from the most fearful convulsions”, “Andrée extended her arms, and made an effort to breathe, as if she had been under the pressure of a pneumatic machine” and “All the muscles of the young woman’s body seemed about to burst. A fringe of froth appeared upon her lips, and a commencement of epilepsy convulsed her
from head to foot.” (Dumas 363) For the hystericized female in Dumas, a lack of self-control takes the place of what are normally extremely emotionally controlled characters. Marie Antoinette and Andrée in particular are shown as displaying the *sang-froid* associated with the aristocracy and do not normally betray their true emotions. On the rare occasion that they do show signs of weakness, it is usually due to extenuating circumstances that revolve around high drama. In certain cases, there is an association in Dumas that takes place between this physical trauma and elements of the grotesque, another criterion that Brooks associates with melodrama in the nineteenth-century novel.

The idea of the sorcerer Cagliostro controlling the female characters throughout Dumas’ *Marie Antoinette Romances* is presented repeatedly in a grotesque manner. Losing control of one’s faculties at the hands of a madman, or in the case of Andrée, at the hands of one of his associates, is a theme used over and over again by Dumas. In *Joseph Balsamo*, Cagliostro’s wife Lorenza is the woman who is most affected by Cagliostro’s occult practices. While seeking sanctuary in a convent run by Princess Louise, she recounts the manner in which Cagliostro abducted her from her family while placing her under a hypnotic trance, and then again from the convent when she was about to take her vows. He finds her under Princess Louise’s protection, and hypnotizes her once again. As Lorenza is carried off by the sorcerer, the Cardinal de Rohan and Princess Louise are dumb struck by what they have just witnessed. “Ah! monsieur le cardinal, dit la princesse en secouant tristement la tête, il y a des choses incompréhensible et fatales jusque dans l’air que nous respirons.” (Dumas 486) “Ah, my lord cardinal,” said the princess, shaking her head sorrowfully, “there are incomprehensible and fatal omens in the very air which we breathe!” (Dumas 456) In the most violently grotesque scene in the
series, Cagliostro’s wife Lorenza is used as a human sacrifice at the hands his former mentor Althotas when she is left unattended by her husband in a hypnotic state:

“En face de lui, la table du vieillard, cette immense table de marbre, toujours remplie de plantes, de livres, de fioles ; devant lui cette table était recouverte d’un long drap de damas blanc a fleurs sombres, sur lequel la lampe d’Althotas envoyait sa rougeâtre lueur et dessinait de sinistres formes que Balsamo n’avait pas encore remarquées.

Balsamo prit un des coins du drap et le tira violemment à lui.

Mais alors ses cheveux se hérissèrent, sa bouche ouverte ne put laisser échapper l’horrible cri étouffé au fond de sa gorge.

Il venait, sous ce linceul, d’apercevoir le cadavre de Lorenza, de Lorenza étendue sur cette table, la tête livide et cependant souriante encore et pendant en arrière comme entraînée par le poids de ses longs cheveux.

Une large blessure s’ouvrait béante au-dessus de la clavicule et ne laissant plus échapper une seule goutte de sang. Les mains étaient roidies et les yeux fermes sous leurs paupières violette.” (Dumas 990)

“Opposite to him was the old man’s table—a large marble slab always heaped with plants, books and phials. This table was covered with a long cloth of white damask with dark flowers, on which the lamp of Althotas shed a reddish light, and which displayed an ominous outline which Balsamo had not before remarked.

He seized a corner of the cloth and hastily pulled it away.

But instantly his hair stood on end—his gaping mouth could not utter the horrible cry which almost suffocated him.

Under this shroud he had perceived Lorenza’s corpse stretched upon this table, her face livid and yet smiling, and her head hanging backward as if dragged down by the weight of her long hair.

A large wound gaped underneath the collar-bone, from which not a single drop of blood escaped. Her hands were rigid, and her eyes closed beneath their purple eyelids.” (Dumas 546)

The hystericized body mentioned by Brooks is used widely by Dumas to show the loss of control of the female characters when under the influence of powerful male
characters. In Lorenza’s final scene, she succumbs to the occult forces of Althotas after being rendered helpless by Cagliostro. The only escape for Lorenza from Cagliostro’s influence is death. Although it is a grotesque final moment for Lorenza, she is finally freed from Cagliostro’s omnipotence. What is even more grotesque, perhaps, is Cagliostro’s belief that he truly loves Lorenza. They can never be equals because of her hatred for him and his constant fear that she will flee. By controlling her mind and body, he transforms her into a sort of doll who agrees to his every whim and is content to live within the confines of his prison-like home.

Almost two centuries after Dumas, in Farewell, My Queen Chantal Thomas also employs this concept of the hystericized body referred to by Brooks, although her descriptions conspicuously lack the grotesque element often used by Dumas. Sidonie Laborde, the narrator of the story, is present at Versailles at the beginning of the Revolution. She, like everyone around her, is both overwhelmed and confused by the events of July 14th-16th, 1789. She is surrounded by rumor and innuendo, and confronted for the first time with the idea that she may have to flee for her life. Mademoiselle Laborde, overcome, collapses. She says, “I sat down at the top of the steps, overlooking the Latona Fountain. And suddenly, I could stand it no longer; I stretched out full length on the marble landing and gave way to wracking sobs. I could hear myself crying, and far from trying to exercise restraint, I wished I could cry even harder. I wanted the tears to flow even more abundantly, in torrents: I was dispossessed. The earth had opened up beneath my feet. It was going to swallow me up. I did not struggle. Rather, I fell…and found myself lying across the stairway, gasping for breath.” (Thomas 108-9) Although Thomas’ novel is not generally written in the melodramatic vein that characterized
Dumas’ more lively tales, she has obviously taken artistic license with historical facts and made use of certain melodramatic elements to emphasize the fragile mental state of Sidonie Laborde, and consequently of the deteriorating emotional state at court at the start of the Revolution.

In Dumas’ series, the role of hypnotism and the hystericized female body is used in conjunction with two of Brooks’ other criteria for melodrama; those of lost and refound parents and children and dramatic and spectacular apparitions. As discussed in detail previously, Dumas used the character of Cagliostro to mesmerize many of the female characters and put them into trances under which they had little control of their physical bodies. The one and only male character directly affected by hypnotism was Sebastien, the illegitimate son of Andrée and Gilbert. As described earlier, Andrée is impregnated by Gilbert against her will and the baby boy is stolen from her soon after his birth. Andrée is forced to keep the secret of the pregnancy and afterwards hide the pain of having the infant ripped from her and being permanently separated from him. Gilbert raises Sebastien, and the boy is convinced that Andrée rejected him since he is never told the truth about the kidnapping by his father. By virtue of the fact that Andrée conceived the child while in an altered state, he has inherited to a degree her psychic ability. As he grows up apart from his mother, Sebastien often has moments alone during which he experiences visions of a beautiful woman in the distance. The apparition always appears when Sebastien is alone, lost in thought. In this scene in Ange Pitou, Sebastien is sitting in the garden at school visiting his father Gilbert, who has just been freed during the storming of the Bastille. Sebastien confides in him that he suspects that an apparition that he sees is his mother, much to the dismay of Gilbert:
“Tenez, mon père, voila ce qui arrivait : je jouais comme les autres enfants dans le village, et tant que j’étais dans le village, tant qu’il y avait d’autres enfants avec moi ou près de moi, je ne voyais rien ; mais si je m’écartais d’eux, si je dépassais les derniers jardins, je sentais près de moi comme le frôlement d’une robe ; j’étendais les bras pour la saisir, et je n’embrassais que l’air ; mais, a mesure que ce frôlement s’éloignait, le fantôme devenait visible. C’était une vapeur, d’abord transparente comme un nuage, puis la vapeur s’épaississait et prenait une forme humaine. Cette forme, c’était celle d’une femme, glissant plutôt qu’elle ne marchait, et devenant d’autant plus visible qu’elle s’enfonçait dans les endroits les plus sombres de la forêt. Alors un pouvoir inconnu, étrange, irrésistible, m’entraînait sur les pas de cette femme Je la poursuivais les bras tendus, muet comme elle : car souvent, j’ai essayé de l’appeler, et jamais ma voix n’a pu former un son, et je la poursuivais ainsi sans qu’elle s’arrêtât, sans que je pusse la rejoindre, jusqu’à ce que le prodige qui m’avait annoncé sa présence me signalât son départ. Cette femme s’effaçait peu à peu ; la matière devenait vapeur, la vapeur se volatilisait, et tout était dit. Et moi, épuisé de fatigue, je tombais à l’endroit même où elle avait disparu. C’est la que Pitou me retrouvait quelquefois le lendemain seulement.” (Dumas 826)

“Well, then, Father, I will tell you all. I used to play, as did the other children in the village. As long as there were children with me, or near me, I saw nothing; but if I separated from them, or went beyond the last village garden, I felt something near, like the rustling of a gown. I would stretch out my arms to catch it, and I embraced only the air; but as the rustling sound became lost in distance, the phantom itself became visible. It was at first a vapor as transparent as a cloud; then the vapor became more condensed, and assumed a human form. The form was that of a woman gliding along the ground rather than walking, and becoming more and more visible as it plunged into the shady parts of the forest. Then an unknown, extraordinary, and almost irresistible power impelled me to pursue this form. I pursued her with outstretched arms, mute as herself, for often I attempted to call to her, and never could my tongue articulate a sound. I pursued her thus, although she never stopped, although I never could come up with her, until the same prodigy which announced her presence to me warned me of her departure. This woman vanished gradually from my sight, matter became once more vapor, the vapor became volatilized, and all was ended; and I, exhausted with fatigue, would fall down on the spot where she had disappeared. It was there that Pitou would find me, sometimes the same day, but sometimes only the next morning.” (Dumas 305)

In The Countess de Charny, Sebastien’s strange behavior is also mentioned by Dumas:
“…les étranges hallucinations qui parfois s’emparaient de Sébastien, quand cette femme qu’il appelait sa mère lui apparaissait, et plus d’une fois, en promenade, l’abbé, qui était prévenu de cette espèce de vertige, avait suivi l’enfant des yeux quand il l’avait vu par trop s’enfoncer dans les bois, et moment où il craignait de le voir disparaître, avait lancé après lui les meilleurs coureurs de son collège.

Les coureurs avaient toujours trouve l’enfant haletant, presque évanoui, adosse a quelque arbre ou couche tout de son long sur la mousse, tapis verdoyant ce ces magnifiques futaies.” (Dumas 54)

“…strange hallucinations sometimes seized young Gilbert [Sebastien] whenever the woman he called his mother appeared. And more than once, the abbe had followed him, when under the influence of this vertigo he seemed inclined to go too far into the fields, where he was afraid he would be lost, and on such occasions would send the best runners of the college after him.

