ABSTRACT

THE PATERNAL MYSTERY OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS
by Simone Dubrovic

This thesis reports on an analysis of the figure of the father in Alexandre Dumas’s Mes Mémoires and the Musketeers cycle. This study presents a psychoanalytical approach to the problem of remembering a father and creating a new one in the fictional work of writing. The goal of this work is to better understand if literature could be considered a way of making up for the frustrations of reality, or of creating something more real than real that, in a fictional dimension, eventually completes and reintegrates some of the inevitable losses of reality, by working them through.
THE PATERNAL MYSTERY OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS

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Simone Dubrovic
Miami University
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Advisor______________________
Jonathan A. Strauss

Reader_______________________
Sante Matteo

Reader_______________________
Anna Klosowska
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INTRODUCTION

In the book *Reading for the Plot – Design and Intention in Narrative* Peter Brooks opens the chapter “The Novel and the Guillotine, or Fathers and Sons in *Le Rouge et le noir*” with a remarkable consideration:

Upon reflection, one can see that paternity is a dominant issue within the great tradition of the nineteenth-century novel (extending well into the twentieth century), a principal embodiment of its concern with authority, legitimacy, the conflict of generations, and the transmission of wisdom. Turgenev’s title, *Fathers and Sons*, sums up what is at stake in a number of the characteristic major novels of the tradition: not only *Le Rouge et le noir*, but also such novels as Balzac’s *Le Père Goriot*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, James’s *The Princess Casamassima*, Conrad’s *Lord Jim*, Gide’s *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*, Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* to name only a few of the most important texts that are essentially structured by this conflict.¹

Brooks does not quote a writer to whom paternity is central: Alexandre Dumas père. Brooks’s judgment seems to perpetuate the essential operation of ostracism that literary critics have inflicted upon the works of Dumas. The intent of this thesis is to analyze the theme of paternity in Alexandre Dumas’s *Musketeers* cycle by juxtaposing it with the memories Dumas wrote about his father. The work is therefore structured in two parts: the tale of the father and the literary analysis of paternity in Dumas’s novels, which are informed by the constant presence of fathers and sons.

Among the literary remarks about Dumas’s works, the ones formulated by Gérard de Nerval are still the most precise and revealing. Nerval understands that Dumas’s world essentially acts out a perpetual identification with historical characters, a play of incarnation in their figure, a thrilling and emotional mixture of truth and falsehood:

Je vais essayer de vous expliquer, mon cher Dumas, le phénomène dont vous avez parlé plus haut. Il est, vous le savez, certains conteurs qui ne peuvent inventer sans s’identifier aux personnages de leur imagination.

[…]

Hé bien, comprenez-vous que l’entraînement d’un récit puisse produire un effet semblable ; que l’on arrive pour ainsi dire à s’incarner dans le héros de son imagination, si bien que sa vie devienne la votre et qu’on brûle des flammes factices de ses ambitions et de ses amours !

[…]

[A]vez su si bien vous jouer avec nos chroniques et nos mémoires, que la postérité ne saura plus démêler le vrai du faux, et chargera de vos inventions tous les personnages historiques que vous avez appelés à figurer dans vos romans. ²

Nerval is aware that the essential feature of Dumas’s style is a perpetual interpolation of historical facts into fictional narratives. This observation by Nerval should be remembered in the course of this thesis because it is central and tells a lot about Dumas’s conceptions of writing.

Brooks points out the conflict between father and son, a conflict that generates a structure for the nineteenth-century novel. He focuses on what is, in some way, the common interpretation of the relationship between fathers and sons: but it is not the only one that appears in literature. We know that the conflict between father and son is explained, through a psychoanalytical approach, by the theory of the Oedipus complex. Freud himself dedicated an important essay to one of the books quoted by Brooks: Fedor Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. Even if it seems unusual, one finds in some nineteenth-century novels a description of paternity that is tender: for example in Alexandre Dumas’s novels. Now we should figure out the dynamics of this tenderness. Are they rooted in the Oedipus complex? In the tales of Dumas the love relationship concerns just father and son, and women do not find any place, if not an evanescent or negative one. We have to make distinctions between Dumas’s memories of his father and the literary inventions in Dumas’s novel, because this is the first step in clarifying something that is filled with different motivations. Even if we are not in front of a *roman familial*, in the sense of a child imagining that he is not the son of his real parents (especially of his father), we can say that the tale of the father in *Mes Mémoires* has some features of this kind of situation, in the sense that Dumas articulates an almost mythical and idealized praise of his father that tends to exalt him in different ways: this father died when Alexandre Dumas was four and he has recreated him in his own way, giving him all the features of a *père prestigieux*.  

Laplanche and Pontalis recognize that the motivation of the refusal of paternity of this family romance must be identified in different factors and needs, among which one finds the desire either to lower or to exalt the figures of the parents, or a delusion of grandeur. These motivations are pertinent in explaining Dumas’s conflict (even if in Dumas we don’t have any kind of refusal of paternity): the creation of a mythical and powerful image of a father in order to get over the frustration of his loss. Nevertheless the tale in the *Mémoires* is not sufficient to recreate an image of a father, therefore we must combine the clues we get from the reading of *Mes Mémoires* to the literary inventions of the cycle of the *Musketeers*’s novels, which, in a fictitious dimension, make up for reality’s deficiencies. 

However it is problematic to find in this story of paternity and filiation a clear connection to the Oedipus complex, even if the story itself presses for a consideration and reflection on the Oedipus complex. We might recall the essay Sigmund Freud dedicated to the consequences of the Oedipus complex towards the image of the father in Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. Freud deals with rivalry, fear of castration, a sense of guilt, punishment and self-punishment. He even explains Dostoevsky’s epilepsy like as a reaction to the desire of killing his father, a sort of punishment one inflicts upon himself. 

We know the meaning and intention of such deathlike attacks. They signify an identification with a dead person, either with someone who is really dead or with someone who is still alive and whom the subject wishes dead. The latter case is more significant. The attack then has the value of a punishment. One has wished another person dead, and now one is this person and is dead oneself. At this point psycho-analytical theory brings in the assertion that for a boy this other person is usually his father and that the attack (which is termed hysterical) is thus a self-punishment for a death-wish against a hated father.  

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That is not what happens in Dumas. We have self-punishment at the end of *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, the last part of the *Musketeers* cycle, in the suicidal action of the young Raoul, but the value of it cannot be interpreted in the way Freud interprets Dostoevsky’s novel, at least not in a strict and unquestionable sense.

The Oedipus complex is structured on the *fear* of the father, on the fear of his power and the possible castration of the son that can be the result of this power and might, but in the memories of Dumas and in his literary inventions we find a deep sense of tenderness which is only occasionally troubled by anxiety and fear. And even when these feelings take place, it is still the love between father and son that remains after, solid and fortified. For Freud, in the dynamics of the Oedipus complex, it is the fear which is predominant.

Another interesting thing in Freud’s essay is the complexity of the feelings the son has towards his father. This complexity might lead the son to a sort of bisexuality.

So from fear of castration – that is, in the interests of preserving his masculinity – he gives up his wish to possess his mother and get rid of his father. In so far as this wish remains in the unconscious it forms the basis of the sense of guilt. We believe that what we have here been describing are normal processes, the normal fate of the so-called ‘Oedipus complex’; nevertheless it requires an important amplification. A further complication arises when the constitutional factor we call bisexuality is comparatively strongly developed in a child. For then, under the threat to the boy’s masculinity by castration, his inclination becomes strengthened to diverge in the direction of femininity, to put himself instead in his mother’s place and take over her role as object of his father’s love. But the fear of castration makes *this* solution impossible as well. The boy understands that he must also submit to castration if he wants to be loved by his father as a woman. Thus both impulses, hatred of the father and being in love with the father, undergo repression.5

Even this passage does not directly enlighten the issues Dumas presents to the reader: especially because father and son do not have a sexual rivalry for the mother. Nevertheless it is full of suggestions that are somehow related to some moments and some features of Dumas’s tales. For example in *Mes Mémoires* and in *Les Trois Mousquetaires* there is certainly a phallic value of some objects that are forbidden: the rifle of General Dumas or the sword little Alexandre could barely raise (which recalls the sword of Athos), but they are also promised as gifts that represent the tie and the continuity and therefore they cannot be considered as an object of castration, of negation of masculinity. The most important suggestion Freud gives is the development of bisexuality, of a female side of the son in order to please his father (but consequently giving up his masculinity). It is important in a reversed way for our discourse about Dumas because it is not the son who is bisexualized, but the image of the father. Dumas at least twice says that his father had feminine feet and hands at least twice. We can see in this bisexualization of the father a way to preserve the masculinity of the son by adding some effeminate features to the masculinity of the father, combining motherly features to fatherly ones. We have, in other words, an example of the psychoanalytical theory of *parents combinés*, as discussed by Laplanche and Pontalis:

Terme introduit par Melanie Klein pour désigner une théorie sexuelle infantile qui s’exprime en divers fantasmes représentant les parents comme unis dans une relation sexuelle ininterrompue : la mère contenant

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5 Ibid., p. 241.
le pénis du père ou le père dans sa totalité ; le père contenant le sein de la mère ou la mère dans sa totalité ; les parents inséparables confondus dans un coût. Il s’agirait là de fantasmes très archaïques et fortement anxiogènes.\

Although we do not have the evident perpetual coitus between the two combined sexualities, the theory of parents combinés seems to be useful to understand the complex relationship Dumas had with his father, a relationship that could be, even if not fully explained, at least clarified by psychoanalytical instruments. According to Laplanche et Pontalis the idea of combined parents “est inséparable de la conception kleinienne du complexe d’Œdipe”, and it is developed inside the child in a very precocious genetic stage. Moreover, Melanie Klein writes:

The erection of new principles and new idealized father-imagos and the heightened demands on himself are used by the child for the purpose of moving away from his original objects. By doing so he is able to call up his original positive attachment to his father and increase it with less risk of coming into collusion with him. This event corresponds to a splitting of his father imago. The exalted and admired father can now be loved and adored while the “bad” father – often represented by his real father or by a substitute such as a schoolmaster – summons very strange feelings of hatred which are common at this period of development. And in the aggressive relationship to the hated father the boy reassures himself that he possesses a powerful and helpful father, and can also identify himself with him; out of all this he draws a greater belief in his own constructive capacities and sexual potency.

In the Musketeers novels we do not have any trace of hatred or a splitting of a father imago, because the father is always a good one. She explains further:

Another thing which plays a very important part in the development of the child is the presence in its early life of a person, besides its father or mother, whom it looks upon as a “helping” figure and who gives it support in the external world against its phantastic fears. In dividing its mother into a “good” mother and a “bad” one and its father into a “good” father and a “bad” one, it attaches the hatred it feels for its object to the “bad” one or turns away from it, while it directs its restorative trends to its “good” mother and “good” father and, in phantasy, makes good towards them the damage it has done its parent-imagos in its sadistic phantasies.

Nonetheless it does not seem that this shift takes place in Dumas, unless we think about a perpetual acting out of the figure of the good father in his novels. The psychological situation we figure from his novels seems to be frozen before the moment of this division occurs. Now what could happen if we consider not the oedipal dimension but, rather, a pre-oedipal one? In this case maybe we could understand a little bit more about this mystery of a filiation without the Oedipus complex. For the pre-oedipal phase we should take into account the theories of Ruth Mack Brunswick: “Elle pense que, si le père est

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6 Laplanche-Pontalis, 1973, Parent(s) Combiné(s), p. 303.
7 Ibid. We find in Melanie Klein: “If, side by side with the imago of the imago of the combined parents, imagos of the single father and mother, especially the ‘good’ mother, are sufficiently strongly operative, the boy’s growing relationship to objects and adaptation to reality will have the result that his phantasies about his father’s penis inside his mother will lose their power, and his hatred, already reduced in any case, will be more strongly directed to his real objects” (Klein, Melanie. The psycho-analysis of children. New York: The Free Press, 1984, p. 246).
8 Klein, 1984, p. 189.
9 Ibid., p. 222.
bien présent dans le champ psychologique, il n’est pas perçu comme un rival"\textsuperscript{10}. Moreover we can also use the idea of identification primaire in order to clarify the attachment Dumas has with the figure of his evanescent father, an identification which is still located in a sort of personal prehistory.

Il est intéressant de noter que Freud, qui n’emploie d’ailleurs que rarement l’expression d’identification primaire, désigne par là une identification au père « de la préhistoire personnelle » prise par le garçon comme idéal ou prototype. Il s’agirait là « d’une identification directe et immédiate qui se situe antérieurement à tout investissement d’objet ».\textsuperscript{11}

The understanding of the relationship between Dumas and his father could be possibly deepened if we conceive it as the result of an intermediate stage from the pre-oedipal to the oedipal phase (we know that Dumas lost his father when he was four and it is possible that he did not have time to develop an actual Oedipus complex), without forcing the interpretation in just one direction and assuming a stage in which some peculiarities of both coexist.

It would be better not to force the meaning of the text with a strict interpretation that could end up as a kind of violence perpetrated on the literary text. Piera Aulagnier has written an interesting and wise essay about the violence of the interpretations and, even if she refers it to the behavior of the psychiatrist towards the psychotic or schizophrenic, a literary critic could make use of it and take advantage of intuitions not only belonging to the specific field of psychology (and they are particularly significant for Dumas’s case).

Comme l’enfer, les routes de la théorie sont pavées de bonnes intentions : elles ne suffisent pas à cacher ce qu’un vouloir-savoir comporte de non-respect pour celui auquel on impose une interprétation qui ne fait que répéter, sous une autre forme, la violence et l’abus de pouvoir des discours qui l’ont précédé.\textsuperscript{12}

Nonetheless the essay by Aulagnier offers more than a perspective of interpretation for literary problems. We could start from the conception of pensée délirante primaire.

Dans tous les autres cas on constatera la présence d’un énoncé sur l’origine étranger à notre mode de penser: c’est cela que nous appelons la pensée délirante primaire. Conséquence de la rencontre entre le Je et une organisation spécifique de l’espace hors psyché et du discours qui y circule, elle devient elle-même préalable nécessaire à l’éventuelle élaboration des formes manifestes de la schizophrénie et de la paranoïa.\textsuperscript{13}

Therefore we should consider the essence of the delusion as something concerning the concept of origin and the psychological quest for origin. Significantly Piera Aulagnier links the pensée délirante primaire to the family romance.

L’absence d’une réponse sur l’énoncé de l’origine mine de l’intérieur l’origine des énoncés, elle les fait reposer sur des sable mouvants qui risquent toujours d’engloutir ce qui s’y construit. La pensée délirante

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., Préœdipienne, p. 324.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., Identification Primarie, p. 192.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 223.
In any case Piera Aulagnier makes a distinction between the *pensée delirante primaire* and the family romance, a distinction on which the reader should insist in order to understand something more about the mechanism of fictional literature.

La différence essentielle étant que, contrairement au roman familial, la pensée délirante ne tient pas compte du système culturel et du système de parenté (rêver qu’on est un enfant d’un autre lit ou un enfant adopté est conforme au système de parenté propre à la culture), aucun effort n’est fait « pour que ces phantasmes atteignent à la vraisemblance » [...].

Naturally this thought enlightens what we are going to analyze in depth: the composition of *Mes Mémoires* together with the novels by Alexandre Dumas. It is fairly evident that the family romance (even in his peculiarities and particularities because the father is not substituted in Dumas’s tale) is built by the writer with *Mes Mémoires*, where the image and figure of the father is essentially rehabilitated on a social level. The autobiographical process carries out, in conclusion, the family romance, a sort of neurotic mystification enacted by memory and an attempt to clarify the problem of origin by making it prestigious. But now we should ask how to deal with literature, considering that literary creation accomplishes a shift from the autobiographical level to a fictional one that cannot be naively interpreted as a mere projection of it. Surely literary creation unquestionably maintains the dynamics of delusion, because it creates a new reality, a new order of things: this is what is called literature.