The child had always been found panting, and almost exhausted, leaning against some tree, or resting on some bank beside some beautiful hedge.” (Dumas 31)

Young Sébastien Gilbert seems to behave in a manner similar to the women in the series who are controlled by Cagliostro and/or Gilbert. He acts as an extension of Andrée and his behaviors often echo hers when she is under duress. When he is first introduced to the reader in Ange Pitou, Sébastien is in a trance, much to the dismay of the abbé at the College Louis-le-Grand. Dumas writes,

“En effet, Sébastien, tiré brutalement de sa rêverie par le cordial attachement de Pitou, chancela, son visage passa de la matité à la pâleur, sa tête se pencha comme si son col n’avait plus la force de la soutenir. Un soupir douloureux sortit de sa poitrine, puis une vive rougir couleur ses joues.” (Dumas 823)

“…And indeed Sébastien, thus abruptly aroused from his reverie by the cordial affection of Pitou, staggered, his pale face became livid, his head fell to one side, as if his neck had not sufficient strength to support it, a painful sigh escaped his breast, and then the blood again rushed to his face.” (Dumas 299)
Towards the end of the series, Sébastien has grown into a young man of sixteen and is at the Tuileries palace one day when he catches a glimpse of Andrée. He immediately recognizes her as the apparition that has been haunting him throughout his childhood and then realizes that he is indeed her long lost son. They are reunited for a brief time, until Sebastien, hidden in an adjoining room, overhears an argument between Andrée and the Count de Charny and flees out into the dark streets of Paris, where he is injured. Gilbert appears as Andrée is sobbing on her bed and once again forces her into a hypnotic state in order to locate Sébastien. She finds him running in the street, where he is nearly hit by a carriage and falls to the ground. The situation is explained and resolved, but not without a dose of drama thrown in by Dumas for good measure. From a metaphorical point of view, Sébastien can be said to represent the loss of innocence associated with France during the Revolution. He is separated for a good part of his life from both his mother and father and is forced to grow up at an early age. At this point in the story, Gilbert is an adult seeing life through his son’s eyes and recognizing himself, just as Rousseau once did with him. He also recognizes the change in Andrée’s character. She has learned to love and deal with losing both her husband and her child and has thus been transformed. In *The Countess de Charny*, Gilbert’s says, “C’est bien, vous voilà femme, vous voilà mère. Diamant brut, vous vous êtes enfin façonnée aux mains de ce terrible lapidaire qu’on appelle la douleur.” (Dumas 92) “You are now a woman. A rough diamond you have been, set by the hands of the terrible lapidary, grief.” (Dumas 56)

If Sébastien represents the loss of innocence of France during the Revolution, then Ange Pitou represents the idealism and philosophy of the Enlightenment in its purist...
form. He is described by Dumas in Ange Pitou as being “simple comme un enfant de la nature” (Dumas 673) “as simple as a child of nature.” (Dumas 37) Like Sebastien, Ange Pitou lost his mother and father at a young age. Dumas only dedicates one paragraph to the description of Pitou’s background during which he gives insight into how he ended up orphaned at a young age:

“Ange Pitou était resté orphelin à l’âge de douze ans, époque à laquelle il avait eu le malheur de perdre sa mère dont il était le fils unique. Cela veut dire que depuis la mort de son père, qui avait eu lieu avant qu’il n’atteignait l’âge de connaissance, Ange Pitou, adoré de la pauvre femme, avait à peu près fait ce qu’il avait voulu, ce qui avait fort développé son éducation physique, mais tout à fait laissé en arrière son éducation morale…” (Dumas 660)

“Ange Pitou had been left an orphan when only twelve years old, the time at which he had the misfortune to lose his mother, of whom he was the only child. That is to say, that since the death of his father, which event had occurred before he had attained the years of recollection, Ange Pitou, adored by his poor mother, had been allowed to do whatever he thought fit, which had greatly developed his physical education, but had altogether retarded the advancement of his moral faculties.” (Dumas14)

Pitou is supported by Gilbert but left in the care of his spinster aunt Angelique who is anything but a loving mother figure to him. Despite her annoyance with his clumsiness, his aunt tries to profit from him, keeping the money left for his education and using his poaching to save her food allowance. Unlike Sebastien, Ange Pitou is never reunited with his parents but does find a place for himself in the Revolutionary society as a patriot who rallies and leads the troops in his local town of Villers-Cotterêts and his native village of Haramont, which also happens to be Dumas’ birthplace.

Perhaps the most emotional example of the separation of parent and child in Dumas’ series relates to the scene in which Marie Antoinette and her son are forcibly
separated by the guards in the Temple in *The Knight of Maison Rouge*. In real life, the dauphin was taken away from his mother on July 3, 1792 and was left to be tortured and neglected at the hands of Simon until his death in 1795. In *Marie-Thérèse, Child of Terror*, Susan Nagel writes of the extreme distress that Marie Antoinette was forced to endure upon being separated from Louis Charles:

“On July 3, the guards arrived to separate Louis Charles from his mother. Terrified, the eight-year-old boy threw himself at his mother and she refused to let go of him. Threats against her own life did not frighten Marie Antoinette; it was only when the jailers threatened to kill her son that she at last acquiesced. She was so distraught that she could not dress him, so Marie-Therese readied her younger brother for solitary confinement. Louis Charles kissed his mother, sister and aunt goodbye and was dragged away in tears by the prison guards. For days and nights, Marie-Thérèse and her mother could hear his cries and then his screams when the guards beat him for crying. There was a small chink through which the Queen could watch her son pass in the distance, and she lived for those moments, ‘her sole hope, her sole occupation’ wrote Marie-Thérèse.” (Nagel 137)

Dumas’ rendering of the story appeared in *The Knight of Maison Rouge* and was centered around an investigation of the queen at which time she was accused of being involved in aiding in escape plots that would liberate her from the Temple prison. Santerre, the chief of police enters her chamber, and when she denies knowledge of the alleged plots, he retaliates by taking the dauphin:

“Maintenant”, dit Santerre, “nous allons te lire l’arrête de la Convention.”

“Quel arrête?” demanda la reine.

“L’arrête qui ordonne que tu seras séparée de ton fils.”

“Mais c’est donc vrai que cet arrête existe?”

“Oui. La Convention a trop grand souci d’un enfant confié à sa garde par la nation, pour le laisser en compagnie d’une mère aussi dépravée que toi…”

Les yeux de la reine jetèrent des éclairs. “Mais formulez une accusation, au moins, tigres que vous êtes!”
“Ce n’est, parbleu! pas difficile”, dit un municipal, “voila…” Et il prononça une de ces accusations infâmes, comme Suétone en porte contre Agrippine. (note Pluton p. 1288)

“Oh ! s’écria la reine,” debout, pale et superbe d’indignation, “j’en appelle au cœur de toutes les mères.” (note--queen’s response during her trial, Hebert’s deposition—maybe in Mme de Stael?) “… Jamais! jamais!” s’écria la reine s’élançant entre les municipaux et le jeune Louis “…jamais je ne me laisserai enlever mon enfant !…”

Mais il eût fallu à cette reine plus de force que n’en contentait le cœur d’une femme, et surtout le cœur d’une mère. Elle retomba anéantie sur une chaise, tandis qu’on emportait l’enfant, dont les larmes coulaient et qui lui tendait les bras, mais sans jeter un cri.” (Dumas 1299-1289)

“Now,” said Santerre, “we will read you the Commune decree.”

“What decree?” the Queen demanded to know.

“The decree that orders you to be separated from your son.”

“So it is true that this decree exists?”

“Yes. The Convention is too concerned with the care of a child entrusted to the nation to leave him in the company of a mother as depraved as you.”

The Queen’s eyes flashed fire. “Come up with an actual accusation, at least, tigers that you are!”

“That’s not hard, for crying out loud,” jeered one of the officers. “Let’s see…” And he named the foul crime—the crime of incest!—Suetonius once accused Agrippina of…..”

“Never! Never!” cried the Queen, throwing herself between the municipal officers and the young Louis…”I will never let anyone take my child away from me!”…

But the Queen did not have the superhuman strength required, especially for a mother, to maintain her pose. She fell, utterly annihilated, onto a chair as they took the child away, sobbing and holding out his arms to her, though without uttering a single cry.” (Dumas 45-6)

Here Dumas shows the complete exasperation of Marie Antoinette, who suffers the worst possible fate known to a mother. The removal of her child from her care, along with the slanderous language of the guards, causes her to collapse physically. Unlike
many of the other female characters who faint under Cagliostro’s spell in a melodramatic fashion, the reaction of Marie Antoinette in this scene is tragic in its authenticity. Dumas is also showing the true suffering of the mother that Marie Antoinette was, and thus gives her a human quality that the reader can identify with, completely the opposite of the mythic version of her represented in the pamphlets. By debunking the myth surrounding the queen, Dumas elevates her to the status of a martyr and a tragic historical figure worthy of our pity. Although the series is written by Dumas in melodramatic form, his representation of Marie Antoinette is less exaggerated and more realistic at times, as is shown in the aforementioned scene.

This scene with Marie Antoinette mirrors the scene in which Andrée is separated from her son Sébastien in The Countess de Charny. After Andrée finally meets her son Sébastien at the end of a fifteen year separation, he runs away from her as he discovers that she despises his beloved father Gilbert. Immediately upon learning that Sebastien has fled, Andrée “se jeta sur son lit, les bras étendus, les mains crispées; elle était à bout de ses forces, à bout de la résignation, à bout de ses prières. Elle n'avait plus que des cris, des larmes, des sanglots et un immense sentiment de sa douleur. Une heure à peu près se passa dans un anéantissement profond, dans cet oubli du monde, dans ce désir de destruction universelle qui vient aux malheureux…” (Dumas 82-83) “threw herself on her bed with arms outstretched, and her fingers convulsively grasped. Her strength and resignation were exhausted. She could cry, weep, and appreciate her loss. Nearly an hour passed in this state of profound annihilation, in a total oblivion of the whole world, and that wish for annihilation which the unhappy entertain…” (Dumas 51-52) For Dumas, being separated from and reuniting with a parent has tragic consequences and reflects the
tearing apart of the French society during the revolutionary period and its attempted
reunification with the monarchy during the Restoration. The identity crisis and feeling of
loss that is represented by Sébastien mirrors that of the newly formed French Nation in
the years immediately following the Revolution.

A third example of the difficulty associated with the separation of parent and
child lies within the relationship of M. Billot and his daughter Catherine. M. Billot is a
farmer in Ange Pitou’s home town of Haramont and is so enraged when the king’s police
storm his house in search of a hidden box that he decides to devote himself to the
revolutionary cause and abandons his family to set out for Paris. He leaves the farm under
the care of his only daughter, Catherine. In her father’s absence, Catherine begins a love
affair with Isidor de Charny, one of the sons of the aristocratic family that owns the
Billot’s land. After participating in the storming of the Bastille, Billot’s fervor wanes. He
reappears in The Countess de Charny during which he plays an instrumental role in
intercepting the royal family at Varennes during their escape attempt and sending them
back to Paris. He explains his return to his farm and separation from Catherine, who has
run away from home with Isidor de Charny and is carrying his illegitimate child. Shamed,
Billot rejects Catherine, but he is not without regret for his actions. In true Dumas
fashion, opposing forces come face to face, as Isidor is also present at the capture of the
royal family, but is there to protect them. He is killed in the line of duty and Catherine is
left to raise her child alone. Once again we see Dumas’ polarization of the universe and
the tragic consequences associated with crossing from one side to the other. Catherine
and Isidor’s families represent opposite sides of the revolutionary cause, and their love
affair is therefore doomed to fail. In The Marie Antoinette Romances, love is never
enough to conquer all, especially in revolutionary France. The men do their sworn duty while the women are left at home to deal with the consequences of being left behind. Catherine is an innocent victim of the Revolution, as she loses her lover and is left to raise her child without a name under the protection of Olivier de Charny, Isidor’s elder brother.