Piera Aulagnier, following Freud, gives a useful outline of the three steps through which a *pensée delirante* takes place.

En reprenant d’une autre façon le chemin proposé par Freud, nous dirons que ce qui est à l’origine de la réponse schizophrénique et de sa construction délirante répond à ces trois conditions :

- Le sujet est frustré « intolérablement » d’une signification.
- Le désir indompté et indomptable, qui refuse d’être réduit au silence, concerne aussi l’exigence d’interprétation et le besoin identificatoire constitutifs du Je.
- La pensée délirante primaire tente d’opérer la reconstruction d’un fragment manquant dans le discours de l’Autre, qui, dès lors, réapparaîtra illusoirement conforme aux demandes identificatoires du Je.

Another passage in *La Violence de l’Interprétation* Aulagnier offers an essential clue about the dramatic situation and condition of the psychotic, because he is not able to share “*l’ordre causal invoqué*” of his delusion. Now here is the point (and the temptation): what if literature was an unpredictable way to create a delusion that eventually could be shared by keeping it in the bounds of language and literary structures?

Aulagnier points out (even if, as already noted, in a psychiatric context and about the relationships between mother and son) that “*toute phantasme de désir bute sur une réalité qui y résiste*” and that there is also the impossibility of a “*plaisir transmissible et

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14 Ibid., p. 254.
15 Ibid., p. 262.
16 Ibid., p. 282.
17 Ibid., p. 274.
We could propose the creation of the novel as something that could pass through the spaces of negation refilling them with the pleasure that was lost.

Maybe a reflection by Jacques Lacan might offer another perspective for this thesis. In the essay about the interpretation of Freud’s dream dealing with the injection to Irma, Lacan writes that the direction of his teaching might be the one that considers the text more than the psychology of the author (“De même, quand il s’agit de nos patients, je vous demande de porter plus d’attention au texte qu’à la psychologie de l’auteur – c’est toute l’orientation de mon enseignement”). That is what this work tries to do in developing an interpretation of a thematic problem in Alexandre Dumas’s world. The research cannot be reduced to a mere portrayal of the writer and his failed and missed relationship between him and his father. This thesis mainly tries to understand two different ways and dynamics of literary communication: the autobiographical one (the memoirs) and the fictional one (the novels). Therefore its structure will be an essentially textual analysis.

When Dumas tells the story of his father, framed by the narration of his own autobiography (a literary genre very close to the notion of sujet), he seems to mystify the real events. Instead, when he makes use of novelistic fiction, he seems to achieve awareness and a sense of reality (meant as a reality of drives and emotions). In this sense the narrative choice attains results more real than real. Lacan suggest a fascinating clue that can be used and applied (like the theories by Piera Aulagnier) to the literary work. Lacan explains the birth of the category of symbolic as a mediation through which it becomes possible to give the shape of an objet to the narcissistic nature of the sujet.

Du fait de cette relation double qu’il a avec lui-même, c’est toujours autour de l’ombre errante de son propre moi que se structureront tous les objets de son monde. Ils auront tous un caractère fondamentalement anthropomorphique, disons même égomorphique. C’est dans cette perception qu’à tout instant est évoquée pour l’homme son unité idéale, qui n’est jamais atteinte comme telle et à tout instant lui échappe.

[…] C’est là qu’intervient la relation symbolique. Le pouvoir de nommer les objets structure la perception elle-même. Le percipi de l’homme ne peut se soutenir qu’à l’intérieur d’une zone de nomination. C’est par la nomination que l’homme fait subsister les objets dans une certaine consistance. S’ils n’étaient que dans un rapport narcissique avec le sujet, les objets ne seraient jamais perçus que de façon instantanée. […] La nomination constitue un pacte, par lequel deux sujets en même temps s’accordent à reconnaître le même objet.

These analyses should be focalized on the notion of symbolic as a category of an absolute literary value. If, according to Lacan, what is sujet has to become objet in order to find a way to be shared and understood between two (or more) sujets, it is clear that the fictional narrative mechanism (the one of the novels), more then the autobiographical one, succeeds in obtaining and giving an objet.

Lacan sees in the narration of a dream (and he interprets Freud’s dream of the injection to Irma in this sense) a first and fundamental step in the detachment of the sujet.
from itself, because a narrative structure of sharing is sought (objet). The psychoanalysis sets a dialogue between two interlocutors. Therefore Lacan writes:

De même que dans une analyse le rêve s’adresse à l’analyste, Freud dans ce rêve s’adresse déjà à nous. C’est déjà pour la communauté des psychologues, des anthropologues, qu’il rêve. Quand il interprète ce rêve, c’est à nous qu’il s’adresse. Et c’est pourquoi voir le mot dans le dernier mot absurde du rêve n’est pas le réduire à un délire, puisque Freud, par l’intermédiaire de ce rêve, se fait entendre à nous, et nous met effectivement sur la voie de son objet qui est la compréhension du rêve.21

Now the dynamics of narration address a silent interlocutor who is the reader, following the same patterns as a dream. Literary fiction could possibly be seen as an attempt to define an objet. If the aim of the analysis is to get back to a shared reality (whatever it could be other than a narcissistic delusion), then the fictional literary mechanism, not offering an evident sujet, accomplishes a sense of reality and truth that is wider than the autobiographical account. Autobiography and literary fiction show in different ways the dialectic between sujet-objet.

For Dumas the father is an imago, a psychoanalytical concept close to the complex but slightly different:

L’imago et le complexe sont des notions voisines ; elles ont trait toutes deux au même champ : les relations de l’enfant avec son entourage familial et social. Mais le complexe désigne l’effet sur le sujet de l’ensemble de la situation interpersonnelle ; l’imago désigne une survivance imaginaire de tel ou tel des participants de cette situation.22

At this point this concept is the most useful in trying to make sense of the tale of the father Dumas depicts in Mes Mémoires and the novel of paternity that is hidden in the cycle of the Musketeers. Melanie Klein explains the sense of the imago in another way, as we have seen, but Dumas, instead, projects the imago of his father on the imaginary screen of literature, which makes up for reality’s frustrations, and by doing so he enacts a mechanism of compensation but also of interior growth and awareness (carried out in the course of his novels) that this thesis will try to understand through its evolutions and implications.

21 Ibid., pp. 202-203.
THE TALE OF THE FATHER IN MES MÉMOIRES

Georges releva ses cheveux et montra à son frère la cicatrice de son front.
- Ah ! oui, c'est vrai, s'écria Jacques ; mille tonnerres ! tu as de la rancune ; j'avais oublié toute cette histoire.

A. Dumas, Georges

In an episode of Vingt ans après the reader witnesses the execution of the English king Charles I Stuart, whom Cromwell has summarily sentenced to the scaffold. Athos, the noble count of La Fère, in the hours preceding the decapitation, has vainly tried to dig an underground gallery which, however, he will not be able to use in order to save the sovereign. The count, old musketeer and devoted royalist, can just listen, hidden under the scaffold, what Charles I succeeds in whispering to him.

- Ami fidèle, cœur généreux, dit le roi, je n’ai pu être sauvé, je ne devais pas l’être. Maintenant, dussé-je commettre un sacrilège, je te dirai : oui, j’ai parlé aux hommes, j’ai parlé à Dieu, je te parle à toi le dernier. Pour soutenir une cause que j’ai crue sacrée, j’ai perdu le trône de mes pères et diverti l’héritage de mes enfants. Un million en or me reste, je l’ai enterré dans les caves du château de Newcastle au moment où j’ai quitté cette ville. Cet argent, toi seul sais qu’il existe, fais-en usage quand tu croiras qu’il en sera temps pour le plus grand bien de mon fils aîné ; et maintenant, comte de La Fère, dites-moi adieu.23

Before the axe of the executioner falls without other delays, the king, addressing Athos, pronounces an admonition with solemnity: Remember!

In the last chapter of the Musketeers’s trilogy, Le vicomte de Bragelonne, the young Louis XIV is visited by Charles II, the son of the decapitated king, young as well. The English king lacks of means and, maintaining austerity, dignity and melancholic disdain, tries to ask the French king for the loan of money and soldiers in order to organize an army and regain power in England. Nevertheless Louis XIV, albeit concerned and disposed to help his peer, does not have at his disposal the money of the realm, denied by the cardinal Mazarin. Charles II, grateful for the friendship Louis XIV has in any case shown him, departs, hopeless, accompanied by the old father’s servant Parry, who has remained faithful to his king even in poverty. By chance the two pass by the white and red house where the count of La Fère retired. Parry is recognized by the servant of Athos, Grimaud. Charles II is immediately welcomed in the house and received by the count.

A ce nom illustre, Athos sentit comme un frisson dans ses veines ; mais à la vue de ce jeune prince debout, découvert devant lui et lui tendant la main deux larmes vinrent un instant troubler le limpide azur de ses beaux yeux.
Il se courba respectueusement ; mais le prince lui prit la main:

- Voyez comme je suis malheureux, monsieur le comte, dit Charles ; il a fallu que ce fût le hasard qui me rapprochât de vous. Hélas ! ne devrais-je pas avoir près de moi les gens que j’aime et que j’honore, tandis que j’en suis réduit à conserver leurs services dans mon cœur et leurs noms dans ma mémoire, si bien que sans votre serviteur, qui a reconnu le mien, je passais devant votre porte comme devant celle d’un étranger.
- C’est vrai, dit Athos, répondant avec la voix à la première partie de la phrase du prince, et avec un salut à la seconde ; c’est vrai, Votre Majesté a vu de biens mauvais jours.
- Et les plus mauvais, hélas ! répondit Charles, sont peut-être encore à venir.
- Sire, espérons !²⁴

The appearance of Athos, with his blue eyes, showing compassion for the boy’s sad past and shining with hope for the future, is used by Dumas as the narrative opening of the king’s rebirth. Keeping his promises, the count personally recovers the treasure of Charles I, in the white moonlight that illuminates the cellar of Newcastle manor (the representation of sweet, quiet and almost liturgical Nature usually accompanies paternal actions, as we will see). Then, with the accidental (and providential) help of d’Artagnan, the young sovereign gets his throne back.

I want to start this study about the father in Dumas’ memories and novel with these quotations in order to show the obsessive importance of this image taken from Vingt ans après. During the Napoleonic campaign in Egypt, the father of Dumas, the General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, occupies a house in Cairo, which used to belong to a bey. While he is attending to some decorations he finds a treasure, left by the former owner of the house in his headlong flight away from the city after the occupation by French soldiers. General Dumas decides to give the treasure as a common fund for the army, faced by penury and high expenses in a futile campaign. He sends the treasure to Napoleon with a letter.

Citoyen général,
Le léopard ne change pas de peau, l’honnête homme ne change pas de conscience.
Je vous envoie un trésor que je viens de trouver, et que l’on estime à près de deux millions.
Si je suis tué, ou si je meurs ici de tristesse, souvenez-vous que je suis pauvre, et que je laisse en France une femme et un enfant.
Salut et fraternité.

Alex. Dumas.²⁵

The situation is not different from the episode of Vingt ans après. In both the reader finds an admonition to not forget. Charles I entreats Athos to remember; General Dumas writes “souvenez-vous” to Napoleon. However the results will be different. In the letter to Napoleon, one can notice, in the tone of the opening elocution, the allusion to a strange claim. General Dumas seems to reassert, with vigorous clearness, his deep honesty towards the army and, at the same time, to give the lie to something, as if he was suspected or he should prove his innocence after an accusation.

The father of Dumas is a mulatto, born from a French nobleman and a black slave of Santo Domingo. His tale, as told by his son in Mes Mémoires, shows him as a brilliant, instinctive, bold and generous character. From the last ranks of the army he has reached the highest positions, before the Napoleonic era, during the war of Vendée and the

conquest of Mount Cenisio. Back in the countryside of Villers-Cotterêts, with his wife and daughter, after handing in his resignation from the army due to a disagreement he had about its administration, he is soon recalled to defend the Convention. In his son’s telling he doesn’t arrive in time and is replaced by Napoleon Bonaparte. Has that late arrival prevented Dumas’s father from becoming the same as Napoleon? The writer seems to be convinced that that is indeed the case. General Dumas remains in the army under the orders of Napoleon and progressive tensions arise. Napoleon realizes the General has great skills, abilities and a strong personality, even if he tends to be a critic and dissenter. Napoleon alternates distrust and sudden hostility (as, for instance, when he will not acknowledge the sacrifice of General Dumas during the capture of Mantua) with ambiguous and exaggerated (and therefore insidious) effusions of affection.

In the exposition of the historic facts one can read in *Mes Mémoires*, the final crack between Napoleon and General Dumas happens during the Egyptian campaign. One evening, under the tent of General Dumas in the camp of Damanhour, after the capture of Alexandria, the other Generals of the French army complain about the hunger and the deprivation provoked by the nonsensical waste of money for the Egyptian enterprise, conquering an uninhabitable and inhospitable land. Napoleon is afraid of a conspiracy and threatens General Dumas immediately.

In the tale that Dumas takes from the written memoirs of Napoleon the reproached general kept still and silent in front of the menace, almost anonymous among the other Generals, motionless and without reaction, even more humiliated by his tall and powerful height. But right after this passage the writer retells the same scene in a totally different way: now General Dumas, in his son’s book, answers with daring pride and dignity, overshadowing the tyrannical figure of his mediocre superior.

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cette porte, et dans quel but vous voulez bien m’accorder l’honneur de ce tête-à-tête.
- Dans le but de vous dire qu’à mes yeux le premier et le dernier de mon armée sont égaux devant la discipline, et que je ferai, l’occasion s’en présentant, fusiller un général comme un tambour.
- C’est possible, général ; mais je crois cependant qu’il y a certains hommes que vous ne feriez pas fusiller sans y regarder à deux fois.
- Non, s’ils entravent mes projets !
- Prenez garde, général : tout à l’heure vous parliez de discipline ; maintenant, vous ne parlez plus que de vous... Eh bien, à vous je veux bien donner une explication... Oui, la réunion de Damanhour est vraie ; oui, les généraux, découragés dès la première marche, se sont demandé quel était le but de cette expédition. Oui, ils ont cru y voir un motif non pas d’intérêt général, mais d’ambition personnelle ; oui, j’ai dit que, pour la gloire et l’honneur de la patrie, je ferai le tour du monde ; mais que, s’il ne s’agissait que de votre caprice, à vous, je m’arrêterais dès le premier pas. Or, ce que j’ai dit ce soir-là, je vous le répète, et, si le misérable qui vous a rapporté mes paroles vous a dit autre chose que ce que je vous dis, c’est non seulement un espion, mais pis que cela, un calomniateur.

Bonaparte regarda un instant mon père ; puis, avec une certaine affection :
- Ainsi, Dumas, lui dit-il, vous faites deux parts dans votre esprit : vous mettez la France d’un côté et moi de l’autre. Vous croyez que je sépare mes intérêts des siens, ma fortune de la sienne.
- Je crois que les intérêts de la France doivent passer avant ceux d’un homme, si grand que soit cet homme... Je crois que la fortune d’une nation ne doit pas être soumise à celle d’un individu.
- Ainsi, vous êtes prêt à vous séparer de moi ?
- Oui, dès que je croirai voir que vous vous séparez de la France.
- Vous avez tort, Dumas..., dit froidement Bonaparte.
- C’est possible, répondit mon père ; mais je n’admets pas les dictatures, pas plus celle de Sylla que celle de César.
- Et vous demandez ?...
- A retourner en France par la première occasion qui se présentera.
- C’est bien ! je vous promets de ne mettre aucun obstacle à votre départ.
- Merci, général ; c’est la seule faveur que je sollicite de vous.

Et, s’inclinant, mon père marcha vers la porte, tira le verrou et sortit.28

In this passage we see how Napoleon uses the possessive adjectives referring to himself and his own destiny. At a certain point his destiny and France are just one thing. The description Dumas offers for his father’s actions is meaningful: General Dumas is against dictatorship and individual powers but is presented by his son as an exceptional individuality.

The reader perceives the self-confidence of General Dumas, his moral nobility, his total absence of fear in front of Napoleon. At the end there seems to be a real break between the two. The idea of superiority Dumas links to his father’s figure is striking.

After this meeting General Dumas finds the treasure in the house in Cairo. In the act of the donation one could read the will to assert and demonstrate (especially to Napoleon) his deep honesty and his devotion towards France. Nevertheless it is not possible not to notice that the tale of the paternal adventures in Mes Mémoires is structured by fragmentation, improbable narrative connections, temperamental and emotional behavior, that is not very plausible. Furthermore one wonders: where did Dumas learn all these details if his father died when he was four? Apart from the habitual invention of dialogue (typical of the fictional conception Dumas has of History), the description of events in which the writer did not participate (he was not even born), it seems that in the juxtaposition of letters and original military dispatches, Dumas wanted to write a personal novel of his father. His memoirs, at least for the first twenty chapters,

28 Ibid., p. 109.
are entirely dedicated to the paternal figure. The note of pride in the dialogue with Napoleon, for instance, does not fit at all in the next vicissitudes, when General Dumas continues to take part in the Egyptian campaign, offering great exploits of strength and economic resources. Furthermore, the actual return that the General asked Napoleon with a shade of challenge, it will be requested by him after being victim of the illness called *nostalgie*. That is too sudden a change to be psychologically plausible.

Dumas is inclined to represent the action of his father like if they were always determined by a pertinacious volition and a proud will, in every circumstance and occasion. Napoleon almost disappears, darkened by the energy and the heroic initiative of the rebel General. One sees Napoleon receiving him with open arms, after the donation of the money and the capture of the big mosque of El-Cairo, the centre of *Mamelouks’* revolt. Napoleon promises a big painting commissioned to the painter Girodet in which the mulatto General should have been pictured as the main character of the event. Bonaparte is seen by the writer through a perspective of absolute mediocrity, compared to the open and sincere breadth of his father. He is portrayed in his ambiguity and hypocrisy, greedy for power. The peculiar tone of the tale is discontinuous, lacking of valid and convincing reason, informed by an indefinable narrative negligence in which the unexpected changes charm and confuse, at the same time, the reader.

For instance, one of the biggest contradictions of the account is when, after the heroic excess showed during the capture of the mosque and the apparent reconciliation with Napoleon, General Dumas decided abruptly to leave and to go back to France again. The writer finds a poetic explanation in the *spleen* from which his father is suffering, which compares him not to a careful and disciplined army General but, instead, to an imaginative, melancholic and temperamental romantic, who also expresses his *spleen* through his exotic roots, which is precisely a Romantic (occasionally inflated idea), without any racial connotations:

Mon père était créole, c’est-à-dire à la fois plein de nonchalance, d’impétuosité et d’inconstance. Un profond dégoût des choses ardemment désirées le prenait aussitôt que ses désirs étaient accomplis. Alors l’activité qu’il avait déployée pour les obtenir s’étéignait tout à coup ; il tombait dans son insouciance et dans son ennu habituel, et, à la première contrariété, il parlait du bonheur de la vie champêtre comme le poète antique dont il avait conquis la patrie, et envoyait sa démission au Directoire.²⁹

Or the *cupio dissolvi* with which he faces the El-Cairo’s revolt, even if he is lying sick in his bed:

Mon père était malade et encore couché, lorsque Dernoncourt se précipita dans sa chambre en criant : - Général, la ville est en pleine insurrection ; le général Dupuis vient d’être assassiné ! À cheval ! À cheval ! Mon père ne se fit pas répéter la nouvelle à deux fois. Il connaissait la valeur du temps en pareille circonstance ; il sauta, à peu près nu, sur un cheval sans selle, prit son sabre, et s’élança dans les rues du Caire, à la tête de quelques officiers qu’il avait autour de lui. […]

Il parvint à se trouver ainsi à la tête d’une soixantaine d’hommes. On sait l’admiration qu’avait inspirée aux Arabes la beauté herculéenne de mon père. Monté sur un grand cheval de dragon qu’il maniait en cavalier consommé, offrant sa tête, sa poitrine et ses bras nus à tous les coups, s’élançant au milieu des groupes les plus acharnés, avec cette insouciance de la mort qu’il avait toujours eue, mais que redoublait en cette

²⁹ Ibid., p. 88.
After such a warlike ardor, almost incomprehensibly, a violent nostalgie takes over the General, a nostalgie which contributes to define and emphasize the literary imagery of his son:

En effet, tiré un instant, par l’insurrection du Caire, de cette nostalgie à laquelle il s’était laissé aller, mon père y retomba bientôt. Un dégoût profond de toute chose s’était emparé de lui avec le dégoût de la vie, et, malgré les conseils de ses amis, il insista obstinément pour que Bonaparte lui accordât son congé. Dans une dernière entrevue qu’il eut avec mon père, Bonaparte tenta un dernier effort pour le déterminer à rester ; il alla même jusqu’à lui dire qu’un jour ou l’autre lui-même passerait en France, et lui promettre de le ramener avec lui. Rien ne put calmer ce désir de départ, devenu une véritable maladie.31

Napoleon too does not want the General to leave and, to the reader, this behavior is another inexplicable contradiction, because from the very beginning of the story Napoleon has disliked him. Naturally the figure of General Dumas has a heroic prestige, a poetic and disdainful carelessness, expressed in a sort of romantic and deep dissatisfaction. Therefore he is totally a literary character, beyond History and historical events. One should understand literary as a way to create ex-novo, using the emotional procedures of literature, in a story that is not a historical and objective recollection but rather a literary invention. For this reason the tale seems incomplete because it is made as a hybrid compilation Dumas is not able to completely control. Dumas pretends it is historical but he writes it as it were literary.

In any case the entire long tale about his father, in Mes Mémoires, is full of contradictions, even in the documents that Dumas uses in order to confirm what he is writing. There is a conflict between the extravagant, sumptuous and superficial literary justification with which the son glorifies his father and a document written by General Dumas, inserted in the book. It is a report addressed to the French government about his imprisonment in Taranto and Brindisi, Italian cities belonging to the kingdom of Naples, under the control of the Bourbons.

After having left Egypt on a small vessel, due to an inauspicious tempest, the ship’s company is forced to berth at Taranto. It is in this precise moment that the fall of the General begins. His strength and might cannot help him against an unlucky destiny. King Ferdinando and Queen Carolina have feelings of friendship towards England and they have welcomed Nelson after the battle of Aboukir. The reign of Naples is therefore against France. After a brief permanence in the quarantine station of Taranto, the ship’s company are pronounced prisoners of war. Confined in a castle, General Dumas realizes that he is in danger of death because one day someone throws in his room a package containing the two volume Le Médicin de campagne by Tissot. The package is accompanied by a brief note in which the Calabrian patriots warn him to read the chapter about poisoning. The prisoner immediately understands that they are going to poison him.

The General writes in his report about his real health condition, which also clarifies the secret reason for his sudden departure from Egypt: the General was already

30 Ibid., pp. 113-114.
31 Ibid., p. 115.
undermined by some sort of illness he was aware of. Nevertheless Alexandre Dumas, writing the story of his father, insists on his excessive nature, on his *spleenétique* vagary.

“J’avais quitté l’Égypte à cause du mauvais état de ma santé. Mes amis, qui voyaient dans mes souffrances une nostalgie pure et simple, croyaient à la maladie imaginaire ; moi seul me sentais malade réellement et me rendais compte de la gravité de ma maladie.

“Une attaque de paralysie, qui me frappa la joue gauche, vint malheureusement, quelques jours après mon entrée au lazaret, me donner raison contre les incrédules”.

During his detention General Dumas survives three attempts of poisoning, from which he saves himself even if they will bring him to die of stomach cancer years later. In the report he describes his physical state after his tragic experience as a prisoner:

“Cependant, à la suite de mon empoisonnement, j’avais été atteint de surdité : un de mes yeux avait perdu complètement la faculté de voir, et la paralysie avait fait des progrès.

[…] je restai estropié de la jambe droite, sourd de l’oreille droite, paralysé de la joue gauche et ayant l’œil droit presque perdu.

“En outre, j’étais en proie à de violents maux de tête et à de continus bourdonnements.

“J’assistais enfin sur moi-même à cet étrange spectacle d’une nature vigoureuse pliant sous la lutte d’une destruction obstinée”.

When he goes back to France his conditions become worse from day to day. He reveals, at the end of the report, that he is “tout mourant” (Dumas, 1989, p. 131). The detention lasts from the 17th of March, 1799, until the 5th of April, 1801, when the General goes back to his property in Villers-Cotterêts. The 24th of July, 1802, little Alexandre is born. The father will die the 26th of February, 1806, without ever getting from Napoleon the compensation for his imprisonment. He had been forced to sell his castle ad to live on a little pension that was totally suppressed after his death, leaving his family in poverty.

Napoleon does not answer his letters (in which the General asks for the compensation Napoleon owes him), does not pay his service of two years in the army and, moreover, refuses to meet him. Napoleon is depicted as a silent divinity who decrees the fall of the General he secretly envied and hated. The painting of the capture of the big mosque in Cairo, in which he promised to give the most important part to the mulatto general, will instead ironically show a blond hussar. Napoleon neglects the *souvenez-vous* with which General Dumas had accompanied the donation of the treasure to the French army, entrusting his family to Napoleon. In his last letter the General will write to him:

Mais, général consul, vous connaissez les malheurs que je viens d’éprouver ! Vous savez mon peu de fortune ! Vous vous rappelez le trésor du Caire !

Valerie Parks Brown has published an article about the relationship between Napoleon and General Dumas. She dismisses the possibility that the attitude of Napoleon could possibly be interpreted as racism towards the mulatto general. She explains it in this way:

32 Ibid., pp. 123-124.
33 Ibid., pp. 125-129.
34 Ibid., p. 134.
What can one say, then, of Napoleon’s attitude toward the Negro, basing the conclusion upon his association with Dumas? Napoleon’s treatment of General Dumas could hardly be cited as representing his attitude toward the Negro. Not in one instance has Napoleon referred to Dumas as a Negro; to him a Negro was a black man and a slave. Dumas, having followed the racial condition of his father, was neither. It is probable that, in spite of the black mother whose name he used, Dumas never considered himself other than French, having taken such a great part in the conquest of Negroes and Arabs in Egypt. However that may be, it cannot be denied that Napoleon and Dumas were close and respected friends early in their association. The rupture of their friendship and the ensuing revenge on the part of Napoleon were caused by Napoleon’s constant and acute awareness of the stature, both physical and military, of General Dumas, which, in some inexplicable way, diminished his own ego; by political differences of opinion which made impossible any meeting of their minds. The difference of race had nothing to do with the unfortunate outcome of the relationship between Napoleon and General Dumas.35

Still, in Dumas’s tale, the substitution of the mulatto general with the blond hussar (in Girodet’s painting that Dumas recalls)36 has significant racial (and racist) implications. We should not forget that in 1802 Napoleon sent General Leclerc to Santo Domingo in order to stop the black revolution against French people led by Toussaint Louverture.37 The increasing personal hostility towards General Dumas could possibly be intensified and aggravated by this political problem. In any case this last assumption is not really satisfying because Napoleon’s wife, Josephine, was a Creole herself.38

The first twenty chapters of Mes Mémoires are entirely dedicated to the figure of Dumas’s father and they are made of ambiguous disjointedness, irregular inlay, truth and exaggeration, with a conflict that is painfully clarified in the first childhood memories of little Alexandre, where the father is described in a way he probably was not given because of his very precarious health, as having great physical strength, attested by the reports of the General himself. The portrait Dumas writes for the reader of Mes Mémoires, through his distant memories, reveals the childish soul with which, even after many years, the writer keeps remembering his father, replacing him, because of his distressing absence, with an imaginary figure. Therefore, even as his father is dying little by little and day by day, Alexandre sees him as strong, handsome and filled with luminous energy: as when the General, together with his black servant Hyppolite, saves three little children from drowning in the moat of his castle.

Une chose m’avait frappé encore, c’étaient les formes merveilleuses de mon père, ces formes pour lesquelles on semblait avoir fondu dans un même moule les statues d’Hercule et d’Antinoüs, comparées aux formes grêles et pauvres d’Hippolyte.

36 The painting by Anne-Louis Girodet de Russy-Trioson is probably the one titled Révolte du Caire le 21 Octobre 1798, 365x500 cm.,1810, at the Musée National du Château de Versailles.
38 Parks Brown, 1976, p. 192: “On October 19, 1796, General Dumas arrived at Milan where he was cordially received by Napoleon (who, of course, must have known of his career) and Josephine, his Creole wife. It has been said that Josephine’s reception was even warmer than that of her husband, for she was from Martinique and had been reared among Negroes. She had played with them, laughed and cried with them, confided in them (her best friend and confidante was Euphemie, a mulatto girl) and loved them”.

16
Il en résulte que je vois mon père, quand je le vois, nu, ruisselant d’eau, et souriant d’un divin sourire, comme un homme qui vient d’accomplir un acte qui l’égale à Dieu, c’est-à-dire qui vient de sauver un autre homme.39

It is interesting to underline the final image of this passage, when General Dumas is compared to God himself. Freud considers all the figures of power (God, King, etc…) as projections of the father are for Freud all projections of the father. But in Dumas there is also the Western monotheistic idea of the “One”, the importance of which we will see in few pages recalling the studies of Françoise Lionnet.

French critic Henri Clouard asked himself at what age Alexandre Dumas saw these things: was he three or forty years old?40 It does not matter. One should consider in any case incontestable the importance of the paternal figure in the world and in the memories of Alexandre Dumas, whether he was indelibly struck by it while he was child or produced an exaggerated image as an adult in order to compensate for his deprived affective needs.

The tale has a strange, fascinating and heartrending sweetness if one follows it in its two essential and incongruous dimensions: the inevitable end, the illness, the reassuring and useless examinations, the despair of dying prematurely and in poverty on one side and on the other a sort of dream of memory, with the figure of a young, powerful, strong and vital father. In his son’s memories he appears with strength amazingly out of the normal, and highly improbable. Dumas envisions his father carrying two men on his bent leg while crossing a room or snapping a big rush with his bare hands or opening a rail fence in the forest with strong tugs. This last episode belongs to a strange trip that the father offers to his little son. They both arrive, in an enchanted temporal and spatial suspension, at an elegant residence in which they are welcomed by a very young Paolina Bonaparte. The General seats at her feet: Paolina leans them on his knees and, with the tip of her slippers, she touches the buttons of his suit. Next to that young and tiny creature the father seems to Alexandre a Hercule mulâtre.