The intrigues of court life and monarchs forced to marry for political reasons was the perfect backdrop for drama, or more precisely for melodrama. Marie Antoinette’s arrival in France in *Memoirs of a Physician* is accompanied by her fateful encounter with the sorcerer Cagliostro, who, at the urging of the dauphine, reveals her death by decapitation, causing her to faint immediately. Dumas incorporates many of the melodramatic elements named by Brooks from the opening scenes of his series—in this case, physical trauma brought about by a well-known villain. While Marie Antoinette is swooning, Cagliostro disappears, or put into theatrical terms, exits the stage. In a similar fashion, Gilbert puts Andrée into a hypnotic state, and then exits as she gasps for air. In scenes where the Queen is visibly upset, as in the following passages taken from *Ange Pitou*, Dumas frequently used such language as “La reine crispa ses droits sur sa poitrine, avec tant de violence qu’elle fit craquer la batiste sous sa pression” (Dumas 933) “The Queen cinched her hand upon her breast with so much violence as to make the cambric crack beneath its pressure” (Dumas 39) and “La reine se rassit frémissante” (Dumas 934) “The Queen sat down, trembling with rage” (Dumas 40) to make the visual more real to the audience, or rather the reader of the series, in a sense directing his characters as one would direct actors in the theater. Throughout the series, we see physical movement that
would have been perfectly executed before a live audience—swordfights, sneaking about Versailles under cover of darkness, masked balls, even grisly murder.

In modern literature about Marie Antoinette there is also mention of theatrical imagery. In *Farewell, My Queen*, Chantal Thomas’ main character Sidonie Laborde makes references to the theater;”…In my naïveté, I, too, began to applaud, along with everyone else….I felt as I did at the theater, when the actors had taken their final bow and I desperately waited for them to come back one more time…waited in vain. I could see that, on the contrary, most of the chateau windows were shut and their curtains drawn.” (Thomas 60-61) Chantal Thomas seems to be using theatrical language and direction to influence the thoughts and actions of Mademoiselle Laborde by placing her in a situation similar to watching a live performance. In another scene from *Farewell, My Queen*, Sidonie and Marie Antoinette are re-enacting a scene from the play *Félicie*. During the reading, Sidonie notices the lack of conviction on the part of the queen. “As I responded with all my soul, trying to restrain my fervor when I realized that unlike me, the Queen was reading tonelessly. She was delivering her lines without putting the least expression into them. She was reciting passages with her eyes shut, wearing a look of concentration as though she were reciting irregular verbs. She had completely forgotten that I was there. Totally absorbed in the effort of memorization, she was muttering the words for her own benefit. I would come to a stop, whereupon she would go back to speaking audibly, and the fairy tale would resume its course…” (Thomas 29) She is also likening the actions of the monarchy at the outbreak of the Revolution to a certain non-reality. The perceived illegitimacy of the monarchy and its’ inevitable end are reflected in Marie Antoinette’s actions. She is not in the same world as Sidonie. She is just reciting her lines without
backing them up, in the same way that the public viewed the monarchy not performing their duties. She serves as the symbol of the end of the Ancien Régime and all that it represented, namely the lack of connection with the people. The people are watching them, commenting on their every move, judging them in the same way that an audience judges a play. Their movements, like those in Dumas, are also theatrical, bringing to mind once again entering and exiting a stage.

Dumas included a scene in Joseph Balsamo in which Rousseau is invited by Louis XV to go to the theater to attend a rehearsal of his Opera Le Devin du village starring Marie Antoinette in the role of Colette and M. de Coigny as Colin. Rousseau is best known for being a philosopher, but he was also as an accomplished composer. He wrote Le Devin du village in 1752. It was first presented the same year at Fontainebleau for Louis XV, who greatly admired it, then again during the marriage celebration of Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI in 1770. In Joseph Balsamo, Marie Antoinette plays the lead female role as Rousseau watches and is unimpressed by her singing and acting abilities. Dumas portrays Rousseau as a hesitant participant in the royal event, during which he is mocked relentlessly by the Comte de Provence, who corrects his translations of Tacitus from Latin into French, much to the philosopher’s horror. Rousseau is rather taken aback by his ill treatment at the hands of the young aristocrat and is at a loss for words. In addition, Dumas uses the plot of the opera to emphasize the jealousy of Mme du Barry as King Louis XV’s attentions are being turned to Andrée, who is praised for her voice and dancing. There is irony in the presentation of the opera at Versailles by the King, since it was written by Rousseau as a pastoral romance that emphasized the virtues of nature and the philosopher himself is seen directing the chorus during the rehearsal. Dumas is
presenting the reader with a glimpse into two worlds colliding—that of the Ancien Régime and the Enlightenment school of philosophical thought. The aristocratic women, in particular Mme du Barry, are shown as being petty and jealous, while the aristocratic men are portrayed as being conceited and unwilling to take any of Rousseau’s new ideology seriously. Dumas throws Rousseau into the proverbial lion’s den in this scene, surrounding him with those he openly criticizes and who criticize him. The tension felt in the scene reflects the political tension in France and serves as a preview of the ideological struggles between the monarchy and the Republicans.

In the novel Ange Pitou, theatrical elements abound. Of all of Dumas’ characters in The Marie Antoinette Romances series, Pitou is perhaps the most comedic from a theatrical point of view. Dumas begins the novel with a description of the seventeen-year-old’s physique and his clumsiness. The melodrama associated with Pitou is shown in his physical body. He is a simple country boy who spends his days poaching and studying Latin at school. He hopes to become an abbé, but is always being singled out by his teacher, the Abbé Fortier, much to the boy’s dismay. Dumas physical description of Pitou is as follows:

“C’était un long et mince garçon, aux cheveux jaunes, aux joues rouges, aux yeux bleu faïence. La fleur de la jeunesse fraîche et innocente s’élargissait sur sa large bouche, dont les grosses lèvres découvraient, en se fendant outre mesure, deux rangées parfaitement complètes de dents formidables—pour ceux dont elles étaient destinées à partager le diner. Au bout de ses longs bras osseux pendaient, solidement attachées, des mains larges comme des battoirs ; des jambes passablement arquées, des genoux gros comme des têtes d’enfant qui faisaient éclater son étroite culotte noire, des pieds immens et cependant à l’aise dans des soliers de veau rougis par l’usage ; tel était, avec une espèce de souquenille de serge brune tenant le milieu entre la vareuse et la blouse, le signalement exact et impartial de l’ex-disciple de l’abbé Fortier.” (Dumas 659-660)
“He was a tall, slender youth, with yellow hair, red cheeks, and blue eyes. The bloom of youth, fresh and innocent, was expanded over his wide mouth, the thick lips of which discovered, when extended by a hearty laugh, two perfectly complete rows of formidable teeth—particularly formidable to those of whose dinner he was about to partake. At the end of his long bony arms were solidly attached hands as large as beetles, legs rather inclined to be bowed, knees as big as a child’s head, which regularly made their way through his tight black breeches, and immense feet, which, notwithstanding, were at their ease in calfskin shoes reddened by constant use; such, with a sort of cassock of brown serge, a garment something between a frock-coat and a blouse, is an exact and impartial description of the ex-disciple of the Abbe Fortier.” (Dumas 14)

The author uses Pitou’s gangliness to contrast with the young Isidor de Charny, his rival for Catherine Billot’s affections. Pitou knows that he can never compete with the aristocratic sophistication of Isidor and is left to suffer humiliation at a village dance. Dumas uses music and pastoral background to showcase Pitou’s uncomplicated country sensibilities. The competition that Isidor presents to Pitou for Catherine’s love is representative of the clash of the aristocracy and the Republicans.

Pitou and his neighbor, Monsieur Billot, leave the country to arrive in Paris just in time to help in the storming of the Bastille. Although he can be considered heroic, Pitou is a quiet, unassuming hero who simply wants to make his world a better place. Pitou represents bravery and simplicity. Dumas describes a scene in which he is attacked by six of his classmates and comes out the victor. His Herculean strength is made comical by his gangly body. Pitou is instrumental in acting as a big brother figure to Sebastien during Gilbert’s extended absences. Gilbert frequently leaves Sebastien aside as he goes out to further the revolutionary cause by undermining the monarchy, while Pitou is content to leave Paris and fight to save his village. Pitou’s one obviously melodramatic
characteristic is the superhuman speed granted to him by Dumas. He is able outrun a horse if necessary in order to escape being caught by the police:

“En ce moment, Pitou se retourna, et, en apercevant les sergents qui se mettaient à sa poursuite plutôt pour l’acquit de leur conscience que dans l’espoir de le rattraper, il redoubla de vitesse et disparut bientôt dans la lisière du bois.

Pitou courut encore un quart d’heure ainsi, il aurait couru deux heures, si c’eût été nécessaire : il avait l’haleine du cerf, comme il en avait la vélocité.” (Dumas 715)

“At that moment Pitou turned round and on perceiving the sergeants who were pursuing him rather from a desire to perform their duty than with the hope of catching him, he redoubled his speed, and soon disappeared in the skirts of the wood.