Ce pied, cette main, cette délicieuse petite femme, blanche et potelée, près de cet Hercule mulâtre, toujours beau et puissant, malgré ses souffrances, faisait le plus charmant tableau qui se puisse voir. Je regardais en riant. La princesse m’appela et me donna une bonbonnière d’écaille, tout incrustée d’or. Ce qui m’étonna, c’est qu’elle vida les bonbons qui étaient dedans pour me donner la boîte. Mon père lui en fit l’observation. Elle se pencha à son oreille, lui dit quelques mots tout bas, et tous deux se prirent à rire. Dans ce moment, la joue blanche et rose de la princesse effleura la joue brune de mon père ; lui parut plus brun ; elle, plus blanche. Tous deux étaient superbes. Peut-être ai-je vu cela avec mes yeux d’enfant – ces yeux pleins d’étonnement de tout – ; mais, si j’étais peintre, à coup sûr, je ferais un beau tableau de ces deux personnages.41

In this magical interior, in this illusive stylization of forms, one has the impression of a failed confidence between the father and his son, who is too young to understand the intimate relationship between his father and Paolina and who remains struck just by the funny impression of disproportion the two bodies create and by the graceful and tempting image of the fancy sweet-box. This last detail actually hides a meaningful frustration. Paolina takes the candies out of it and little Alexandre is left with

39 Ibid., p. 140.
a precious but useless and valueless (from his childish point of view) sweet-box. This image can tell a lot about the impossibility of the child to understand the adult criteria of valuing things, and therefore it gives the reader the appropriate perspective to understand the entire tale of Mes Mémoires: an attempt to use faded and rough-sketch memories in order to create and write an organized and complete portrayal of his father. Instead Dumas writes something that is an aborted novel. In the analysis of the Musketeers cycle we will realize why.

The father is the pivot around which the universe of Dumas’s childhood rotates. Even the objects belonging to his father are invested with a prestige and an almost inviolable sacredness. Little Alexandre tries to get close to them in spite of the prohibitions of his mother: for instance, the rifle which is placed inside the big fireplace in the kitchen of the Les Fossés castle.

In an essay about Dumas, titled “Dumas allo specchio” (“Dumas in the mirror”) and entirely devoted to Mes Mémoires, the Italian critic Pietro Citati describes the imaginative importance the father had on the writer.

Every time Dumas deals with the military adventures of his father, or he just imagines him in situations he could not know, the General is always marked by a sense of youthful readiness, invincible might, instinctual braveness and a wonderfully plethoric

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42 Ibid., p. 138.
43 “The first image of My Memories is the one of the father, an unlucky Napoleonic general. The sparkling Creole officer was, to his son, the archetype of what he loved: heroic male beauty, the perfect shapes of Hercules or Antinous combined, as in an androgynous dream, with female grace, velvety eyes, slim waist, hands and feet like a woman: the tremendous physical strength, like a Rabelaisian giant: the arrogance, the braveness, the aristocratic boldness, which enabled him to face with two guns an Austrian battalion or a horde of Mamelouks; the embroidered and sumptuous clothes, the three-colored plumes, the medals, the magnificence of war and glory, the sword, which the son could barely raised. […] His books would have the splendor and the physical strength of his father: they would imitate his deeds; youthful, fantastic, unbridled, daring, plumed like the royal armies” (Citati, Pietro. “Dumas allo specchio”, in Il male assoluto. Milano: Mondadori 2002, pp. 126-127).
heroism. His son sees him running with the freedom of a wild youth in Santo Domingo, imagines him in fights where, with bold and cheerful ease, he always gets the better of everyone. The reader sees him overturning a musketeer from a theatre’s box; capturing thirteen Tyrolean soldiers by himself, pirouetting on his horse; pouncing heedlessly in the middle of an Austrian platoon; hiding behind a tree and shooting, without missing a shot, with fifty rifles left behind by the runaway soldiers of the enemy army; breaking into the enemy squadron, spinning his sword around like a whirlwind. The son also loves his moral rigor, his honesty and his astuteness, which are all things that have a consistent importance in his novels: the General asks for the army review, put out by the insubordinations; rules the Trevigiano, among rich and sumptuous buildings, where he moves with the self-assurance and the vigor of a young man, asking for a reduction of his own stipend and refusing to carry out unworthy spoliations; or when, following the example in his beloved Caesar’s Commentaries (the same that brigand Vampa will be reading in Le comte de Monte-Cristo), he gives a purgative to an Austrian spy and discovers, among the excrements, sealed inside a sort of pellet, an important dispatch.

And Dumas always insists on his father’s might and beauty:

Beau de visage, quoique son teint de mulâtre donnât un caractère étrange à sa physionomie, élégant comme un créole, admirablement fait à l’époque où c’était un avantage d’être bien fait, avec des pieds et des mains de femme ; prodigieusement adroit à tous les exercices du corps, un des meilleurs élèves de Laboissière, le premier maître d’escrime du temps […].

And also:

Mon père, nous l’avons déjà dit, à l’âge de vingt-quatre ans qu’il avait alors, était un des plus beaux jeunes hommes qu’on pût voir. Il avait ce teint bruni, ces yeux marrons et veloutés, ce nez droit qui n’appartient qu’au mélange des races indiennes et caucasiques. Il avait les dents blanches, les lèvres sympathiques, le cou bien attaché sur de puissantes épaules, et, malgré sa taille de cinq pieds neuf pouces, une main et un pied de femme. Ce pied surtout faisait damner ses maîtresses, dont il était bien rare qu’il ne pût pas mettre les pantoufles.

At this point I would like to open a brief parenthesis about racial problems in Dumas and his description of his father. We saw that Dumas always underlines the physical beauty of his father that is so uncommon and empowered by the “caractère étrange” that Dumas connects to its exotic roots. The racial difference of his father’s body does not seem to be seen through a racial lens.

Françoise Lionnet explained the revolutionary value of the métissage as a new direction for the whole Western culture. She sees in the métis (like General Dumas was) an image signifying a physical possibility of crossing cultures: the métis as an image of rebellion and cultural freedom beyond Western bounds and rigidities.

For it is only by imagining nonhierarchical modes of relation among cultures that we can address the crucial issues of indeterminacy and solidarity. Métissage is such a concept and a practice: it is the site of

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44 Dumas, “Mémoires”, pp. 11-12.
undecidability and indeterminacy, where solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages.46

And furthermore:

A politics of solidarity thus implies the acceptance of métissage as the only racial ground on which liberation struggles can be fought. [...] [T]he possibility of emancipation is indeed linked to an implicit understanding of métissage as a concept of solidarity which demystifies all essentialist glorifications of unitary origins, be they racial, sexual, geographic, or cultural.47

However, in General Dumas’s figure we do not have this feature of solidarity. It is rather an exceptional and powerful image of individuality. It is interesting to point out what Lionnet writes about the Western obsession of the “One” and the “Same”, that the métis must have the duty to destroy.

Racial and cultural “mixing” has always been a fact of reality, however fearfully unacknowledged, especially by the proponents of “racial purity”. It is in large part because of the scientific racism of the nineteenth century that hybridization became coded as a negative category. At that time, science created the idea of the “pure race”, an extremely fallacious and aberrant form of human classification, born on the West’s monotheistic obsession with the “One” and the “Same”. As a result of colonial encounters and confrontations, the troubling question of miscegenation began to feed the European imagination with phantasms of monstrosity and degeneracy.48

We can conclude that this obsession of the “One” and the “Same” took over Dumas himself, becoming his own obsession of the narcissistic “Exceptional”. General Dumas fights against Arabs, terrified by his astonishing and mighty négritude; among his servants there is another black, Hyppolite, who is constantly mocked for his naiveté. A possible racial frustration of Alexandre Dumas may have strengthened the Western category of the “One”.

In this affective celebration of his father there are some memories, among the last of Alexandre Dumas, in which, insistently determined by a sort of hidden imperative, one can sense a promise made. In one the reader is present at the visit to the residence of Madame de Montesson, the widow of Louis-Philippe d’Orléans, a meeting the father urges the son to not forget.

[…] [J]e sais que cette douce recommandation, accompagnée de cette pièce d’or, grava toute cette scène dans ma mémoire, de telle sorte que je me vois encore aujourd’hui, assis près de cette gracieuse vieille femme qui, tout en causant avec mon père, s’amusait doucement à jouer avec mes cheveux.49

The coincidence of his father’s recommendations and the piece of gold remarks the link often present in Dumas between preciousness, jewels, treasures and the affective needs.

The other memory, possibly more important, is lunch with Generals Murat and Brune.

48 Ibid., p. 9.
49 Ibid., p. 150.
Le lendemain, Murat et Brune déjeunaient à la maison. On déjeuna dans une chambre au premier ; de la fenêtre de cette chambre, on voyait Montmartre, et je me rappelle que je suivais des yeux un immense cerf-volant nageant gracieusement dans l’air au-dessus des moulins à vent, lorsque mon père m’appela, me mit le sabre de Brune entre les jambes et le chapeau de Murat sur la tête, et, me faisant faire en galopant le tour de la table :
- Mon enfant, me dit-il, n’oublie pas plus aujourd’hui que tu as fait le tour de cette table, le sabre de Brune entre les jambes et le chapeau de Murat sur la tête, que tu n’oublieras que tu as embrassé hier madame de Montesson, veuve du duc d’Orléans, petit-fils du régent.50

As we already saw in the passage with Paolina Bonaparte and her fancy sweet box without pieces of candy, in this moment we have the disquieting mixture of a childish behavior (little Alexandre watching the cerf-volant) and an adult world made of weapon and military hats that could possibly express a neurosis of Dumas, culminating in the image of the sword put between the child’s legs (which surely confirms Melanie Klein’s theories about objects and weapons).

And, immediately after, Dumas fictitiously addresses his father:

Vous le voyez, mon père, je n’ai perdu aucun des souvenirs que vous m’aviez dit de garder. C’est que, depuis que j’ai l’âge de raison, votre souvenir vit en moi comme une lampe sainte, et continue d’éclairer toutes les choses et tous les hommes que vous avez touchés du doigt, quoique le temps ait détruit ces choses, quoique, ces hommes, la mort les ait emportés 51

General Dumas dies when his son is four. During the last night of his father’s life, in order to protect him from the tension of waiting, little Alexandre is taken to his cousin’s house. At midnight, at the exact moment when the father dies, Alexandre hears a knock at the door and feels a breath passing over his face.

A minuit, je fus éveillé, ou plutôt, nous fûmes réveillés, ma cousine et moi, par un grand coup frappé à la porte. Une veilleuse brûlait sur une table de nuit ; à la lueur de cette veilleuse, je vis ma cousine se soulever sur son lit, très effrayée, mais sans rien dire.
Personne ne pouvait frapper à cette porte intérieure, puisque les deux autres portes étaient fermées. Mais, moi qui aujourd’hui frissonne presque en écrivant ces lignes, moi, au contraire, je n’éprouvai aucune peur : je descendis à bas de mon lit et je m’avançai vers la porte.
- Où vas-tu, Alexandre ? me cria ma cousine ; où vas-tu donc ?
- Tu le vois bien, répondis-je tranquillement, je vais ouvrir à papa, qui vient nous dire adieu. La pauvre fille sauta hors de son lit tout effarée, m’attrapa comme je mettais la main à la serrure, et me recoucha de force dans mon lit.
Je me débattais entre ses bras, criant de toutes mes forces :
- Adieu, papa ! adieu, papa !
Quelque chose de pareil à une haleine expirante passa sur mon visage et me calma.
Cependant je me rendormis avec des larmes plein les yeux et des sanglots plein la gorge.52

They tell Alexandre that his father is gone and that he cannot see him again because the Good Lord has taken him back.

Par qui me fut annoncé le plus grand malheur de ma vie ?

50 Ibid., p. 151.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., p. 158.
Je l’ignore.
- Mon papa est mort, répliquai-je. Qu’est-ce que cela veut dire ?
- Cela veut dire que tu ne le verras plus.
- Comment, je ne verrai plus papa ?
- Non.
- Et pourquoi ne le verrai-je plus ?
- Parce que le bon Dieu te l’a repris.
- Pour toujours ?
- Pour toujours.
- Et vous dites que je ne le verrai plus ?
- Plus jamais.
- Plus jamais, jamais ?
- Plus jamais !
- Et où demeure-t-il, le bon Dieu ?
- Il demeure au ciel.

Je restai un instant pensif. Si enfant, si privé de raison que je fusse, je comprenais cependant que quelque chose de fatal venait de s’accomplir dans ma vie. Puis, profitant du premier moment où l’on cessa de faire attention à moi, je m’échappai de chez mon oncle et courus droit chez ma mère.

Toutes les portes étaient ouvertes, tous les visages étaient effarés ; on sentait que la mort était là.

J’entrai donc sans que personne me vit ou me remarquât. Je gagnai une petite chambre où l’on enfermait les armes ; je pris un fusil à un coup qui appartenait à mon père, et que l’on avait souvent promis de me donner quand je serai grand.

Puis, armé de ce fusil, je montai l’escalier.
Au premier étage, je rencontrai ma mère sur le palier.
Elle sortait de la chambre mortuaire... elle était tout en larmes.
- Où vas-tu ? me demanda-t-elle, étonnée de me voir là, quand elle me croyait chez mon oncle.
- Je vais au ciel ! répondis-je.
- Comment, tu vas au ciel ?
- Oui, laisse-moi passer.
- Et qu’y vas-tu faire, au ciel, mon pauvre enfant ?
- J’y vais tuer le bon Dieu, qui a tué papa."53

One could ask oneself, because Dumas does not make it clear, if the rifle, which he held, was the same he tried to touch and take in the fireplace of Les Fossés castle (sold due to straitened circumstances in 1805). Probably yes but it does not matter because both episodes express the sense of the paternal object.

We should not worry too much about the verisimilitude of these memories that are completely out of any kind of philological psychology. They already are literature. Dumas is aware of not telling in all likelihood, but his love towards his father and his painful feelings of his loss are unquestionable. They form a basis for a critical analysis of some of his novels.

J’adorais mon père. Peut-être, à cet âge, ce sentiment, que j’appelle aujourd’hui de l’amour, n’était-il qu’un naïf étonnement pour cette structure herculéenne et pour cette force gigantesque que je lui avais vu déployer en plusieurs occasions ; peut-être encore n’était-ce qu’une enfantine et orgueilleuse admiration pour son habit brodé, pour son aigrette tricolore et pour son grand sabre, que je pouvais à peine soulever ; mais tant il y a, qu’aujourd’hui encore le souvenir de mon père, dans chaque forme de son corps, dans chaque trait de son visage, m’est aussi présent que si je l’eusse perdu hier. Tant il y a enfin, qu’aujourd’hui je l’aime encore, je l’aime d’un amour aussi tendre, aussi profond et aussi réel, que s’il eût veillé sur ma

53 Ibid., p. 159.
General Dumas took his name from his mother, the black slave of Santo Domingo. After the breaking off of the relationship with his father, marquis Davy de la Pailleterie, General Dumas started his military career without any noble titles. The marquis denied him the use of his name among the lowest ranks of the army, from which the son wanted to start. General Dumas did not just change his name but also his motto, which became: *Deus dedit, Deus dabit.* After the Napoleonic period and when the monarchy had been definitively restored the mother said to Alexandre that he could choose between the ancient noble name of Davy de la Pailleterie, which might facilitate things for him, or his father’s name, which would not help him at all, considering that General Dumas was initially a republican General and later on a Napoleonic one. To this Alexandre replied:

- Oh ! il n’y a pas besoin de réfléchir, ma mère ! m’écriai-je ; je m’appelle Alexandre Dumas, et pas autrement. J’ai connu mon père, et je n’ai pas connu mon grand-père ; que penserait donc mon père, qui est venu me dire adieu au moment de sa mort, si je le reniais, lui, pour m’appeler comme mon grand-père ?
- C’est bien ton avis ? dit-elle.
- Et c’est le tien aussi, n’est-ce pas, mère ?
- Hélas ! oui ; mais qu’allons-nous devenir ?
- Bah ! lui dis-je, tu oublies que j’explique le *De viris*, et que, par conséquent, je sais ce que veut dire la devise de mon père : *Deus dedit, Deus dabit.* Dieu a donné, Dieu donnera.

From this moment periods of poverty and need start, but Dumas, resourceful and hopeful like d’Artagnan, newcomer from Gascony, starts an ascent that leads him to success and wealth.
THE FATHER IN DUMAS’S MUSKETEERS CYCLE

Dumas’s fidelity to the paternal image can be understood only by pointing out some coincidences in his novels, especially in the Musketeers cycle. In Le comte de Monte-Cristo Edmond Dantès, imprisoned for seventeen years, cannot help his father who, old and poor, eventually dies of hunger in solitude. Edmond is unjustly imprisoned (as happened to General Dumas) and enacts his vendetta thanks to the discovery of an ancient treasure, the treasure of Cardinal Spada (whereas General Dumas found one, but to no avail). In the figure of Le comte de Monte-Cristo’s main character the impotence and the will for a revenge for a suffered injustice coexist. It seems that Dumas put in the literary image of Edmond Dantès his own tragedy of his father’s loss (because he is so distant and impotent when his father dies) and the revenge accomplished through a rebirth, which was denied to his father. Jean-Yves Tadié has underlined the obsessive importance that the recurrence of treasures has in Dumas’s world. Once the treasure is found and recovered, a fabulous power is achieved, a power that lifts up the owner beyond any social lines, differently from the conception Balzac and Zola have, because their characters are set and located by money in the law of social life and relationships. It is also necessary to specify the mythical and, in some ways, moral value that is linked to the image of the treasure. The power deriving from it does not end in a volitional hedonism, because from the recovery of the treasure the narrative attention is focused on the fulfillment of a painfully intimate revenge. Such is the revenge of Edmond Dantès, who seems always indifferent to his unlimited wealth, without any warmth of life, with his icy hand that makes the one who touches it shiver.

The episode recalled at the beginning of the last chapter of this study, the one about Athos retrieving the treasure of Newcastle, presents the same identical conception: the treasure is necessary to the young Charles II in order to reestablish his power over England and to avenge his father. Dumas redeployed, with a disguised but obstinate autobiographical tendency, a paternal image, unjustly sacrificed and then avenged by a devoted son. In the tale of Le comte de Monte-Cristo the readers should also consider the terrible presence-absence of Napoleon who is associated with the misfortune of the innocent Edmond Dantès, accused of Bonapartist conspiracy. Also in the tale of Mes Mémoires the figure of Napoleon superintends the fall of Dumas’s father and hinders the life of Dumas himself: Napoleon’s hatred (at least as Dumas tells it) prevents him from being accepted in military and civil schools.

On verra plus tard que cette haine s’étendit à moi, et que, malgré les démarches qui furent faites en ma faveur par les anciens amis de mon père, je ne pus jamais obtenir mon entrée dans aucune école militaire, ni dans aucun collège civil.

The narrative world of Dumas is essentially a male world, often crossed by feelings of revenge and retaliation through which the one who is taking his revenge also gains the sense of his individuality and identity. Le comte de Monte-Cristo and its outline and sinopia, the amazingly fresh novel Georges, are perfect examples of that. The

60 I disagree with Jean-Yves Tadié when he doubts the paternity of Georges (J. Y. Tadié, “Le roman”, p. 59). According to Tadié Georges lacks humor, a main stylistic feature of Dumas. The remark is interesting
model and the dream of the father are hidden with covert ability in the Musketeers cycle, in which one can recognize, compared to the descriptions and the imaginations of Mes Mémoires, some not accidental recurrences. The idea that Dumas has transposed some features, qualities and impressions (as well as inventions) of his father’s figure to the musketeers whom d’Artagnan meets in Paris is really tempting. Once the young Gascon arrives at the antechamber of Monsieur de Tréville, Commanding Officer of the Royal Guards, he is struck by the appearance of Porthos and Aramis. The impression the young man gets at the sight of Porthos and his magnificent clothes is a real étonnement for the grandeur of the musketeer, a grandeur that is not separate from an exuberant, gently fatuous elegance.

Au centre du groupe le plus animé était un mousquetaire de grande taille, d’une figure hautaine et d’une bizarrerie de costume qui attirait sur lui l’attention générale. Il ne portait pas, pour le moment, la casaque d’uniforme, qui, au reste, n’était pas absolument obligatoire dans cette époque de liberté moindre, mais d’indépendance plus grande, mais un justaucorps bleu de ciel, tant soit peu fané et râpé, et sur cet habit un baudrier magnifique, en broderies d’or, et qui reluisait comme les écaillles dont l’eau se couvre au grand soleil. Un manteau long de velours cramoisie tombait avec grâce sur ses épaules, découvrant par-devant seulement le splendide baudrier, auquel pendait une gigantesque rapière.61

The figure of Porthos is naturally perceived through the amazement of a young man’s eyes, which contemplate an enlarged spectacle, dilated, in its proportions, like something seen from the point of view of the child. Moreover the sword can be compared to the one of General Dumas, which little Alexandre could barely raise. The enchanted daze with which d’Artagnan looks at the magnificent bulk of Porthos always preserves the sense of a naïve and dragged astonishment, as during the departure for the siege of La Rochelle, when the great musketeer appears in the dazzle of his elegance.

Porthos était magnifique ; ses éperons résonnaient, sa cuirasse brillait, son épée lui battait fièrement les jambes.62

Even in the second novel of the trilogy, Vingt ans après, when d’Artagnan finds Porthos after twenty years, he has in front of himself a gigantic figure, with unequivocal paternal features.

D’Artagnan franchit la grille et se trouva en face du château ; il mettait pied à terre quand une sorte de géant apparut sur le perron. Rendons cette justice à d’Artagnan, qu’à part tout sentiment d’égoïsme le coeur lui battit avec joie à l’aspect de cette haute taille et de cette figure martiale qui lui rappelaient un homme brave et bon.
Il courut à Porthos et se précipita dans ses bras ; toute la valetaille, rangée en cercle à distance respectueuse, regardait avec une humble curiosité.63

but not for the purpose of demonstrating that the author of Georges is not Dumas. If anything, one could use it as an unsolved contradiction in the writer’s temperament, fluctuating from sharp visions and descriptions of violence and tensions in feelings to sometimes a predominant appearance of elusive brilliance, of witty dialogic dissimulation (a constant feature of Les trois mousquetaires). After all, even Le comte de Monte-Cristo is almost totally devoid of humor, apart from rare moments in which humor does not dissolve but rather increases the disquieting inscrutability of Edmond Dantès.

61 Dumas, “Mousquetaires”, p. 29.
62 Ibid., p. 443.
In *Le vicomte de Bragelonne*, the last novel of the trilogy, Porthos seems to have definitely taken on the traits through which Dumas affectionately describes and remembers the paternal figure: physical strength and magnificence. Before realizing that it is Porthos, d’Artagnan very pensively observes a man who looks after six workmen, who are incapable, altogether, of raising a big stone. From the imperiousness of his gestures and from his elegance, the very tall man gives d’Artagnan the impression of being the chief engineer.

Ce groupe était dominé par cet homme qu’avait déjà remarqué d’Artagnan, et qui paraissait être l’ingénieur en chef. Un plan était étendu sur une grosse pierre formant table, et à quelques pas de cet homme une grue fonctionnait. 

Cet ingénieur, qui, en raison de son importance, devait tout d’abord attirer l’attention de d’Artagnan, portait un justaucorps qui, par sa somptuosité, n’était guère en harmonie avec la besogne qu’il faisait, laquelle eût plutôt nécessité le costume d’un maître maçon que celui d’un seigneur. 

C’était, en outre, un homme d’une haute taille, aux épaules larges et carrées, et portant un chapeau tout couvert de panaches. Il gesticulait d’une façon on ne peut plus majestueuse, et paraissait, car on ne le voyait que de dos, gourmander les travailleurs sur leur inertie ou leur faiblesse.

D’Artagnan approchait toujours. 

En ce moment, l’homme aux panaches avait cessé de gesticuler, et, les mains appuyées sur les genoux, il suivait, à demi courbé sur lui-même, les efforts de six ouvriers qui essayaient de soulever une pierre de taille à la hauteur d’une pièce de bois destinée à soutenir cette pierre, de façon qu’on pût passer sous elle la corde de la grue.64

Irritated by the inefficiency of the workmen, who are unable to raise the rock, the presumed chief engineer moves them away.

- Oh ! oh ! dit-il, qu’est-ce que cela ? ai-je donc affaire à des hommes de paille ?... Corne de bœuf ! rangez-vous, et vous allez voir comment cela se pratique. 
- Peste ! dit d’Artagnan, aurait-il la prétention de lever ce rocher ? Ce serait curieux, par exemple. Les ouvriers, interpellés par l’ingénieur, se rangèrent l’oreille basse et secouant la tête, à l’exception de celui qui tenait le madrier et qui s’apprêtait à remplir son office. 

L’homme aux panaches s’approcha de la pierre, se baissa, glissa ses mains sous la face qui posait à terre, roidit ses muscles herculéens, et, sans secousse, d’un mouvement lent comme celui d’une machine, il souleva le rocher à un pied de terre. 

L’ouvrier qui tenait le madrier profita de ce jeu qui lui était donné et glissa le rouleau sous la pierre. 

- Voilà ! dit le géant, non pas en laissant retomber le rocher, mais en le reposant sur son support. 
- Mordieux ! s’écria d’Artagnan, je ne connais qu’un homme capable d’un tel tour de force. 
- Hein ? fit le colosse en se retournant. 
- Porthos ! murmura d’Artagnan saisi de stupeur, Porthos à Belle-Ile ! 

De son côté, l’homme aux panaches arrêta ses yeux sur le faux intendant, et, malgré son déguisement, le reconnut. 

- D’Artagnan ! s’écria-t-il.65

One should remember what Dumas writes in *Mes Mémoires* about his own amazement occasioned by his paternal figure, about his étonnement. Isn’t the strong and plumed Porthos here a projection of the filial imagination of Dumas? The adjective “herculéens” defines once and for all the link between Porthos and General Dumas. We

65 Ibid., I, pp. 657-658.
should remember that Dumas called his father “Hercule mulâtre”. Nevertheless, as a character, Porthos also embodies the hidden presence of a mystification, on which the writer insists many times, as if he wanted to unmask the invulnerable enormousness of the giant. Actually Porthos is a liar and a brilliant simulator. Even his elegance is sometimes artificially concocted, as exemplified by the precious bandoleer that the musketeer pompously shows (which is made of gold in the visible part and of buffalo in the hidden one), or his houses in *Les trois mousquetaires* and *Vingt ans après*: the first one is an apartment that seems wide and sumptuous, but none can exactly tell how it really is because Porthos never invited anyone inside, and perhaps, it could hide a disappointing reality behind the façade, like the bandoleer.

Porthos habitait un appartement très vaste et d’une très somptueuse apparence, rue du Vieux-Colombier. Chaque fois qu’il passait avec quelque ami devant ses fenêtres, à l’une desquelles Mousqueton se tenait toujours en grande livrée, Porthos levait la tête et la main, et disait : Voilà ma demeure ! Mais jamais on ne le trouvait chez lui, jamais il n’invitait personne à y monter, et nul ne pouvait se faire une idée de ce que cette somptueuse apparence renfermait de richesses réelles.66

The second house, after Porthos has become rich, is a palace in which a tasteless extenuation of golden elegance dominates.

Ils entrèrent dans le château ; ce n’étaient que dorures du haut en bas, les corniches étaient dorées, les moulures étaient dorées, les bois des fauteuils étaient dorés.67

Aramis, on the other hand, strikes d’Artagnan for his sweet and effeminate gracefulness (as effeminate were some of the features of General Dumas), a feature that opposes him to Porthos.

Cet autre mousquetaire formait un contraste parfait avec celui qui l’interrogeait et qui venait de le désigner sous le nom d’Aramis : c’était un jeune homme de vingt-deux à vingt-trois ans à peine, à la figure naïve et doucereuse, à l’œil noir et doux et aux joues roses et veloutées comme une pêche en automne ; sa moustache fine dessinait, sur sa lèvre supérieure, une ligne d’une rectitude parfaite ; ses mains semblaient craindre de s’abaisser de peur que leurs veines ne se gonflascent, et de temps en temps il se pinçait le bout des oreilles pour les maintenir d’un incarnat tendre et transparent. D’habitude il parlait peu et lentement, saluait beaucoup, riait sans bruit en montrant ses dents, qu’il avait belles et dont, comme du reste de sa personne, il semblait prendre le plus grand soin.68

Among the three, this musketeer is the most ambiguous and equivocal, always reticent about his secrets. The description of his house introduces Aramis to the reader in the best possible way.

Quant à Aramis, il habitait un petit logement composé d’un boudoir, d’une salle à manger et d’une chambre à coucher, laquelle chambre, située comme le reste de l’appartement au rez-de-chaussée, donnait sur un petit jardin frais, vert ombreux et impénétrable aux yeux du voisinage.69

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66 Dumas, “Mousquetaires”, p. 90.
69 Ibid., p. 90.
This character, in the course of the trilogy, will be defined, novel by novel, more and more negatively compared to his friends, and eventually he will be expelled from the group. He will also be more and more feminized in the course of the trilogy, even (and mainly) in a moral sense.

As for Athos, D’Artagnan is totally fascinated by him, from the very beginning, when the oldest of the musketeers comes alone in the room of Monsieur de Tréville. D’Artagnan notices his nobility at first sight.

Au même instant la portière se souleva, et une tête noble et belle, mais affreusement pâle, parut sous la frange.70

It is Athos whom, more than the others, d’Artagnan wants to approach, hoping to become his friend.

Il espérait […] se faire un ami d’Athos, dont l’air de grand seigneur et la mine austère lui agréaient fort.71

Comparing Athos and Porthos, it is naturally Athos who is preferred by d’Artagnan, who finds in his figure the trustworthiness and the nobility of a real guide, a perception that the fatuous appearance of Porthos cannot definitely inspire.

Porthos […] avait un caractère tout opposé à celui d’Athos : non seulement il parlait beaucoup, mais il parlait haut ; peu lui importait au reste, il faut lui rendre cette justice, qu’on l’écoutât ou non ; il parlait pour le plaisir de parler et pour le plaisir de s’entendre ; il parlait de toutes choses excepté de sciences, excipant à cet endroit de la haine invétérée que depuis son enfance il portait, disait-il, aux savants. Il avait moins grand air qu’Athos, et le sentiment de son infériorité à ce sujet l’avait, dans le commencement de leur liaison rendu souvent injuste pour ce gentilhomme, qu’il s’était alors efforcé de dépasser par ses splendides toilettes. Mais, avec sa simple casaque de mousquetaire et rien que par la façon dont il rejetait la tête en arrière et avançait le pied, Athos prenait à l’instant même la place qui lui était due et reléguait le fastueux Porthos au second rang.72

In the adventures of the four friends Dumas reaches peaks of unrestrainable and overwhelming exaggeration and, in one of these, which exalts their heroism, the adventure of the bulwark of Saint-Gervais, Dumas recalls the adventure of his father against an entire Austrian squadron. Alone on the bulwark, accompanied by their servants, they face the attacks of enemy squadrons (with the alibi of a bet but just in order to find a secret place for an important and strictly private conversation), using, as General Dumas similarly did, the charged muskets of dead soldiers. Pleased by the excesses of strength and good fortune, the writer brings the emotional tension up to the glorification that culminates in the thunderous applause of all the French soldiers who have watched the enterprise from a distance in the encampment.