Pitou ran on at this rate for another quarter of an hour. He could have run two hours had it been necessary, for he had the wind of a stag, as well as its velocity.” (Dumas 104)

Pitou himself is a young man who spends the majority of his time alone outdoors which has afforded him the ability to be a successful poacher of small game. Dumas based the character of Ange Pitou on both himself and his father, who was a hero during the Revolution in foreign campaigns under Napoleon. According to Tom Reiss in The Black Count, General Dumas was “renowned for his strength, his swordsmanship, his bravery, and his knack for pulling victory out of the toughest situations…He single-handedly captured twelve enemy soldiers and marched them back to his camp. Not long afterward, he led four horsemen in an attack on an enemy post manned by over fifty men—Dumas alone killed six and took sixteen prisoner.” (Reiss 8)

Pitou is greatly influenced by a pamphlet written by Gilbert who espouses the ideas of freedom associated that were circulating during the pre-revolutionary period in France.
Il est à remarquer que les gens du peuple, et j’oserai presque dire les hommes en général, écoutent avec d’autant plus d’attention qu’ils comprennent moins. Il est évident que le sens général de la brochure échappait aux esprits les plus éclairés de la rustique assemblée, et à Billot lui-même. Mais, au milieu de cette phraséologie obscure, passaient, comme des éclairs dans un ciel sombre et chargé d’électricité, les mots lumineux d’indépendance, de liberté et d’égalité. Il n’en fallut pas davantage ; les applaudissements éclatèrent ; les cris de : “Vive le docteur Gilbert !” retentirent. Le tiers de la brochure à peu près avait été lu ; il fut décidé qu’on la lirait en trois dimanches.” (Dumas 704)

It is to be remarked that people of the lower class, and I might almost venture to say, men in general, listen with most attention to that which they understand the least. It was evident that the general sense of the pamphlet escaped the perceptions of the most enlightened among the rustic auditory, and even of Billot himself. But in the midst of that obscure phraseology from time to time flashed, like lightening in a dark sky charged with electricity, the luminous words, Independence, Liberty, Equality. Nothing more was necessary; shouts of applause burst forth; cries of “Long live Doctor Gilbert!” resounded on every side. Not more than one third of the pamphlet had been read; it was decided that the remainder should be delivered on the following two Sundays.” (Dumas 87)

Pitou is seen delivering the message of the pamphlet from atop a platform, a kind of soliloquy on a small stage with the townsmen as captive audience. Other theatrical elements are mentioned by Dumas in Ange Pitou. Isidore de Charny’s dancing ability is compared by Dumas with theatrical performances of Louis XIV:

“Si Pitou avait été contraint d’admirer monsieur de Charny joueur de paume, force lui fut de rendre justice à monsieur de Charny danseur. A cette époque, la mode n’était pas encore venue de marcher au lieu de danser. La danse était un art qui faisait partie de l’éducation. Sans compter monsieur de Lauzun (note, p. 709), qui avait du sa fortune à la façon dont il avait dansé sa première courante au quadrille du roi, plus d’un gentilhomme avait du la faveur dont il jouissait à la cour, à la manière dont il tendait le jarret et poussait la pointe du pied en avant. Sous ce rapport, le vicomte était un modèle de grâce et de perfection, et il eût pu, comme Louis XIV, danser sur un théâtre avec la chance d’être applaudi, quoiqu’il ne fut ni roi, ni acteur.” (Dumas 709)
“If Pitou had been constrained to admire Monsieur de Charny as a tennis-player, he was no less compelled to do him justice as a dancer. In those days the fashion had not yet sprung up of walking instead of dancing. Dancing was an art which formed a necessary part of the education of everyone. Without citing the case of Monsieur de Lauzun, who had owed his fortune to the manner in which he had danced his first steps in the king’s quadrille, more than one nobleman owed the favor he had enjoyed at court to the manner in which he had extended his legs or pointed the extremity of his toe. In this respect the Viscount was a model of grace and perfection, and he might, like Louis XIV, have danced in a theatre with the chance of being applauded, although he was neither a king nor an actor.” (Dumas 95)

In Joseph Balsamo, Dumas also showcases a theatrical performance which calls to mind both and Rousseau’s and his own creative backgrounds. The monarchy is both literally and figuratively on stage here as they are judged by Rousseau, and through his philosophy by the French people. “The rehearsal…commenced, and the general attention drawn to the stage, Rousseau was no longer remarked, and it was he, on the contrary, who became the observer.” (Dumas 379) In the same way that the reader observes Marie Antoinette through Sidonie Laborde’s eyes in Farewell, My Queen, Dumas allows the reader to gain entry into the world of the dauphine and the court through the secondary characters. Gilbert, in this book still a young man infatuated by Andrée, sneaks in to the performance to observe her practicing her role. He has only ever been able to observe her from a distance because of their class difference and putting Andrée on a stage allows Gilbert to once again play the voyeur. In fact, all of the characters in this scene are playing some kind of role, although not all are on the stage. Gilbert, Rousseau and King Louis XV all focus their undivided attention on Andrée. At the same time, Nicole and Mme du Barry are also fixated on the thought of Andrée, who they consider to be their mutual rival. The spotlight is literally on Andrée, who is elevated above the other women in the series both on stage and in real life because of her purity. Rousseau can see this in
her and wishes that she could play the role of Colette, but of course the lead female role is reserved for Marie Antoinette. Despite her insistence upon starring in the play, the dauphine cannot hide her inferior singing, dancing and acting abilities from the audience, just as in the novel she cannot hide her character flaws. Andrée is content to play a secondary role but is seen as the superior actress and woman. As much as the queen tries to push Andrée into the background, she is still perceived as the star of the production.

Thus, the historical novel as a literary form lends itself to physical drama reminiscent of its theatrical roots. It was the bridge between the lower form of revolutionary pamphlets and early theater to the higher forms of contemporary novel and eventually cinema. While maintaining certain elements of the theater that were of interest to a wide audience during the early nineteenth century, the historical novel elevated the communicative art form to one that questioned the legitimacy of the Restoration. In Reading for the Plot, Design and Intention in Narrative Peter Brooks echoes Lynn Hunt’s study of the idea of the family romance and the Freudian image of the father figure in French history. Brooks points to Stendhal’s Le Rouge et le noir (1830) as the definitive French novel dealing with the topic of ‘legitimacy and usurpation’. He suggests that “it hinges on the fundamental question, To whom does France belong? This question in turn implicates and is implicated in an issue of obsessive importance in all of Stendhal’s novels, that of paternity”. (Brooks 62) Brooks writes, “Upon reflection, one can see that paternity is a dominant issue within the great tradition of the nineteenth-century novel, a principal embodiment of its concern with authority, legitimacy, the conflict of generations, and the transmission of wisdom.” (Brooks 63) He goes on to explain that “…the nineteenth-century novel as a genre seems to be inseparable from the conflict of
movement and resistance, revolution and restoration, and from the issues of authority and paternity, which provide not only the matter of the novel but also its structuring force, the dynamic that shapes its plot.” (Brooks 65)

As Lynn Hunt wrote, the idea of the King as the father being eliminated so that the brother could find a better place in the world is one that follows logically with the backdrop of the Revolution. Dumas touched upon this underlying theme in *The Marie Antoinette Romances*, especially in scenes involving Cagliostro and the Freemasons. During their secret meetings, the men involved were seeking to undermine and eventually overthrow the *Ancien Régime*. Even the King’s cousin the Duc d’Orleans, given the nickname *Égalité*, is present. Dumas described secret nocturnal Masonic ceremonies held in cellars to emphasize the peripheral nature of the individuals involved in the plots. Marginal characters in the series offer up a unique opportunity to introduce specialized language. In the case of the Freemasons, secrecy comes into play not only with characters’ identities, but with the way they speak during meetings. As is illustrated from the first pages of *Memoirs of a Physician*, Cagliostro is their leader and is known to the members at large as the Great Copt. He appears as a stranger in the night and is put to the test by the Masons awaiting him at the top of Mont Tonnerre. From the start, Cagliostro presents himself as a force to be reckoned with, not as another member at large undergoing an initiation rite. He speaks forcefully with the group, scoffing at their insinuations that he might have fear or not know the answers to their questions. The melodramatic is at work in these beginning passages of Dumas. The introduction is quite lengthy and is all written in melodramatic language. An excerpt illustrates the general manner in which the count Cagliostro addresses his fellow Freemasons:
“Tu es jeune”, reprit le président, “et tu parles avec l’autorité d’un dieu. Réfléchis bien, à ton tour : l’audace n’étourdit que les hommes irrésolus ou ignorants.”

Un sourire de suprême dédain se dessina sur les lèvres de l’étranger.

“Vous êtes tous irrésolus”, dit-il, “puisqu’au lieu de vous agir sur moi ; vous êtes tous ignorants, puisque vous ne savez pas qui je suis, tandis qu’au contraire je sais, moi, qui vous êtes ; donc je réussirai près de vous rien qu’avec de l’audace ; mais à quoi sert l’audace à celui qui est tout-puissant ?”

“La prévue de cette puissance”, dit le président, “la preuve, donnez-nous-la.”

“Qui vous a convoqués?” demanda l’inconnu, passant du rôle d’interroge à celui d’interrogateur.

“Le cercle suprême.”

“Ce n’est pas sans but”, dit l’étranger en se retournant vers le président et vers les cinq chefs, “que vous êtes venus, vous de Suède, vous de Londres, vous de New York, vous de Zurich, vous de Madrid, vous de Varsovie, vous tous enfin,” continua-t-il en s’adressant à la foule des quatre parties du monde, “pour vous réunir dans le sanctuaire de la foi terrible.”

“Non, sans doute”, répondit le président, “nous venons au-devant de celui qui a fondé un empire mystérieux en Orient, qui a réuni les deux hémisphères dans une communauté de croyances, qui a enlacé les mains fraternelles du genre humain.”

“Y-a-t-il un signe certain auquel vous puissiez le reconnaître?”

“Oui, dit le président”, et “Dieu a daigné me le dévoiler par l’intermédiaire des anges.”

“Vous seul connaissez ce signe, alors?”

“Moi seul le connais.”

“Vous n’avez révélé ce signe à personne?”

“A personne du monde.”

“Dites-le tout haut.”

Le président hésita.

“Dites”, répéta l’étranger avec le ton du commandement, “dites, car le moment de la révélation est venu!”

Il portera sur la poitrine, dit le chef suprême, une plaque de diamant, et sur cette plaque étincelleront les trois premières lettres d’une devise connue de lui seule.

“Quelle sont ces trois lettres?”
“L.P.D.”

L’étranger écarta d’un mouvement rapide sa redingote et son gilet, et sur sa chemise de fine batiste apparu, resplendissant comme une étoile de flamme, la plaque de diamant sur laquelle flamboyaient les trois lettres de rubis.

“LUI!” s’écria le président épouvante : “serait-ce lui?”

“Celui que le monde attend!” dirent avec anxiété les chefs.

“Le Grand Cophte!” murmurèrent trois cent voix.

“Eh bien!” s’écria l’étranger avec l’accent du triomphe, “me croirez-vous maintenant quand je vous répéterai pour la seconde fois : je suis celui qui est?”

“Oui,” dirent les fantômes en se prosternant.” (Dumas 51-52)

“Thou art young,” replied the president, “and thou speakest as if from divine authority. Reflect! Boldness overcomes only the weak or the ignorant.”

A disdainful smile played over the lips of the stranger.

“You are all weak, since you have no power over me! You are all ignorant, since ye know not who I am! Boldness, then, alone might overcome you; but why should one all-powerful be so overcome?”

“Give us proof of your boasted power!” said the president.

“Who convoked you?” asked the unknown, becoming the interrogator instead of the interrogated.

“The grand assembly.”

“And not without a cause hast thou,” pointing to the president, “come from Sweden; thou, and he turned from one to another of the five chiefs as he spoke, thou from London, thou from New York, thou from Zurich, thou from Warsaw, and you all,” looking round the assembly, “from the four winds of heaven, to meet in the sanctuary of the dreaded faith.”

“No,” replied the president, “not without cause, for we came to meet him who has founded in the East a mysterious faith, joining two worlds in one belief, entwining mankind with the bonds of brotherhood.”

“Is there a sign by which you shall know him?”

“Yes,” said the president, “and an angel revealed it to me.”

“You alone know it?”
“I alone.”

“You have revealed it to none?”

“To none.”

“Name it.”

The president hesitated.

“Name it! The hour has come!”

“He will bear on his breast a diamond star, and on it three letters, the signification of which is only known to himself.”

“Declare the letters.”

“L.P.D.”