Et Athos s’élança dans le bastion, monta sur la plate-forme, et enleva le drapeau ; seulement comme les Rochelais étaient arrivés à portée de mousquet, ils firent un feu terrible sur cet homme, qui, comme par plaisir, allait s’exposer aux coups. Mais on eût dit qu’Athos avait un charme attaché à sa personne, les balles passèrent en sifflant tout autour de lui, pas une ne le toucha.

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70 Ibid., p. 37.
71 Ibid., p. 55.
72 Ibid., pp. 87-88.
Athos agita son étendard en tournant le dos aux gardes de la ville et en saluant ceux du camp. Des deux côtés de grands cris retentirent, d’un côté des cris de colère, de l’autre des cris d’enthousiasme.  

The friendship of the four characters dilates, with powerful beauty, the sense of adventure and risk. The three musketeers Athos, Porthos and Aramis hide their real identity (at least in the first book of the trilogy) behind exotic and unusual names, as General Dumas did when, joining the army, he decided to use the exotic name of his mother in spite of his old nobility. D’Artagnan is really curious about them. He wants to know their real names and their lives, but he senses that most of all it is Athos who is wrapped in mystery and clearly belongs to an ancient nobility.

D’Artagnan, qui était fort curieux de sa nature, comme sont les gens, du reste, qui ont le génie de l’intrigue, fit tous ses efforts pour savoir ce qu’étaient au juste Athos, Porthos et Aramis ; car sous ces noms de guerre, chacun des jeunes gens cachait son nom de gentilhomme, Athos surtout, qui sentait son grand seigneur d’une lieue.

In a moment of Les trois mousquetaires Dumas clarifies the figure of d’Artagnan in relation to the three, seeing him as a demiurge who enables the different qualities of his friends by concerting them.

Or d’Artagnan, dans ses projets d’intrigue à venir, et décidé qu’il était à faire de ses trois compagnons les instruments de sa fortune, d’Artagnan n’était pas fâché de réunir d’avance dans sa main les fils invisibles à l’aide desquels il comptait les mener.

D’Artagnan is as crafty and skilled a metteur en scène of the peculiarities of his three friends, as is the writer Dumas in making vital, active and dynamic the impressions he retains of his father and the images inspired by him. It seems to be as if through fiction, Dumas is still meditating about that figure who appeared for a moment and suddenly disappeared in the first blooming of his childhood. These observations can be confirmed by the discovery of a novel about paternity and filiation inside the Musketeers cycle.

Dumas’s novels generally have a predilection for male figures who are also the most well-made and defined. A memory Dumas tells in Mes Mémoires reveals a lot about this disposition. Dumas remembers some characters of his childhood, recalling them with anecdotes and features: the ones he still clearly remembers are all men except for a young servant girl: the gardener Pierre, recalled for the frogs and grass snakes he captured for little Alexandre; the black servant Hyppolite, for his proverbial naïveté; the guard named Mocquet, who left a fascination in the writer for the stories he used to tell in the evenings, immediately interrupted when General Dumas came in the room. About the young servant girl Dumas does not remember anything but her name: Marie.

73 Ibid., p. 510.
74 Ibid., p. 90.
76 Interesting the quick remarks of J. Y. Tadié in the préface to Dumas, “Bragelonne”.
Cette dernière se perd complètement dans les brouillards crépusculaires de ma vie. C’est un nom que j’ai entendu donner à une forme restée indécise dans mon esprit, mais qui, autant que je puis me rappeler, n’avait rien de poétique.77

Male figures, and particularly the ones of the Musketeers cycle, are the most substantial and real, and they often have a paternal undertone. Paternal is the commanding officer of the royal guards Monsieur de Tréville, who warns d’Artagnan against women (in the same way Athos does). Paternal (and boundlessly rich and powerful) are the Duke of Buckingham and the lavishly splendid Fouquet of Le vicomte de Bragelonne. In some way even Cardinal Richelieu, who at the same time, fears and admires d’Artagnan, has ambiguous paternal attributes, for instance when he extends an offer to d’Artagnan to be immediately in command of one of his guards’ squads. Women have an actual and consistent reality only in their expression of evil and danger and in their physical decay, as in the figures of Milady and the Duchess of Chevreuse. The loved woman does not have any body in the imagination of Dumas. One could recall and see the disappearance of Constance Bonacieux, with whom d’Artagnan believes himself in love.

D’Artagnan suivit donc Mme Bonacieux, mû par un double sentiment, l’amour et la curiosité. Pendant toute la route, et à mesure que les corridors devenaient plus déserts, d’Artagnan voulait arrêter la jeune femme, la saisir, la contempler, ne fût-ce qu’un instant ; mais, vive comme un oiseau, elle glissait toujours entre ses mains, et lorsqu’il voulait parler, son doigt ramené sur sa bouche avec un petit geste impératif plein de charme lui rappelait qu’il était sous l’empire d’une puissance à laquelle il devait aveuglement obéir, et qui lui interdisait jusqu’à la plus légère plainte ; enfin, après une minute ou deux de tours et de détours, Mme Bonacieux ouvrit une porte et introduisit le jeune homme dans un cabinet tout à fait obscur. Là elle lui fit un nouveau signe de mutisme, et ouvrant une seconde porte cachée par une tapisserie dont les ouvertures répandirent tout à coup une vive lumière, elle disparut.78

Or in this other passage, in which d’Artagnan has the impression of having glimpsed Constance in a coach, after she has been kidnapped.

Enfin, après un quart d’heure d’attente et comme le crépuscule tombait tout à fait, une voiture apparut, arrivant au grand galop par la route de Sèvres ; un pressentiment dit d’avance à d’Artagnan que cette voiture renfermait la personne qui lui avait donné rendez-vous : le jeune homme fut tout étonné lui-même de sentir son cœur battre si violemment. Presque aussitôt une tête de femme sortit par la portière, deux doigts sur sa bouche, comme pour recommander le silence, ou comme pour envoyer un baiser ; d’Artagnan poussa un léger cri de joie ; cette femme, ou plutôt cette apparition, car la voiture était passée avec la rapidité d’une vision, était Mme Bonacieux.
Par un mouvement involontaire, et malgré la recommandation faite, d’Artagnan lança son cheval au galop et en quelques bonds rejoignit la voiture ; mais la glace de la portière était hermétiquement fermée : la vision avait disparu.79

These excerpts remark a feature of female disappearance that tells a lot about the essential male feature of Dumas’s world. This feature is confirmed by a passage by Judith Butler, who, by recalling Luce Irigaray’s concept of “phallogocentrism”, reveals that a phallic imagery (and we have seen many examples in Dumas’s writing, from the description of weapons to the amazement produced by physical strength and might) sets

78 Dumas, “Mousquetaires”, p. 248.
79 Ibid., p. 433.
out the ultimate step to female vanishing (and we will see how the same Aramis, the most feminized character among the four, will disappear at the end of the novel).

For Irigaray, that phallogocentric mode of signifying the female sex perpetually reproduces phantasms of its own self-amplifying desire. Instead of a self-limiting linguistic gesture that grants alterity or difference to women, phallogocentrism offers a name to eclipse the feminine and take its place.80

And also:

The feminist appropriation of sexual difference, whether written in opposition to the phallogocentrism of Lacan (Irigaray) or as a critical reelaboration of Lacan, attempts to theorize the feminine, not as an expression of the metaphysics of substance, but as the unrepresentable absence effected by (masculine) denial that grounds the signifying economy through exclusion. The feminine as the repudiated/excluded within that system constitutes the possibility of a critique and disruption of that hegemonic conceptual scheme.81

This gender reading, which could lead up to a thoughtful interpretation of Dumas’s writings, implies a meditation on those Western monotheistic categories that we found in recalling Françoise Lionnet’s ideas about the figure of the métis. In fact Judith Butler talks about the “monotheistic singularity,”82 of phallogocentrism and it is difficult to not recognize that Dumas is completely rooted in these Western categories, and that his imagery of the father is, again, a projection of God.

In any case the tenderest feelings, in the trilogy of the Musketeers, are for male figures. When d’Artagnan arrives in Paris, he is alone. He has quickly said goodbye to his father, a sort of ghostly figure. His father fell into disgrace but talks to his son about “vieille noblesse”.83 Is it not something that the reader of Mes Mémoires has read about? One scene is particularly significant: d’Artagnan, in his little room of rue Fossoyeur, before visiting Monsieur de Tréville, sews on his jacket and his trousers some stripes belonging to his father. This remote figure, whose memory d’Artagnan sews on his clothes, is substituted by Athos, the real father of the novels (he will be the only one, among his friends, to have a son). D’Artagnan wants to know everything about the musketeer, who immediately reveals features of temper very similar to the spleen of General Dumas. He is very strong in all physical exercises, he is an excellent jockey and an infallible fencer; he is elegant, handsome; he has a strange and impassible self-destructive cruelty when he gambles; he easily falls prey to frequent and disdainful inebriations; he is melancholic and noble.

L’air noble et distingué d’Athos, ces éclairs de grandeur qui jaillissaient de temps en temps de l’ombre où il se tenait volontairement enfermé, cette inaltérable égalité d’humeur qui en faisait le plus facile compagnon de la terre, cette gaieté forcée et mordante, cette bravoure qu’on eût appelée aveugle, si elle n’eût été le résultat du plus rare sang-froid, tant de qualités attiraient plus que l’estime, plus que l’amitié de d’Artagnan, elles attiraient son admiration.

En effet, considéré même auprès de M. de Tréville, l’élégant et noble courtisan, Athos, dans ses jours de belle humeur, pouvait soutenir avantageusement la comparaison ; il était de taille moyenne, mais cette taille

81 Ibid., p. 37.
82 Ibid., p. 38.
83 Ibid., p. 9.
était si admirablement prise et si bien proportionnée, que, plus d’une fois, dans ses luttes avec Porthos, il avait fait plier le géant dont la force physique était devenue proverbiale parmi les mousquetaires ; sa tête, aux yeux perçants, au nez droit, au menton dessiné comme celui de Brutus, avait un caractère indéfinissable de grandeur et de grâce ; ses mains, dont il ne prenait aucun soin, faisaient le désespoir d’Aramis, qui cultivait les siennes à grand renfort de pâte d’amandes et d’huile parfumée ; le son de sa voix était pénétrant et mélodieux tout à la fois, et puis, ce qu’il y avait d’indéfinissable dans Athos, qui se faisait toujours obscur et petit, c’était cette science du monde et des usages de la plus brillante société, cette habitude de bonne maison qui paraît comme à son insu dans ses moindres actions.

S’agissait-il d’un repas, Athos l’ordonnait mieux qu’aucun homme du monde, plaçant chaque convive à sa place et au rang que lui avaient faits ses ancêtres ou qu’il s’était faits lui-même. S’agissait-il de science héraldique, Athos connaissait toutes les familles nobles du royaume, leur généalogie, leurs alliances, leurs armes et l’origine de leurs armes. L’étiquette n’avait pas de minuités qui lui fussent étrangères, il savait quels étaient les droits des grands propriétaires, il connaissait à fond la vénérerie et la fauconnerie, et un jour il avait, en causant de ce grand art, étonné le roi Louis XIII lui-même, qui cependant y était passé maître. Comme tous les grands seigneurs de cette époque, il montait à cheval et faisait des armes dans la perfection. Il y a plus, son éducation avait été si peu négligée, même sous le rapport des études scolastiques, si rares à cette époque chez les gentilshommes, qu’il souriait aux bribes de latin que détachait Aramis, et qu’avait l’air de comprendre Porthos ; deux ou trois fois même, au grand étonnement de ses amis, il lui était arrivé, lorsque Aramis laissait échapper quelque erreur de rudiment, de remettre un verbe à son temps et un nom à son cas ; en outre, sa probité était inattaquable, dans ce siècle où les hommes de guerre transigeaient si facilement avec leur religion et leur conscience, les amants avec la délicatesse rigoureuse de nos jours, et les pauvres avec le septième commandement de Dieu. C’était donc un homme fort extraordinaire qu’Athos.

Et cependant, on voyait cette nature si distinguée, cette créature si belle, cette essence si fine, tourner insensiblement vers la vie matérielle, comme les vieillards tournent vers l’imbécilité physique et morale. Athos, dans ses heures de privation, et ces heures étaient fréquentes, s’éteignait dans toute sa partie lumineuse, et son côté brillant disparaissait comme dans une profonde nuit.

Alors, le demi-dieu évanoui, il restait à peine un homme. La tête basse, l’œil terne, la parole lourde et pénible, Athos regardait pendant de longues heures soit sa bouteille et son verre, soit Grimaud, qui, habitué à lui obéir par signes, lisait dans le regard atone de son maître jusqu’à son moindre désir, qu’il satisfaisait aussitôt.84

In a certain way Athos seems to harmonize both the grace of Aramis and the might of Porthos in a more individualized semblance. Nevertheless he is a man surrounded by mystery, which d’Artagnan senses with acute curiosity. Who is Athos really? Looking at his apartment increases the mystery.

Athos habitait rue Férou, à deux pas du Luxembourg ; son appartement se composait de deux petites chambres, fort proprement meublées, dans une maison garnie dont l’hôtesse encore jeune et véritablement encore belle lui faisait inutilement les doux yeux. Quelques fragments d’une grande splendeur passée éclataient çà et là aux murs de ce modeste logement : c’était une épée, par exemple, richement damasquinée, qui remontait pour la façon à l’époque de François Ier, et dont la poignée seule, incrustée de pierres précieuses, pouvait valoir deux cents pistoles, et que cependant, dans ses moments de plus grande détresse, Athos n’avait jamais consenti à engager ou à vendre. Cette épée avait longtemps fait l’ambition de Porthos. Porthos aurait donné dix années de sa vie pour posséder cette épée. […] Outre son épée, il y avait encore un portrait représentant un seigneur du temps de Henri III, vêtu avec la plus grande élégance, et qui portait l’ordre du Saint-Esprit, et ce portrait avait avec Athos certaines ressemblances de lignes, certaines similitudes de famille, qui indiquaient que ce grand seigneur, chevalier des ordres du roi, était son ancêtre.85

Doesn’t the untouchable sword recall the father’s rifle that little Alexandre was not allowed to touch, placed over the fireplace of his house? The portrait, which is an

84 Ibid., pp. 311-312.
85 Ibid., p. 89.
effective clue of a family tie locates Athos in the sense of *descent* and presents him, in terms of origins, as the most elevated and privileged compared to Porthos and Aramis. It is due to his filial feeling that d’Artagnan clarifies Athos’s obscurities and understands the misogyny which affects his friend, a misogyny born from a love’s deception, specifically Milady’s. The young Gascon always looks at Athos before speaking, as if trying to gain his approval and support. When d’Artagnan is diverted by the ephemeral (but somehow threatening) enticements of Cardinal Richelieu, who wants to entrust him with the leadership of one of his squads, it is the image of Athos who immediately solves the dilemma.

D’Artagnan sortit ; mais à la porte le cœur fut prêt à lui manquer, et peu s’en fallut qu’il ne rentrât. Cependant la figure grave et sévère d’Athos lui apparut : s’il faisait avec le cardinal le pacte que celui-ci lui proposait, Athos ne lui donnerait plus la main, Athos le renierait.86

But Athos also demonstrates an evident paternal concern towards the young man. He warns him all the time against women and particularly against Milady, eventually threatening her directly and personally with his gun in order to defend him. After the adventure of Saint-Gervais’ bulwark, Athos wants to make sure that d’Artagnan is not injured.

- Et en échange de tout cela pas une égratignure ? Ah ! si fait ! Qu’avez vous donc là à la main, d’Artagnan ? du sang, ce me semble.
- Ce n’est rien, dit d’Artagnan.
- Une balle perdue ?
- Pas même.
- Qu’est-ce donc alors ?
Nous l’avons dit, Athos aimait d’Artagnan comme son enfant, et ce caractère sombre et inflexible avait parfois pour le jeune homme des sollicitudes de père.87

But d’Artagnan is not Athos’s son: in spite of his filial attitudes and the attentions of the older musketeer, a separation takes place. In the second novel of the trilogy *Vingt ans après*, when d’Artagnan leaves in search of Athos, he speaks about him with detachment.

- Eh bien ! aujourd’hui, continua d’Artagnan, voici le triste spectacle qui nous attend. Ce noble gentilhomme à l’œil fier, ce beau cavalier si brillant sous les armes, que l’on s’étonnait toujours qu’il tint une simple épée à la main au lieu d’un bâton de commandement, eh bien ! il se sera transformé en un vieillard courbé, au nez rouge, aux yeux pleurants. Nous allons le trouver couché sur quelque gazon, d’où il nous regardera d’un œil terne, et qui peut-être ne nous reconnaîtra pas.88

But these assumptions are totally invalidated by the actual appearance of Athos, who now is seen in his real identity, as *comte de la Fère*. As in a dream (already seen in the improbable rejuvenation of General Dumas, in the recollections of his son’s first

86 Ibid., p. 442.
87 Ibid., p. 511.
years of childhood) the reader sees Athos as not old at all. Instead he seems regenerated in the dignity of his aspect.

Chose étrange ! Athos avait vieilli à peine. Ses beaux yeux, dégagés de ce cercle de bistre que dessinent les veilles et l’orgie, semblaient plus grands et d’un fluide plus pur que jamais, son visage, un peu allongé, avait gagné en majesté ce qu’il avait perdu d’agitation fébrile ; sa main, toujours admirablement belle et nerveuse, malgré la souplesse des chairs, resplendissait sous une manchette de dentelles, comme certaines mains de Titien et de Van Dick ; il était plus svelte qu’autrefois ; ses épaules, bien effacées et larges, annonçaient une vigueur peu commune ; ses longs cheveux noirs, parsemés à peine de quelques cheveux gris, tombaient élégants sur ses épaules, et ondulés comme par un pli naturel ; sa voix était toujours fraîche comme s’il n’eût eu que vingt-cinq ans, et ses dents magnifiques, qu’il avait conservées blanches et intactes, donnaient un charme inexprimable à son sourire.89

The arrival of a young man of fifteen years, whom the servants call Raoul, makes d’Artagnan understand immediately the reasons for his friend’s rebirth.

Ce fut donc presque machinalement qu’il se retourna, lorsqu’un beau jeune homme de quinze ans, vêtu simplement, mais avec un goût parfait, entra dans le salon en levant gracieusement son feutre orné de longues plumes rouges. Cependant ce nouveau personnage, tout à fait inattendu, le frappa. Tout un monde d’idées nouvelles se présenta à son esprit, lui expliquant par toutes les sources de son intelligence le changement d’Athos, qui jusque-là lui avait paru inexplicable. Une ressemblance singulière entre le gentilhomme et l’enfant lui expliquait le mystère de cette vie régénérée.90

Enlightened by his paternity Athos is now entirely devoid of mysteries and brooding. Paternity brings clarity: the more the image of the real father is confused and unclear in the tale of Mes Mémoires, the more the figure of this fictional father is clear, simple, entire and pure with its affection towards a son Athos saw growing up. The figure of the father finds, in the novel, a reality through its beloved son. The love for his son has restored him from his disappointed love for women. Raoul was born due to a romantic adventure about which Dumas gives few narrative details. The reader is informed about the identity of Raoul’s mother, the Duchess of Chevreuse, but the real affective object is Athos as father (actually his mother disappears from the life of her son and when she finds him again after many years she merely looks at him with pleased but passing surprise). Athos confides to d’Artagnan:

- Eh ! mon Dieu, oui ! c’est lui qui a causé en moi le changement que vous voyez : je me desséchais comme un pauvre arbre isolé qui ne tient en rien sur la terre, il n’y avait qu’une affection profonde qui pût me faire reprendre racine dans la vie. Une maîtresse ? j’étais trop vieux. Des amis ? je ne vous avais plus là. Eh bien ! cet enfant m’a fait retrouver tout ce que j’avais perdu ; je n’avais plus le courage de vivre pour moi, j’ai vécu pour lui.91

In the story, at this precise moment, the paternal attributes of Athos definitively shift from d’Artagnan to Raoul. In this shift we find a significant moment that implies a lot of suggestions about the mechanism of fictional literature, concerning what we said in

89 Ibid., p. 841.
90 Ibid., p. 842.
91 Ibid., pp. 845-846.
the introduction about the Lacanian dialectic between sujet and objet. D’Artagnan is surely a projection of the writer’s figure because he is able to use and exploit the features and qualities of his friends in order to accomplish his plans. Athos’ paternity was adumbrated in his relationship with d’Artagnan, a relationship that failed because d’Artagnan was not Athos’ son. This paternity is here fully objectified in the relationship between Athos and Raoul. From this point d’Artagnan-Dumas has the possibility to write about father and son, without the private and subjective frustration of an impossible projection.

- Monsieur, dit Athos en posant la main sur l’épaule de d’Artagnan, monsieur est le chevalier d’Artagnan, dont vous m’avez entendu parler souvent, Raoul.
- Monsieur, dit le jeune homme en saluant de nouveau et plus profondément, M. le comte a prononcé votre nom devant moi comme un exemple chaque fois qu’il a eu à citer un gentilhomme intrépide et généreux. Ce petit compliment ne laissa pas que d’émouvoir d’Artagnan, qui sentit son cœur doucement remué. Il tendit une main à Raoul en lui disant :
- Mon jeune ami, tous les éloges que l’on fait de moi doivent retourner à M. le comte que voici : car il a fait mon éducation en toutes choses, et ce n’est pas sa faute si l’élève a si mal profité. Mais il se rattrapera sur vous, j’en suis sûr. J’aime votre air, Raoul, et votre politesse m’a touché.92

The presence of Raoul, who descends from Athos and is the continuity of the family line, clarifies everything about that sword that Athos forbade anyone to touch, so deeply linked to his origins, which are now projected in his heir. The sense of paternity seems to be accompanied by an absolute absence of mysteries. Athos tells easily what he never said in Les trois mousquetaires.

Athos conduisit son hôte dans une salle à manger fort simple, mais dont les fenêtres s’ouvraient d’un côté sur le jardin et de l’autre sur une serre où poussaient de magnifiques fleurs.
D’Artagnan jeta les yeux sur le service : la vaisselle était magnifique ; on voyait que c’était de la vieille argenterie de famille. Sur un dressoir était une aiguière d’argent superbe ; d’Artagnan s’arrêta à la regarder.
- Ah ! voilà qui est divinement fait, dit-il.
- Oui, répondit Athos, c’est un chef-d’œuvre d’un grand artiste florentin nommé Benvenuto Cellini.
- Et la bataille qu’elle représente ?
- Est celle de Marignan. C’est le moment où l’un de mes ancêtres donne son épée à François Ier, qui vient de briser la sienne. Ce fut à cette occasion qu’Enguerrand de La Fère, mon aïeul fut fait chevalier de Saint-Michel. En outre, le roi, quinze ans plus tard, car il n’avait pas oublié qu’il avait battu trois heures encore avec l’épée de son ami Enguerrand sans qu’elle se rompît, lui fit don de cette aiguëière et d’une épée que vous avez peut-être vue autrefois chez moi, et qui est aussi un assez beau morceau d’orfèvrerie.93

The affectionate cares towards Raoul are tormented by what is the obsession of Athos: the fear of women and of the unhappiness caused by them, an unhappiness he knows well and from which he would like to preserve his son. With constant worry, Athos sees him falling in love with Louise de La Vallière and tries to send him away from her. Raoul joins the army of Flanders. When father and son say goodbye to each other the atmosphere is very similar to the moments in Mes Mémoires when the reader finds father and son together and the father asks his son not to forget (for instance during the déjeuner with Generals Murat and Brune and during the visit to Madame de

92 Ibid., pp. 848-849.
93 Ibid., p. 849.
Montesson). Now the perception is powerfully enhanced in an almost liturgical sense, which accomplishes what in the childhood memories of Dumas was just slightly traced. Before saying goodbye Athos keeps vigil by Raoul, contemplating him asleep with protective solicitude, thinking with pain about the suffering he might experience because of a woman.

Athos s’approcha, et le corps incliné dans une attitude pleine de tendre mélancolie, il regarda longtemps ce jeune homme à la bouche souriante, aux paupières mi-closes, dont les rêves devaient être doux et le sommeil léger, tant son ange protecteur mettait dans sa garde muette de sollicitude et d’affection. Peu à peu Athos se laissa entraîner aux charmes de sa rêverie en présence de cette jeunesse si riche et si pure. Sa jeunesse à lui reparut, apportant tous ces souvenirs suaves, qui sont plutôt des parfums que des pensées. De ce passé au présent il y avait un abîme. Mais l’imagination a le vol de l’ange et de l’éclair ; elle franchit les mers où nous avons failli faire naufrage, les ténèbres où nos illusions se sont perdues, le précipice où notre bonheur s’est englouti. Il songea que toute la première partie de sa vie à lui avait été brisée par une femme ; il pensa avec terreur quelle influence pouvait avoir l’amour sur une organisation si fine et si vigoureuse à la fois.

En se rappelant tout ce qu’il avait souffert, il prévit tout ce que Raoul pouvait souffrir, et l’expression de la tendre et profonde pitié qui passa dans son cœur se répandit dans le regard humide dont il couvrit le jeune homme.94

This subtle lyricism, which seems to be unusual in the narrative world of Dumas (a world made up of battlegrounds, secret passages and sudden riots), opens instead a moment of intimacy that the writer likes and finds congenial, using it with a sort of painful reserve as if it was the truest and most vulnerable part of himself.

As the rifle was promised to little Alexandre when he would be older, the one-shot rifle that his father will not be able to give him, so Athos now, saying goodbye to his son, hands him the family sword, after having received from him the promise of loyalty to the king (another evident projection of the father) in the crypt of Saint-Denis, in front of the tomb of Louis XIII. Is it the same forbidden sword hung on the wall of Athos’s ancient house? Dumas does not say so, as in Mes Mémoires he does not specify if the one-shot rifle is the same rifle hung over the fireplace of Les Fossés’s castle. Nevertheless these objects derive from the other original objects, and they express the same totemic tie of belonging.

In the story of Athos and Raoul the reader finds a crypto-novel of paternity and filiation. Describing feelings of friendship and paternity Dumas demonstrates a tenderness and a quiet and sincere intimacy that are not perceived when he deals with heterosexual love, which always seems excessive and distorted. For Dumas love could find expression just in these two male displays: friendship and fatherhood. When Raoul comes back from the battleground Athos is happy in a way the reader of Les trois mousquetaires could not imagine.

La belle et noble figure du gentilhomme exprimait un indicible bonheur au récit de ces premières émotions si fraîches et si pures ; il aspirait les sons de cette voix juvénile qui se passionnait déjà aux beaux sentiments, comme on fait d’une musique harmonieuse. Il avait oublié ce qu’il y avait de sombre dans le passé, de nuageux dans l’avenir. On eût dit que le retour de cet enfant bien-aimé avait fait de ces craintes mêmes des espérances. Athos était heureux, heureux comme jamais il ne l’avait été.95

94 Ibid., p. 937.
95 Ibid., p. 1099.
French critic Pierre Tranouez has focused on the figure of women in the cycle of *Musketeers*: deceivers, egoists, subjected to a progressive moral and physical decay. An example could be the Duchess of Chevreuse, but also the Queen Anna of Austria herself.  

Only male world seems, in its culminating figures, to reach his positive *entelechy* in the course of Time: the intelligence of d’Artagnan becomes sharper and changes in a stoic good sense without losing quickness and precision, but enriching itself with awareness and patience; Athos becomes nobler and more ascetic; Porthos is bigger and even more titanic, like in the episode of Locmaria’s cave, in which he can be stopped and covered only by a ruin of stones, after having killed dozens of enemy soldiers with a barrel of explosive in order to save his friend Aramis. This last musketeer fascinates Dumas but, in the course of the cycle, his image becomes more and more corrupt: he is a crafty, ambitious and cold planner. Among the musketeers Aramis is the one who is most similar to a woman. His androgynous appearance is linked to a feminine behavior. The reader sees him conjuring, becoming General of Jesuits, saving himself through intrigue from the ambush he provoked and which ruins the unaware and good Porthos.

Unfortunately also Raoul is wounded (as his father was) by the love of that Louise de La Vallière from whom his father tried to keep him away. And it is such a hard wound that the young man meditates an incomprehensible suicide. He joins up the army of an African expedition and throws himself against an enemy platoon. In this moment *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, the third and last act of the trilogy, unleashes a terrible explosion of repressed, self-destructive, Oedipal violence: the son who tries to kill himself, who punishes himself instead of punishing his father, in order to expiate the desire of killing his father, as Freud explains in the essay about Dostoevsky and the problem of parricide. Nevertheless a Freudian interpretation seems not to be totally satisfying because if it...

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96 Only in one moment of the *Bragelonne* does the reader find an image of tranquility linked to a woman. It is Trüchen, Planchet’s lover. Nevertheless it is just an illusion because, further on, Trüchen shows herself as she really is: selfish, greedy, ungrateful. “Cette chambre, doucement éclairée par une lampe placée sur la table, apparaissait au fond du jardin comme une riante image de la tranquillité, de l’aisance et du bonheur. Partout où tombait la paillette de lumière détachée du centre lumineux sur une faïence ancienne, sur un meuble luisant de propreté, sur une arme pendue à la tapisserie, la pure clarté trouvait un pur reflet, et la goutte de feu venait dormir sur la chose agréable à l’œil. Cette lampe, qui éclairait la chambre, tandis que le feuillage des jasmins et des aristoloches tombait de l’encadrement des fenêtres, illuminait splendidement une nappe damassée blanche comme un quartier de neige. Deux couverts étaient mis sur cette nappe. Un vin jauni roulait ses rubis dans le cristal à facettes de la longue bouteille, et un grand pot de faïence bleue, à couvercle d’argent, contenait un cidre écumex. Près de la table, dans un fauteuil à large dossier, dormait une femme de trente ans, au visage épanoui par la santé et la fraîcheur. Et, sur les genoux de cette fraîche créature, un gros chat doux, pelotonnant son corps sur ses pattes pliées, faisait entendre le ronflement caractéristique qui, avec les yeux demi-clos, signifie, dans les mœurs félines : ‘Je suis parfaitement heureux’” (Dumas, “Bragelonne”, II, pp. 584-585).

certainly explains some features and problems (after all Athos is a castrating father, because he wants to keep his son far from his lover, Louise de La Vallière) it does not fully explain the real perception of love that we find in Dumas. In this moment the death of the son is seen as a way to be closer to his father, coming together definitively beyond the tragedy of existence. As it turns out, Athos and Raoul find each other again at the end of the novel.

Athos comprehends with pain his son’s suffering and he is afraid of Raoul’s reactions. He reluctantly allows him to leave.

- Ecoutez-moi encore, monsieur, je vous en supplie. Si je ne pars pas, je mourrai ici de douleur et d’amour. Je sais combien j’ai encore de temps à vivre ici. Renvoyez-moi vite, monsieur, ou vous verrez lâchement expirer sous vos yeux, dans votre maison ; c’est plus fort que ma volonté, c’est plus fort que mes forces ; vous voyez bien que, depuis un mois, j’ai vécu en Afrique ? oh ! dites-le... ne mentez pas.