The stranger rapidly threw open his coat and vest, and on his fine Holland shirt shone like a flaming star the diamond, and the three letters formed of rubies.

“It is he!” cried the president.

“He whom we await?” asked the chiefs.

“The Great Copt?” murmured the three hundred voices.

“Now,” cried the stranger triumphantly, “do you believe me when I say ‘I am he that is’?”

“Yes,” said the phantoms, prostrating themselves before him.

(Dumas xix-xx)

In the above passage, Dumas invokes the secrecy for which the Freemasons were famous. In his biography about Cagliostro entitled The Last Alchemist, Iain McCalman describes the popularity of Cagliostro’s brand of Freemasonry. “Cagliostromania was supplanting the balloon craze of the last few years…Given that aeronauts could now soar to the heavens and Dr. Mesmer could make people swoon with magnetic waves, even Cagliostro’s fantastic claims seemed possible. After all, his Egyptian Masonry entailed science, religion, and magic.” (The Last Alchemist, p. 128) In addition to calling himself
as The Great Copt, which refers to a native Egyptian Christian sect (The Last Alchemist, p. 105), Cagliostro uses the term L.P.D., which stood for Lilium pedibus destrue, or “trample the lilies underfoot”. This is used by Dumas to show the secret language known only to the Freemasons when speaking to each other about calling into question the legitimacy of the monarchy and inciting the revolution.

In Reading for the Plot, Peter Brooks notes the use of specialized language by many of the nineteenth century French novelists, including Dumas. Brooks associates specialized language with peripheral characters, such as prostitutes and others who can be considered part of the “social underground” and links the idea of such characterization and language as essential to serialization. Brooks attributes Parent-Duchatelet with the first in depth research on this topic. Brooks writes about “an entire sub-society, a subterranean world with its own social organization, its manners, its language—even its special slang—analyzed and documented with great detail and authority….that such novelists as Balzac, Dumas, Hugo and Sue put Parent-Duchatelet’s research largely to profit.” (Brooks 158) Here Cagliostro and his Freemason brothers show the secretive, symbolic language known only to them. Their marginality implies an outsider’s knowledge of the political events underway in France and their cultish practices suggest their desire to impact change without the knowledge of the public.

Other characters are also affected by Cagliostro’s specialized language and melodramatic delivery. In the case of the women that he has dealings with, instead of being portrayed as the fearless leader of the Freemasons, Cagliostro is cast in the more menacing role of the evil sorcerer who puts them in a trance and uses them like live crystal balls as a means to see future events. The women he hypnotizes range from his
wife Lorenza, to Andrée de Taverney, to Marie Antoinette herself, although she seems to
be more resistant to his power. In Joseph Balsamo in the chapters called “The Will”
and “Clairvoyance” the hallucinations are brought about by such dramatic words as
“Lorenza! Lorenza! Je veux que tu dormes!—Je veux que tu sois muette!” (Dumas 934)
“Lorenza! Lorenza! It is my will that you sleep!—be dumb at my command” (Dumas
472) and “Reprends des forces, lui dit Balsamo…tout à l’heure, j’aurai encore besoin de
toute ta lucidité. O science!” (Dumas 123) “Recover thy strength…I shall soon require
thy light again. O science!” (Dumas 63) Except for his wife, Cagliostro comes into
contact with all of these women for the first time in Memoirs of a Physician, shortly after
his return from Mount Tonnerre. At each first meeting, he immediately finds a moment to
mesmerize the women and use them to foretell future events. Despite his exasperation
with Lorenza, Cagliostro claims to love her; yet in reality he treats her as a prisoner for
whom he has great contempt, but whom he needs to realize his powers. After Lorenza’s
murder, it is mostly Gilbert who Dumas uses to illustrate mesmerism. While Cagliostro
still employs women in his schemes—in particular Nicole d’Oliva in the Diamond
Necklace Affair—he does not put them into a hypnotic state do so.

Gilbert suffers the same affliction at the hands of Andrée. His eventual rage
towards her is caused by her rejection of him and everything he stands for. When they are
young, Gilbert knows that he is uneducated and of inferior social status to Andrée. In
time, however, he leaves France for America, where he studies medicine and philosophy.
He comes back a proud, knowledgeable man who is disgusted by Andrée and the world
she lives in. Gilbert wants to affect change in the French political system, and is a
follower of the Enlightenment thinking, in particular of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau
preached the inequality between men and women and this is evident in the way that Gilbert treats Andree. He also echoes this manner of speaking when in the company of certain women, in particular his former love Nicole Legay. In *Memoirs of a Physician*, Gilbert rejects Nicole and tells her that he will not marry, as he prefers to remain free. He goes on to explain their inequality:

“…Vous ne m’épouserez pas?”

“Je ne vous ai jamais dit que je vous épouserais,” répondit Gilbert avec mépris.

“Eh bien! eh bien!” s’écria la jeune fille exaspérée, “il me semble que Nicole Legay vaut bien Sebastien Gilbert.”

“Tous les homes se valent,” dit Gilbert ; “seulement, la nature ou l’éducation on mit en eux des valeurs diverses et des facultés différentes. Selon que ces valeurs ou ces facultés se développent plus ou moins, ils s’éloignent les uns des autres.”

“De sorte qu’ayant des facultés et des valeurs plus développées que les miennes, vous vous éloignez de moi.”

“Naturellement. Vous ne raisonnez pas encore, Nicole, mais vous comprenez déjà.” (Dumas 133)

“So, then, you will not marry me?”

“I never said I would marry you,” said Gilbert contemptuously.

“And yet,” cried the exasperated girl, “I think Nicole Legay fully the equal of Sebastien Gilbert.”

“All human beings are equal; but nature or education makes certain faculties greater in, one man than another, and according as these faculties are more or less developed, men differ from one another.”

“So that your faculties being more developed than mine, you are raised above me?”

“Quite correct!—you do not reason yet, Nicole, but you understand.” (Dumas 72)

Later in the series, in *The Queen’s Necklace*, Nicole is speaking to Cagliostro about Gilbert and says, “Il était plein d’esprit; il était mon égal par la naissance…Tant
que Gilbert le voudra, aucune femme ne sera son égale.” (Dumas 213) “He was full of mind, my equal in birth, but Gilbert thought no woman his equal.” (Dumas 171) Dumas presents Rousseau’s philosophy through the character of Gilbert, who tries to better himself through education. In order for Nicole to improve her station in life, she must resort to scheming with her husband. She is eventually revealed to be the Nicole d’Oliva who is involved in impersonating Marie Antoinette in the Diamond Necklace Affair.

Soon after his self-liberation from the de Taverney’s service, Gilbert becomes a disciple of Cagliostro and uses his methods of mind control, particularly on Andrée. His desire to espouse the teachings of Rousseau becomes convoluted when he is affected by Cagliostro’s occult influence.

When dealing with both male and female characters that are beneath him socially, Cagliostro is more direct and resorts to threats and bribery to get his way. Such is the case with Nicole and Beausire in The Queen’s Necklace. They will do anything to better their station in life, and Cagliostro uses this fact to blackmail them into his service. Their first confrontation begins in a swordfight during which Beausire is controlled by his emotions and Cagliostro calmly sends his opponent’s sword flying across the room. Cagliostro speaks to Beausire in a condescending tone, making it obvious that they are not equals. Cagliostro threatens to expose information about Beausire’s unscrupulous business affairs to convince him to do his bidding. Disguised at a masked ball he says to Beausire,

“Je prouverai donc, continua le domino bleu, que votre présence ici vous est aussi nuisible que votre absence vous serait profitable…Nous sommes membres d’une certaine académie, n’est-ce pas ?….Je ne parle pas de l’Académie Française…Rue du Pot-de-Fer…est-ce bien cela monsieur de Beausire ?”

“Chut !”
“...Le domino bleu tira sa montre, une belle montre enrichie de brillants sur laquelle se fixèrent comme deux lentilles enflammées les deux prunelles de Beausire. Eh bien, dans un quart d’heure…on va discuter un petit projet tendant à donner un bénéfice de deux millions aux douze vrais associés, dont vous êtes un, monsieur de Beausire.”

“Et dont vous êtes un autre, si toutefois…”

“Achevez.”

“Si toutefois vous n’êtes pas un mouchard.”

“En vérité, je vous croyais un homme d’esprit, monsieur de Beausire, mais je vois avec douleur que nous n’êtes qu’un sot ; si j’étais de la police, je vous aurais déjà pris et repris vingt fois pour des affaires moins honorables que cette spéculation…”

“Ah ! monsieur,” dit-il, “vous m’envoyez rue du Pot-de-Fer !...pour m’y faire pincer. Mais pas si fou.”

“Encore une sottise…Je vous ferai…arrêter tout de suite, et nous serions débarrassés de vous…mais au contraire, tut par la douceur et la persuasion…c’est ma devise.” (Dumas 210-211)

“I will prove to you that your presence here is as hurtful as your absence would be profitable. You are a member of a certain academy, not the Académie Française, but in the Rue du Pot au Fer, is it not, my dear M. Beausire?”

“Hush!” said Beausire.

The blue domino drew out his watch, which was studded with diamonds that made Beausire’s eyes water to look at them. “Well!” continued he, “in a quarter of an hour they are going to discuss there a little project, by which, they hope to secure 2,000,000 among the twelve members, of whom you are one, M. Beausire.”

“And you must be another; if you are not—“

“Pray go on.”

“A member of the police.”

“Oh, M. Beausire, I thought you had more sense. If I were of the police, I should have taken you long ago, for some little affairs less honorable than this speculation.”

“So, sir, you wish to send me to the Rue du Pot au Fer: but I know why—that I may be arrested there: I am not such a fool.”
“Now, you are one. If I wanted to arrest you, I had only to do it, and I am rid of you at once; but gentleness and persuasion are my maxims.” (Dumas 169)

Bribery works with the couple, since the two have little moral character and are happy to break the law if it means they will profit by their actions. Cagliostro gives Beausire a sizable sum so that he will leave him alone with Nicole and can proceed with their plan to have her mistaken for Marie Antoinette, and seeing the money he immediately submits to Cagliostro’s wishes. With Nicole, Cagliostro uses a more gentle power of persuasion. Once he convinces her that he is not interested in taking her for a lover, she willingly takes his money and has little concern for how she must earn it. As the director of the action in the series, Cagliostro always wants to insure that he has the upper hand in his relationships with those he wants to control, and is sure to expose their weaknesses to them before demanding their service.

Conversely, when addressing his master Althotas, Cagliostro plays the part of the respectful grandson upon hearing his elder’s crazy schemes, and is gentle in his criticism. Oddly, although Cagliostro is used by Dumas as a catalyst for the Revolution in France, he is more inclined to respect the past, as represented by the old man Althotas, than the younger ones such as Nicole and Beausire. His claims to have found the fountain of youth lead him to launch into stories about the ancient world and his first-hand knowledge of it. The new ideas of the Enlightenment also ring true for Cagliostro, including his treatment of women as the means to an end. He clearly echoes Rousseau’s thoughts on inequality of the sexes as is illustrated in his disdain for most of the female characters that he is in direct contact with. They are kept at home, apart from the outside world where they are seen doing more harm than good. In the time period of the
Revolution, the role of women was at best uncertain and Cagliostro’s treatment of women represents the confusion surrounding their public and private portrayal.

This is illustrated in Cagliostro’s appearance at key points in Dumas’ series when female characters are put in the position to either want to escape or actually attempt to escape their circumstances. In The Countess de Charny there is a scene when the royal family is being brought from Versailles to Paris by the angry mob on October 6, 1789. As the queen is trying to come to grips with the idea that the French people hate her enough to walk along side her carriage parading decapitated heads on spikes, Cagliostro appears in the distance, leaning against a tree. He is the physical embodiment of the downfall of the monarchy, constantly taunting her. His casual, upright physical descriptions are in direct contrast to the hystericized bodies of the female characters throughout the series. As in his last scene in the series at the opera, Cagliostro’s appearance signals doom for the queen. Dumas often has his antagonist leaning against something—a tree, a post--- as if to emphasize his devilish persona. As he conducts the cheers of the crowd, Marie Antoinette is overcome. He is content to look out onto the destruction he has caused with a gleam in his eye. Dumas wrote, “La reine poussa un cri de terreur et ferma les yeux; elle ne se sentait plus la force de regarder ce démon, qui semblait le roi du désordre, l’esprit de la destruction.” (Dumas 796) “The queen shrieked with terror, and closed her eyes. She could no longer look at this demon, who seemed the god of disorder, the spirit of destruction.” (Dumas 498) In the case of Lorenza, Cagliostro also seems to appear out of the blue and at just the precise moment that she is attempting escape. Be it the opening scenes in Memoirs of a Physician when she takes advantage of a storm/accident to steal Cagliostro’s horse and flee, or when she finally gets away from imprisonment in
Cagliostro’s home in the Rue St. Claude and runs to the police with evidence that he is a criminal, Lorenza can never truly break free. Dumas gave Cagliostro the power to hypnotize and women, and the uncanny ability to arrive on the scene just as we, the audience, are about to be relieved that someone, anyone, has escaped his wrath. It is not to be overlooked that Cagliostro also magnetizes Mirabeau’s dog in *The Countess de Charny*, but he never hypnotizes men. Instead he instructs them how to hypnotize women. Is Dumas equating women and dogs here? Both are portrayed as nuisances needing to be tamed. Once they are, they are used to Cagliostro’s benefit.

Another melodramatic element in Dumas’ series is the tone of suspense he used to set the tone in *Memoirs of a Physician*. The first chapter begins with a storm descending upon Cagliostro’s carriage:

“Un jour gris et terne filtra péniblement sur la terre, et les feuillages tremblants, sans que la moindre brise passât dans l’air, prirent cette teinte noire qu’ils revêtent sous les premières couches d’obscurité qui suivent l’absence du soleil. Tout à coup un éclair sillonna la nuée, le ciel se fendit en losanges de feu, et l’œil effrayé put plonger dans les profondeurs incommensurables du firmament… Au même instant un coup de tonnerre bondissant d’arbre en arbre jusqu’au bout du bois que traversait la route secoua la terre-même, et fit courir la grande nuée comme un cheval furieux. De son côté la voiture roulait toujours, continuant de lancer de la fumée par sa cheminée; seulement, de noire qu’elle était d’abord, cette fumée était devenue subtile et couleur d’opale” and further, “un second coup de tonnerre, plus violent…que le premier, dégagea la pluie des nuages ; elle tomba d’abord en larges gouttes, puis bientôt elle jaillit drue et roide, comme des brassées de flèches qu’on eût lancées du ciel.” (Dumas 68)

“A dim gray light struggled through upon the scene, and although no breeze swept along, the leaves shivered, and put on the dark tinge which they assume in the deepening twilight succeeding sunset. Suddenly a flash illuminated the cloud, the heavens burst into sheets of flame, and the startled eye might penetrate the immeasurable depths of the firmament. At the same moment the thunder rolled from tree to tree, shaking the earth, and hurrying on the vast cloud like a maddened steed. On went the carriage, sending forth its smoke, now changed in color by the changes of the atmosphere” and further, “…a peal of thunder more
violent than the first rent the clouds, and the rain fell, at first in large drops, then thick and smarting, like arrows darted from the heavens.” (Dumas 3)

The forces of nature that are at work here go hand in hand with the dark intentions of the stranger Cagliostro. His affinity to the dark arts is mirrored in the darkness of the landscape in the storm, and in turn is used as a metaphor for the impending political storm that is about to shake the French monarchy.

Dumas uses the metaphor of a storm to represent the Revolution several times throughout the series. In Ange Pitou, he writes about “un jeudi du mois de juillet 1789, jour assez maussade, assombri qu’il était par un orage” (Dumas 654) “one Thursday in the month of July 1789, a somewhat disagreeable day, being darkened by a storm” (Dumas 4) and again in The Countess de Charny he writes “La reine comprit que la était la tempête” (Dumas 795) “The queen knew the tempest was come.” (Dumas 498) The political and social climate in France is seen by Dumas as being under the influence of darkness and uncertainty. Much in the same way that modern horror films announce an evil presence with a storm, Dumas used storm references to emphasize malevolent forces at work in pre-Revolutionary France. Dumas, after all had the gift of hindsight and knew that although the intentions of Enlightenment philosophers were good, they eventually incited a bloody revolution that ended in the extermination of the monarchy and left a nation wondering which direction to take in the future. Dumas himself was a part of that future French society that continued to struggle politically during the years following the end of the Revolution. A loyal Republican and son of a hero of the French Revolution, Dumas interrupted his writing career in 1830 to help oust Charles X from power. (Schopp 157)
Dumas uses the character of Jean-Jacques Rousseau to lend a contrasting image to the rites of the Freemasons. In a chapter in *Joseph Balsamo* entitled “The House in the Rue Platrière”, he is invited by Cagliostro to attend one of the meetings. He is being chosen to be elected into the group because of the veneration of the Freemasons for his philosophical contributions to the Enlightenment. The speaker at the meeting addresses the assembly in order to explain the elimination of the usual mysterious rituals:

“You will not be surprised,” said he, “that we have assembled you in a place where the usual trials cannot be attempted. These trials have seemed useless to the chiefs; the brother whom we are to receive today is one of the lights of contemporary philosophy—a thoughtful spirit who will be devoted to us from conviction, not from fear. One who has discovered all the mysteries of nature and of the human heart cannot be treated in the same manner as the simple mortal from whom we demand the help of his arm, his will, and his gold. In order to have the cooperation of his distinguished mind, of his honest and energetic character, his promise and his assent are sufficient.”

The speaker, when he had concluded, looked round to mark the effect of his words.
Upon Rousseau the effect had been magical; the Genovese philosopher was acquainted with the preparatory mysteries of freemasonry, and looked upon them with the repugnance natural to enlightened minds. The concessions, absurd because they were useless, which the chiefs required from the candidates, this simulating fear when everyone knew there was nothing to fear, seemed to him to be the acme of puerility and senseless superstition.” (Dumas 298)

As the scene continues, Rousseau’s motives are questioned by other members of the assembly, notably Marat. He calls upon Rousseau to defend his conviction for independence and liberty not brought about by fear and violence. Rousseau will not be lured into an argument, nor will he be persuaded to stay at the meeting. He offers that the assembly should keep a set of his books to reference as a means of support to the cause and takes an oath of secrecy to the men before leaving. Rousseau was presented by Dumas at the time in his life when he had already written the Confessions. He was already looking back and coming to terms with his mistakes, while the rest of the world--here in Dumas, the freemasons lead by Cagliostro--was looking to him as a representative of the republican cause. He had already moved beyond this in his lifetime. He was an older, wiser version of himself while the revolutionaries were acting like young men, without thinking of the consequences of their actions. This unbridled desire for change, coupled with paranoia about the aristocracy resulted in the Terror, and when the revolution ended left confusion about the Republic and the eventual Restoration which caused the political upheaval associated with 19th century France history. It took the French time to come to terms with the end of the monarchy as the nation continued to struggle with its new identities under different political systems.

Cagliostro, the leader of the Freemasons, also uses melodramatic language to accentuate the seriousness of their mission. He utters such veiled phrases as “Veillez au
Watch the south, brothers, under its burning rays has been hatched a traitor who will ruin you. Watch in Paris, brothers—the traitor dwells there; he possesses the secrets of the order, a feeling of hatred urges him on. A murmuring voice, a rustling flight, whispers the denunciation in my ear. I see a terrible vengeance coming, but perhaps it will be too late. In the meantime, brothers, watch! watch! A traitorous tongue, even though it be uninstructed, is sometimes sufficient to overthrow our most skillfully constructed plans.” (Dumas 305-6) Dumas repeatedly has Cagliostro speaking in dramatic language which has a theatrical effect. Here he is trying to stir up the Freemasons’ fear and paranoia. Although it is not clear to whom Cagliostro is referring, he could be making reference to the duc de Choiseul, whom he mentions later on in the chapter.

In The Knight of Maison-Rouge, (1845) Dumas seems to have combined the melodramatic theatrical elements of his own time period with some elements from the classical theater of Racine to emphasize the tragic nature of the revolutionary world during the Terror. In The Knight of Maison Rouge, the character of Cagliostro is conspicuously absent, as it was written before the rest of The Marie Antoinette Romances series. The lack of this melodramatic persona in Knight lends a different tone to this
novel. There is no outside occult influence present. The characters, though fictional, are more believable and less bizarre. That is not to say that melodramatic elements are not present in The Knight of Maison-Rouge. They are, but to a lesser degree. The theatrical elements in Knight span from the tragic death at the guillotine to a more classical treatment of love.

Dumas uses theatrical references throughout the novel The Knight of Maison-Rouge. The character of Lorin, best friend of Maurice Lindey and Geneviève Dixmer, is known for speaking in rhyme. He often makes up his own couplets, but is also known for quoting Racine and Molière. A corporal in the National Guard, Lorin plays the role of the theatrical clown but also the voice of reason to Maurice’s love struck hero. He never takes himself too seriously, despite the desperate circumstances he is surrounded by. Lorin is quoted as saying to Maurice, “Ce culte de la patrie n’exclut pas celui de l’amour.” (Dumas 1279) “Worship of the nation doesn’t exclude worship of love.” (Dumas 34) and this could very well summarize Dumas’ main theme in Knight. One of the elements of tragedy is that is allows trauma to be healed. In The Knight of Maison Rouge, the deaths of Geneviève, Maurice and Lorin give a physical and psychological escape from the traumas of the Terror. The inclusion of both tragic and melodramatic elements in Dumas go with the idea of desacralization that reached its’ height during the Enlightenment and the Revolution and ending in the idea of resacralization which gained popularity in its’ aftermath. In The Melodramatic Imagination, Peter Brooks explained this phenomenon:

“By the end of the Enlightenment, there was clearly a renewed thirst for the Sacred, a reaction to desacralization expressed in the vast movement we think of as Romanticism. The reaction both reasserted the need for some version of the
Sacred and offered further proof of the irremediable loss of the Sacred and its traditional, categorical, unifying form. Mythmaking could now only be individual, personal; and the promulgation of ethical imperatives had to depend on an individual act of self-understanding that would then—by an imaginative or even a terroristic leap—be offered as the foundation of a general ethics. In fact, the entity making the strongest claim to sacred status tends more and more to be personality itself. From amid the collapse of other principles and criteria, the individual ego declares its central and overriding value, its demand to be the measure of all things….Melodrama represents both the urge toward resacralization and the impossibility of conceiving sacralization other than in personal terms.” (Brooks 16)

Thus the theater, and eventually the historical novel in the case of Dumas, came to demonstrate self-recognition as a means of coming to terms with the ills of the outside world. The end of the Ancien Régime and the beginning of the Terror cause the characters in The Knight of Maison Rouge to question their previous belief systems in order to achieve self-awareness. This change in one’s individual convictions in turn unifies the range of divergent thought among characters so that they came come to act in a uniform manner. Geneviève’s sympathies toward the aristocracy collide with Maurice’s (and Lorin’s) republican loyalty. Love puts Maurice in a compromising position. His adoration for Geneviève leads him to question his loyalty to the nation. She, in turn abandons her husband for Maurice. All that was previously sacred to them is neglected in the face of betrayal and death and is replaced by their love for one another. Lorin, too decides that his love for both Maurice and Geneviève is stronger than his will to live in a world without them, and he voluntarily goes with them to be executed. In the cart, just before mounting the scaffold, Geneviève “entoura d’un bras le cou de Maurice, saisit de l’autre main celle de Lorin, et tous trios, debout sur la charrette, ayant a leurs pieds les deux autres victimes ensevelies dans la stupeur d’une mort anticipée, ils lancèrent au ciel, qui leur permettait de s’appuyer librement l’un sur l’autre…. ” (Dumas 1584) “wrapped one
arm around Maurice’s neck, seized Lorin’s hand with the other, and all three, standing tall in the cart, with the other victims at their feet shrouded in the stupor of anticipated death, launched a greeting and a look of gratitude to the heavens, which allowed them to freely prop one another up.” (Dumas 396) This physical joining together and propping up immediately precedes the ascension of the three souls and represents humanity overcoming political convictions. The use of melodrama to correspond to the idea of self-sacralization is evidenced in this scene. The protagonists are fighting against forces that are beyond their ability to control. Once they accept their fate, they become a better version of themselves and accept their death with dignity as being part of a larger cause.

Thus, the progression from tragedy to melodrama to novel afforded the Romantic authors another means to affect public morals/opinions about historical events. By taking a cue from the mistakes of the not so distant past, the value system of the nineteenth century was able to evolve from that of the Enlightenment period to the Romantic period of the early nineteenth century.

The resacralization of Marie Antoinette as it appears in Dumas is present in other literary works of the nineteenth century. In Madame Bovary, published in 1856, Gustave Flaubert wrote a chapter in which Emma is at a ball and sees one of Marie Antoinette’s former lovers, who has reached old age. She is overcome with the notion that he was present at court during the Ancien Régime and romanticizes his image.

“But at the upper end of the table, alone amongst all these women, bent over his full plate, and his napkin tied round his neck like a child, an old man sat eating, letting drops of gravy drip from his mouth. His eyes were bloodshot, and he wore a little queue tied with black ribbon. He was the Marquis’s father-in-law, the old Duke de Laverdière, once on a time favourite of the Count d’Artois, in the days of the Vaudreuil hunting-parties at the Marquis de Conflans’, and had been, it was
said, the lover of Queen Marie Antoinette, between Monsieur de Coigny and
Monsieur de Lauzun. He had lived a life of noisy debauch, full of duels, bets,
elopements; he had squandered his fortune and frightened all his family. A
servant behind his chair named aloud to him in his ear the dishes that he pointed
to stammering, and constantly Emma's eyes turned involuntarily to this old man
with hanging lips, as to something extraordinary. He had lived at court and slept
in the bed of queens!” (Flaubert Chapter 8 Project Gutenberg)

Instead of being critical of Marie Antoinette’s alleged past, Emma obsesses over
it and equates it with a more interesting and desirable place in history. Ironically, she
becomes amoral as the story progresses, much like the image Marie Antoinette’s world
which she has come to associate with happiness.

The end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century witnessed the
advent of the era of film. With the evolution from the novel to film at this time,
melodrama continued to serve a vital role in telling the story of Marie Antoinette on the
screen. Instead of reading the written interpretation of a story, an audience could now see
the writer’s vision before them. Like live theatrical performances, the cinematic
performance played to the audience’s senses rather than to his or her imagination.
Physical drama took on a slightly different form. The ability to refilm scenes lead to a
perfected version of the finished product not easily reproduced on a live stage and
afforded the director a more personalized influence on the final production. As referenced
earlier, *Orphans of the Storm* (1921) directed by D.W.Griffith, was a film about the
French Revolution, and one of the first melodramas on the silver screen. It was a silent
film that featured music to accompany the images and stir emotion in the audience.
Although Marie Antoinette was not featured in the film, it served as a representation of
the radical side of the French Revolution as the main character is sent to the guillotine.
As the twentieth century progressed, several films were produced with Marie Antoinette as the subject. Many were adaptations of novels and biographies. Among the best known American productions is the black and white version of *Marie Antoinette* in 1938 directed by W.S. Van Dyke which starred Norma Shearer in the role of the queen. Because it was released in the 1930s, the Van Dyke version of Marie Antoinette had some melodramatic elements that were not present in later productions. It was filmed partially at Versailles, giving the audience the ability to see the actual interiors of the palace for the first time. From an acting standpoint, Shearer’s most memorable scenes were at the end of the film when she is separated from the *dauphin*, and during her imprisonment in the Conciergerie when she is left alone before her death. Both scenes reflect tragedy but are not associated with Brooks’ idea of the hystericized female body that came into play in Dumas historical melodrama. During her final scene in the Conciergerie, the queen has made the same transformation spoken about in Dumas and written about by Stefan Zweig. Her conversion is represented both emotionally and physically by Van Dyke. The Marie Antoinette that the audience sees in prison awaiting execution has aged considerably and is unrecognizable as the light-hearted, self-assured queen of France. In an extreme close-up at the end of the film, all of the agony of Marie Antoinette can be read on Norma Shearer’s face. It is said that the actress refused makeup in order to look more haggard and realistic in this scene, where her physical and emotional transformation is complete.

In 1955 appeared the French film, *Marie-Antoinette reine de France*, directed by Jean Delannoy. Delannoy, like Van Dyke, showed a Marie Antoinette who evolved from a carefree young woman to a queen and mother. However, Van Dyke’s portrayal of
Marie Antoinette is one in which she holds her duty as a queen above all else. She is shown as being extremely dignified and respectful in her relationship with Louis XVI although both she and the king are aware that she prefers Count Axel von Fersen. In fact, Delannoy’s focus throughout the film is the romantic relationship between Marie Antoinette and Axel von Fersen and the sacrifices that both of them make to ensure the protection of Marie Antoinette’s reputation. Delannoy also allots a considerable amount of attention to the pamphlets, both in the form of booklets and songs that calumniated the queen. He shows Marie Antoinette’s concern about the spreading of pamphlet literature and the helplessness she felt while being unable to reverse the damage that it did to her reputation, especially following the Diamond Necklace Affair. The legitimacy of the monarchy is called into question throughout the film and is substantiated with the use of pamphlets by the revolutionaries to undermine the king and queen and simultaneously create military propaganda to fuel their cause. Throughout the film, Delannoy portrays a dignified and unselfish Marie Antoinette who accepts her fate with the sang-froid expected of a monarch.

Over the past two decades, there has been a resurgence in Marie Antoinette as a subject in film following the 2006 release of Marie Antoinette, directed by Sofia Coppola which featured Kirsten Dunst in the lead role. Both of the 1938 and 2006 American films were based on popular biographies of the day, the Van Dyke version being based on Stefan Zweig’s Marie Antoinette: An Ordinary Woman, and Sofia Coppola’s version being based on the Antonia Fraser biography entitled Marie Antoinette: The Journey. Coppola’s Marie Antoinette showed the young, haughty, narcissistic queen and her evolution into a more mature woman as the Revolution progressed and began to turn
hostile towards the royal family. While the film is visually stunning, it fails to capture the entire life of the queen, instead focusing on her carefree youth. It is not until the end that Marie Antoinette is depicted as anything other than frivolous. Coppola’s final scene in Marie Antoinette shows the King, Queen and their children as they are forced to leave Versailles for Paris in October 1789. The last scene shows a pensive Marie Antoinette who regrets having to leave her home and fears what lies ahead. The carriage ride away from Versailles is the visual exiting of the stage. However, unlike many recent movies about the ill-fated queen, we are spared seeing her execution. Through the use of dramatic costumes, lighting and twentieth-century pop music, Coppola chose to show exactly how modern and extravagant Marie Antoinette was during her lifetime. By breaking tradition, Coppola portrays the queen as having youthful appeal that transcends the centuries. The proof: she is still a pop culture icon in the modern day. However, this modern version of Marie Antoinette’s life stops short of the point in her life where she suffered most, thereby denying her transformation and self-realization.

In 2012, Benoit Jacquot directed the French production called Les Adieux à la reine based on the novel by Chantal Thomas of the same name. Jacquot’s film stars Diane Kruger as the queen and Léa Seydoux as her reader Mademoiselle Laborde. In the film, the character of Mademoiselle Laborde is portrayed by the director as a teenager rather than a mature woman as was the case in the novel. This allows the character a certain naïveté in politics and in love that place her in the unique position of coming of age during the French Revolution. Everything around her at Versailles is surprising, from the reluctance, then urgency of the flight of the royal family, to the intimate relationship between Marie Antoinette and Gabrielle de Polignac. As in the novel, the film depicts the
queen as being self-centered and pleasure-seeking, as well as being emotionally devastated by the abandonment of her friends as the Revolution breaks out. Some liberties were taken with the plot, especially in addressing the relationship between Marie Antoinette and her favorite. In the film, the queen asks Sidonie if she has ever been in love with a woman. Sidonie later watches as Marie Antoinette et Gabrielle de Polignac embrace one another. In the film, it is clear that Marie Antoinette has deep feelings for Gabrielle de Polignac and there is an erotic element given to their relationship as Sidonie walks in on a nude, sleeping Gabrielle. Sidonie is used by the queen as a decoy in Gabrielle de Polignac’s escape from France and is preceded by a scene in which Sidonie herself is stripped naked before the queen. At this moment she is changing identity, going from an overlooked reader to the double of the queen’s lover. The physical stripping of clothing represents her being reborn into another character. This scene echoes the transfer ceremony of Marie Antoinette at a young age, when she was forced to shed all of her Austrian clothing in favor of French couture in Coppola’s film. The duplicity of Marie Antoinette’s image is one that has been metaphorically addressed through costume changes. Kruger’s portrayal of Marie Antoinette was perhaps the most regal and least melodramatic of the past century. Although the audience is shown her practical side at the beginning of the Revolution as she tries to help those closest to her escape assassination, we never see her personal suffering at the hands of the revolutionaries. Instead, Jacquot shows her being left behind at Versailles as the mass emigration of the aristocracy begins.

The transition from libertine literature of the Ancien Régime to pamphlet literature of the Revolutionary period and eventually to melodrama of the early nineteenth century
follows an evolution in the criticism of society and politics in France. Libertine literature was focused on the aristocracy and was meant to act as a cautionary tale about the vices of society and the perception of personal liberty. In the period immediately preceding the outbreak of the Revolution, there was a shift to pamphlet literature whose audience included all levels of French society and which had for its goal the expansion of republican thought through the identification of a common enemy, namely Marie Antoinette. The irreparable damage caused to Marie Antoinette’s reputation by her scapegoating in the pamphlets unified the French people to the revolutionary cause. After the executions of both Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, there was an abrupt end to the production of pamphlet literature. The coming of the Restoration in 1814 allowed for a reconsideration of the monarchy. During this time, melodrama began to appear in theatrical performances which appealed to the masses, then eventually was seen in historical fiction. Alexandre Dumas used melodramatic techniques to create a series based upon the life of Marie Antoinette which had the effect of resacralizing the monarchy while simultaneously representing republican ideals. While Dumas always considered himself to be a republican who never turned his back on a fight, he also started his career in the employ of the Duc d’Orléans before he was crowned King of the French. Dumas walked a fine line between selling enough books to support his lavish lifestyle and not offending those who had gotten him on the path to success. The Marie Antoinette Romances is an example of what Dumas often portrayed in his series—the polarization of French society and the search for a national identity once the break with the monarchy was finally established.
Notes—Chapter 5

1 Antonia Fraser mentions several events that were associated with Marie Antoinette before her arrival in France and ascension to the throne, such as her birth on November 2, 1755, the day of a terrible earthquake in Portugal (5), her transfer ceremony under a tapestry depicting Jason and Medea, which showed a mother who kills her own children, and her stop at Strasbourg Cathedral en route to Paris, where she was blessed by her future enemy, the Cardinal de Rohan. (63) At the actual wedding, Marie Antoinette’s signature was marred by a large ink blot. (70)

2 Princess Louise was the daughter of King Louis XV. She rejected the court and spent the rest of her life in the convent of Saint-Denis. (435) Dumas mentions her in Joseph Balsamo in a chapter called “Mme Louise de France” and again in “La Femme du sorcier”, in which she attempts unsuccessfully to give sanctuary to Lorenza, the wife of Cagliostro.

3 Althotas was the mentor of Cagliostro in Dumas’ series. He is portrayed in Joseph Balsamo in a chapter called “Le Sang” as an old man who is convinced that he must drink the blood of “a child…or an unmarried woman” in order to continue to live forever. (990)

4 The chateau in this area was known for debauchery under the reign of Louis XV.
Conclusion

Over the last two and a half centuries, Marie Antoinette’s image has undergone a transformation from that of the depraved queen of pamphlet literature to one of martyr by authors of fiction such as Dumas and more recently, Chantal Thomas. Her public persona and mythical portrayal were created by the pamphleteers to serve their own political agenda—that of furthering the ideas of the Revolution. In order for such political and social upheaval to take place, there was a need for the general population to rally around a common enemy. This centered on the aristocracy, but eventually Marie Antoinette was chosen as the primary victim of the slanderous press. Because of her foreign background and perceived influence in matters of State, she was an easy target for those wanting to identify a dangerous unifying force for the republican cause. She represented not only the aristocracy and its ultimate end, but an entire way of life dating back to the Middle Ages that had reached its unnatural conclusion.

Dumas was well-versed in the topic of the evil queen. His play *La Tour de Nesle* and his novel *La Reine Margot* were two works in which he showcased the most sinister nature of female aristocrats. By making a conscious decision to show a contrasting view of Marie Antoinette in *The Marie Antoinette Romances* series, Dumas followed in the footsteps of Mme de Stael and publicly redeemed her image by disassociating her from her former representation that was created before the Revolution and sustained throughout it. Dumas used an abundance of different literary techniques to emphasize the status of both queen and woman during this period. By assigning Marie Antoinette the self-awareness necessary for character transformation, Dumas was simultaneously
elevating not only the queen herself, but through her the role of all women left behind in revolutionary society. Dumas used the queen and other female characters to show the potentially disastrous effects of two worlds being brought into direct contact when the female and male characters were of opposing political and/or religious beliefs. The misogynistic image of the French Revolution which used the body of the queen as a metaphor for a debauched aristocracy/female was destroyed by Dumas in his dramatic portrayal of a woman in crisis. The same can be said of some of the secondary women that Dumas wrote about, such as Andrée, who made her own transformation throughout the series. Dumas gave Marie Antoinette, Andrée and Lorenza strength of character and of conviction despite being thrown into catastrophic circumstances which permanently changed their lives for the worse. Marie Antoinette and Lorenza both suffered physical termination at the hands of revolutionary and/or occult forces, while Andree managed to escape the Revolution physically unharmed but psychologically and emotionally damaged. On the whole, Dumas’ women in *The Marie Antoinette Romances* serve as a metaphor for a society undergoing sudden and tremendous changes and those struggling to find a place in the new, post-revolutionary world.

Marie Antoinette was herself the symbol of the *Ancien Régime*, of a world that was on the brink of extinction. Both she and Louis XVI had to be physically eliminated for the Revolution to go forward and the past to be permanently left behind. Marie Antoinette was unique in her trial and execution in that she as queen consort had no real power and technically posed no political threat to the nation. However, her Austrian background and assumed influence on the emasculated King lead to her accusations of treason and most diabolically of incest by the French people. In order to destroy the
monarchy completely, it was necessary to destroy the woman and the mother. The mother of the French people who committed the crime of treason was likened to the mother of the dauphin who committed the crime of incest. In her Réflexions sur le procès de la reine, Mme de Staël anonymously criticized a nation for its capricious treatment of their formerly beloved dauphine and queen. She reminded the people of the welcome they extended to the young princess as she crossed into France for the first time in anticipation of her impending marriage to Louis XVI, and how quickly their love had turned to hatred.

Perhaps at this time as the Revolution was in full swing, there was no room for sympathy. To show benevolence to the sworn enemy of the nation would be to undermine the cause. However, several years later during the Restoration, Alexandre Dumas was able to capture the interest and sympathy of the public with his series dedicated to the fallen monarch. This was the first time that Marie Antoinette was shown to be worthy of compassion and seen as a martyr. Dumas used the melodramatic elements affiliated to the theater throughout his series to portray a world turned upside down and spun out of control. What began as the philosophical musings of the Enlightenment in the early part of the eighteenth century gradually transformed into a bloody revolution with a life of its own. Dumas used the occult and the grotesque to emphasize the peripheral forces at work in the plot to overthrow the French monarchy. This gave the revolution a diabolical image which he contrasted with the purity of the philosophical ideals represented by his female victims.

Male and female characters were used to show the polarization of society during the pre-revolutionary period. The ideal of the pure female and the chivalric male
associated with the monarchy were called into question during this time of social upheaval. Dumas introduced characters who challenged these ideals in the same way that the republicans challenged the old regime. By combining couples who did not share similar political and/or religious beliefs, Dumas created a metaphor for the discord in France. These pairings were doomed to failure, often under tragic circumstances. In contrast, couples from similar, namely aristocratic backgrounds were caught up in the traditional world that was soon to be extinct. It seems that Dumas was equating the Ancien Régime with chivalry and the new order with destruction. As these two moments in history collided, characters had to figure out their roles in revolutionary society. In particular, the female characters suffered the misogynistic side of the revolution and were often left searching for a place among their male counterparts. While the men were plotting and scheming about politics, the women were fighting for freedom and self-preservation. Generally, Dumas’ main characters each undergo some kind of metamorphosis as the series progresses. Under the dark storm cloud of the Revolution, Dumas portrays queens as becoming more in touch with their humanity, noblemen evolving into knights and farmers tuning into patriot leaders.

Dumas also used masks and doubles to represent the fracturing of French society during the Revolution. The multidimensional aspect of certain characters showed the polarization of thought and action during this time of political and societal crisis. Some characters wore masks and disguises so that they could play the role of hero while remaining anonymous to the enemy forces, while others served as doppelgangers for the queen in an effort to permanently destroy her credibility. Another use of masks and doubling is to heighten emotion and therefore increase melodrama. The confusion
associated with confronting a double or masked character, then mistaking them for another or trying to figure out who if they are really who they are pretending to be causes the plot to take twists and turns that keep the reader interested.

The Diamond Necklace Affair was a true to life case of doubling that even after being uncovered lead to the destruction of Marie Antoinette’s reputation. The drama associated with the public mistaking the queen for a common prostitute resulted to her being put on trial. Dumas used this scandal as the basis for The Queen’s Necklace, in which he used doubling and masks to cause melodramatic situations in the plot and focused on the way in which the queen became the victim of pamphleteers due to her damaged reputation. Clandestine meetings in the park of Versailles and forged letters in Marie Antoinette’s hand were ideal for Dumas to show the underhanded world of the aristocracy and the resulting annihilation of the queen’s image due to Mme de la Motte’s self-serving schemes.

Dumas also used irony in The Queen’s Necklace as a disguised Marie Antoinette first comes into contact with Mme de la Motte. The queen is posing as a benefactor willing to offer her financial support to the poverty-stricken aristocrat who secretly wished to be introduced at court. Despite the King’s protests, Marie Antoinette allows Mme de la Motte into her inner circle, and the results are disastrous. Hidden identity almost always leads to the downfall of some of the main characters as it focuses attention away from the true people involved and onto the unsuspecting victim who is being doubled. In the case of Marie Antoinette, being falsely represented by a prostitute was detrimental to her in the revolutionary time period, yet useful to Dumas in saving her reputation in its aftermath. She was set up to be portrayed as the unwitting victim who
tries desperately to convince others of her innocence and in the end is right. But instead of being redeemed, she is criticized by the public.

Throughout all of the novels that comprise *The Marie Antoinette Romances*, Dumas sets the reader on an emotional journey, leading up to the time at the end of the series when it is impossible not to pity Marie Antoinette. She has grown and changed as a person as a result of the tribulations that she has suffered and comes out the other end with her dignity intact. During her final moments, Dumas has her followed by the Knight of Maison-Rouge, who is by her side until the very end. Her last glimpse of him is as she is approaching the scaffold in the cart to the jeers of the crowd. He is up on a street lamp, looking at her, pointing to heaven. In this moment, Dumas elevates Marie Antoinette to a saintly status and leaves the reader questioning the ruthlessness of the revolutionary world that is taking the place of the *Ancien Régime*. As her head falls, so does the monarchy, her fractured body a symbol of the broken French society she leaves behind. The fact that Dumas chose to have Marie Antoinette’s Knight perish with her proves that he is representing the end of an era in French history. The past is at odds with the present, and the future remains uncertain. Dumas’ use of melodramatic elements served to underscore the tension of the underlying revolutionary themes and to bring the plot to its inevitable, tragic conclusion by making a martyr of the once hated queen.
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