Raoul pâlit et se tut pendant deux secondes, qui furent pour son père deux heures d’agonie, puis tout à coup :
- Monsieur, dit-il, j’ai promis de me donner à Dieu. En échange de ce sacrifice que je fais de ma jeunesse et de ma liberté, je ne lui demanderai qu’une chose : c’est de me conserver pour vous, parce que vous êtes le seul lien qui m’attache encore à ce monde. Dieu seul peut me donner la force pour ne pas oublier que je vous dois tout, et que rien ne me doit être avant vous.98

In this gesture of giving himself to God we can also read that he is giving himself to his father. The scene of the farewell is a love scene, where father and son, in front of the sea and beneath the moon and the stars (with all the sweetness of Nature that always accompanies paternal actions, as when Athos at the beginning of Le vicomte de Bragelonne recovers the treasure for Charles II Stuart under a quiet and liturgical moonlight), think about the propulsion of the boats, the pressure on the hulls, winds and tempests, in a glorification of life and suffering.

- Dieu a fait tout ce que nous voyons, Raoul ; il nous a faits aussi, pauvres atomes mêlés à ce grand univers ; nous brillons comme ces feux et ces étoiles, nous soupirons comme ces flots, nous souffrons comme ces grands navires qui s’usent à creuser la vague, en obéissant au vent qui les pousse vers un but, comme le souffle de Dieu nous pousse vers un port. Tout aime à vivre, Raoul, et tout est beau dans les choses vivantes.99

In the dialogue between Athos and Raoul, Dumas shows a deep maturity in conceiving affections, in revealing the shades in the relationship a father has with his son and a son with his father. Rarely in literature does one witness such a touching reciprocal confession of love, mistakes and promises. It is painful to compare this literary moment with the memories (which are embryonic literature in themselves) of Mes Mémoires in which little Alexandre could not understand or even conceive an affective necessity fully realized within himself beyond his instinctual attachment to the evanescent father figure. Nevertheless, Alexandre Dumas knows very well the affective battles between fathers and sons.

98 Ibid., III, p. 530.
99 Ibid., III, pp. 581-582.
- Comme d’Artagnan est bon ! interrompit tout de suite Athos, et comme c’est un rare bonheur que de s’être appuyé toute une vie sur un ami comme celui-là ! Voilà ce qui vous a manqué, Raoul.

- Un ami ? s’écria le jeune homme ; j’ai manqué d’un ami, moi !

- M. de Guiche est un charmant compagnon, reprit le comte froidement ; mais je crois qu’au temps où vous vivez, les hommes se préoccupent plus de leurs affaires et de leurs plaisirs que de notre temps. Vous avez cherché la vie isolée ; c’est un bonheur ; mais vous y avez perdu la force. Nous autres quatre, un peu sevrés de ces délicatesses qui font votre joie, nous avons trouvé bien plus de résistance quand paraissait le malheur.

- Je ne vous ai point arrêté, monsieur, pour dire que j’avais un ami, et que cet ami est M. de Guiche. Certes, il est bon et généreux, pourtant, et il m’aime. J’ai vécu sous la tutelle d’une autre amitié, aussi précieuse, aussi forte que celle dont vous parlez, puisque c’est la vôtre.

- Je n’étais pas un ami pour vous, Raoul, dit Athos.

- Eh ! monsieur, pourquoi ?

- Parce que je vous ai donné lieu de croire que la vie n’a qu’une face, parce que, triste et sévère, hélas ! j’ai toujours coupé pour vous, sans le vouloir, mon Dieu ! les bourgeois joyeux qui jaillissent incessamment de l’arbre de la jeunesse ; en un mot, parce que, dans le moment où nous sommes, je me repens de ne pas avoir fait de vous un homme très expansif, très dissipé, très bruyant.

- Je sais pourquoi vous me dites cela, monsieur. Non, vous avez tort, ce n’est pas vous qui m’avez fait ce que je suis ; c’est cet amour qui m’a pris au moment où les enfants n’ont que des inclinations ; c’est la constance naturelle à mon caractère, qui, chez les autres créatures, n’est qu’une habitude. J’ai cru que je serais toujours comme j’étais ; j’ai cru que Dieu m’avait jeté sur une route toute défrichée, toute droite, bordée de fruits et de fleurs. J’avais au-dessus de moi votre vigilance, votre force. Je me suis cru vigilant et fort. Rien ne m’a préparé ; je suis tombé une fois, et cette fois m’a ôté le courage pour toute ma vie. Il est vrai de dire que je m’y suis brisé. Oh ! non, monsieur, vous n’êtes dans mon passé que pour mon bonheur : vous n’êtes dans mon avenir que comme un espoir. Non, je n’ai rien à reprocher à la vie telle que vous me l’avez faite ; je vous bénis et je vous aime ardemment.

- Mon cher Raoul, vos paroles me font du bien. Elles me prouvent que vous agirez un peu pour moi, dans le temps qui va suivre.

- Je n’agirai que pour vous, monsieur.

The culminating point of these promises is a moment of the dialogue when Athos and Raoul have come closest to each other.

- Raoul, ce que je n’ai jamais fait à votre égard, je le ferai désormais. Je serai votre ami, non plus votre père. Nous vivrons en nous répandant, au lieu de vivre en nous tenant prisonniers, lorsque vous serez revenu. Ce sera bientôt, n’est-ce pas ?

- Certes, Monsieur, car une expédition pareille ne saurait être longue.

- Bientôt alors, Raoul, bientôt, au lieu de vivre modiquement sur mon revenu, je vous donnerai le capital de mes terres. Il vous suffira pour vous lancer dans le monde jusqu’à ma mort, et vous me donnerez, je l’espère, avant ce temps, la consolation de ne pas laisser s’éteindre ma race.

- Je ferais tout ce que vous me commanderez, reprit Raoul fort agité.

- Vous rêvez à moi quelquefois, Raoul ?

- Toutes les nuits, monsieur. Pendant ma première jeunesse, je vous voyais en songe, calme et doux, une main étendue sur ma tête, et voilà pourquoi j’ai toujours si bien dormi... autrefois !

- Nous nous aimions trop, dit le comte, pour que, à partir de ce moment où nous nous séparons, une part de nos deux âmes ne voyage pas avec l’un et l’autre de nous et n’habite pas où nous habiterons. Quand vous serez triste, Raoul, je sens que mon cœur se noiera de tristesse, et, quand vous voudrez sourire en pensant à moi, songez bien que vous m’enverrez de là-bas un rayon de votre joie.

- Je ne vous promets pas d’être joyeux, répondit le jeune homme ; mais soyez certain que je ne passerai pas une heure sans songer à vous ; pas une heure, je vous le jure, à moins que je ne sois mort. Athos ne put se contenir plus longtemps ; il entoura de son bras le cou de son fils, et le tint embrassé de toutes les forces de son cœur.

100 Ibid., III, pp. 582-583.
La lune avait fait place au crépuscule ; une bande dorée montait à l’horizon, annonçant l’approche du jour. Athos jeta son manteau sur les épaules de Raoul et l’emmena vers la ville, où fardeaux et porteurs, tout remuait déjà comme une vaste fourmilière.

The promises are kept. Raoul commits suicide throwing himself against a platoon of enemies, and his father Athos, who is dying little by little after the departure of his son, meets Raoul again in a dream, or in a sort of revealing vision (as little Alexandre heard a knock at the door and a breath passing over his face when his father was dying): he dreams of walking in the African battlefield, desperately looking for the dead body of his son among the corpses of the decimated French army. The situation is now turned upside down: Dumas represents not a son who loses his father, but a father who loses his son, as if, in the end, he wanted to experience paternal despair, after having known filial despair. It is now Athos, the father, who feels his son dying and then dies, to join him definitively.

This masochistic fury (in which the reader finds tenderness as well) is revealed at the end of the *Musketeers* cycle and uncovers the terribleness hidden behind that façade of bonhomie, that apparently reassuring good sense of Dumas’s world that the French critic Jean-Yves Tadié points out as a fundamental feature of the writer’s fiction. It is not inappropriate to talk about the actual Dumas’s own paternal trauma, which is continuously reenacted in his novels, through the variations of themes such as paternity and friendship. To confirm the conjunction of these two themes one should reconsider the telling testament of Porthos.

« J’ai vécu sans avoir d’enfants, et il est probable que je n’en aurai pas, ce qui m’est une cuisante douleur. Je me trompe cependant, car j’ai un fils en commun avec mes autres amis : c’est M. Raoul Auguste – Jules de Bragelonne, véritable fils de M. le comte de la Fère. Ce jeune seigneur m’a paru digne de succéder aux trois vaillants gentilshommes dont je suis l’ami et le très humble serviteur. »


At the end of *Le vicomte the Bragelonne* there is the definitive expulsion of Aramis. The effeminate and ambiguous Aramis is the only one who is expelled from the group of friends: the final triumph is just of generosity and strength. The male part wins.

When d’Artagnan dies, at the very end of the novel, Dumas writes:

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101 Ibid., III, pp. 583-585.
102 Ibid., III, p. 793.
103 Ibid., III, p. 776.
Aramis is left as a body without the soul.

In the vicissitudes of the four friends, Dumas develops the theme of Athos’s paternity, who replaces the giant figure of Porthos (who is the closest to the mythicized memories of General Dumas in Mes Mémoires) by presenting a mature and reliable image of a father. Athos accompanies his son, cares for him, helps him to grow up, and fails too, but only because his son is really his own and resembles him, showing the same temperament and the same fragility towards the love of women. Athos gives the symbol of the family line to Raoul: the sword. Athos is regenerated, while General Dumas was not able to be, except in the imagination of his son. Athos is the substitute father, who enacts a significant doubling when he helps the orphan of Charles I Stuart, a situation that did not happen after the death of General Dumas, who did not have such a delegate and instead remained unheard.

In Mes Mémoires the writer offers an enlightening detail: his vocation for drama and literature was born when he saw for the first time a representation of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, adapted to French by Jean François Ducis. And the obsessive presence of the father is certainly explained as Hamlet’s obsession, a desire for revenge fulfilled in the work of art. Doesn’t Hamlet avenge his father during a theatrical representation without being able to accomplish it in reality?105

Dumas recovers a paternal dream in an innocent mythomania of memory, which makes up for a real absence and loss by nourishing literary inventions. This father exists only in the imagery of his son; this father was not so heroic and glamorous, but was probably just a conspirator and a sick man destroyed by a terrible captivity. Napoleon describes him to Doctor Desgenettes neither as proud nor bold after the discovery of the conspiracy but, instead, as timid and crying106. Anyway it is not important to know the actual truth because Dumas has actually kept his promise to his father: he has remained, after all, that toddler who played with the hat and the sword of Napoleonic Generals Murat and Brune, while sitting on his father’s back. Dumas has kept playing with History, linking its events to the imaginary figures of his characters and novels, restlessly looking for History’s invisible (and impossible) affective joints.

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104 Ibid., III, p. 843.
CONCLUSION

At the end of this crossing of Dumas’s memories and novels we should sum up the problems of his fatherly imagination by recalling three essential essays Freud wrote about the problems of literature and creativity: “Delusions and Dreams in Jensen’s Gradiva” (1906-1907), “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” (1907-1908), “Family Romances” (1908-1909). These three essays shed light on what we have pointed out in Dumas’s texts.

In “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” Freud offers an interpretation of creativity by linking it to the sense of “playing”. The poet continues the play of childhood in his work of art (“Should we not look for the first traces of imaginative activity as early as in childhood?”). The poet does the same thing as the child.

He creates a world of phantasy which he takes very seriously – that is, which he invests with large amounts of emotion – while separating it sharply from reality.

The reason for this creativity is essentially found by Freud in the need to make up for the frustrations of reality. When the child grows up he has to stop playing and therefore he has to find a different way to express his phantasy:

Actually we can never give anything up; we only exchange one thing for another. What appears to be a renunciation is really the formation of a substitute or surrogate. In the same way, the growing child, when he stops playing, gives up nothing but the links with real objects; instead of playing, he now phantasies. He builds castles in the air and creates what are called day-dreams.

The same mechanism is enacted by a creative writer (and Freud emphasizes that he is mostly considering the writers who personally invent their stories differently from the ones who take over their material ready-made, like the ancient tragic and epic poets). He deals with “unsatisfied wishes, and every single phantasy is the fulfilment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality”. Freud uses a significant example to clarify the dynamics of the phantasm, an example that is pertinent to our analysis of Dumas’s interior conflict.

A very ordinary example may serve to make what I have said clear. Let us take the case of a poor orphan boy to whom you have given the address of some employer where he may perhaps find a job. On his way there he may indulge in a day-dream appropriate to the situation from which it arises. The content of his phantasy will perhaps be something like this. He is given a job, finds favour with his new employer, makes himself indispensable in the business, is taken into his employer’s family, marries the charming young daughter of the house, and then himself becomes a director of the business, first as his employer’s partner and then as his successor. In this phantasy, the dreamer has regained what he possessed in his happy childhood – the protecting house, the loving parents and the first objects of his affectionate feelings.

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108 Ibid., p. 144.
109 Ibid., p. 145.
110 Ibid., p. 146.
111 Ibid., p. 148.
This brief, simplistic but useful explanation Freud gives of a phantasy shows an interesting coincidence with what we read in Dumas’s *Musketeers* cycle: a tender and protective father who helps his son to grow up, a phantasy that arises from the frustration Dumas experienced with his father’s loss. Then we should also consider another essay titled *Family Romances* (already cited in the introduction) which explains certain mechanisms of the behavior the child has towards his parents.

The child’s most intense and most momentous wish during these early years is to be like his parents (that is, the parent of his own sex) and to be big like his father and mother. 112

That is precisely what happens in *Mes Mémoires* in which the main feature Dumas remembers of his father is his hugeness and his physical strength and might. So we are dealing with a basic instinct of identification. According to Freud, later on the child sees other parents and “compares them with his own, and so acquires the right to doubt the incomparable and unique quality which he had attributed to them” 113. Then Freud goes on developing what is the last stage in the estrangement the child experiences from his parents, which is called “family romance”: the child imagines that he was born from a different and prestigious father, often an aristocrat, always powerful:

At about the period I have mentioned, then, the child’s imagination becomes engaged in the task of getting free from the parents of whom he now has a low opinion and of replacing them by others, who, as a rule, are of higher social standing. 114

This is what does not happen in Dumas, because the father is the same. Still we are in the presence of a “family romance” because Dumas is not replacing his father with another one but nonetheless he is exalting him by following the same psychological process. It is possible that Dumas as a child was so traumatized, seeing his huge and mighty father falling into illness, poverty and death day by day, that he projected onto the image of the lost father the other empowered father of the “family romance”. Freud recognizes that the son does not want to get rid of his real father, because by replacing him he wants to express painfully his “longing for the happy, vanished days when his father seemed to him the noblest and strongest of men […] and his phantasy is no more than the expression of a regret that those happy days have gone”. 115

In conclusion, in Dumas we fully find the “family romance” in the tale of the father of *Mes Mémoires*. Now we should analyze the *Musketeers* cycle, because the discourse is linked to that of *Mes Mémoires* but is different and represents a further evolution and the principal theme of this thesis. So far we have seen a conception of literature based on making up for reality’s frustrations, as Freud shows in “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming”. Nevertheless Freud does not seem to have a coherent conception of literature. Rather in the essay “Delusions and Dreams in Jensen’s *Gradiva*”

113 Ibid., p. 237.
114 Ibid., p. 238.
115 Ibid., p. 241.
he talks about creative writers individuals who are able to discover secrets of the human mind before and more accurately than psychological science:

But creative writers are valuable allies and their evidence is to be prized highly, for they are apt to know a whole host of things between heaven and earth of which our philosophy has not yet let us dream. In their knowledge of the mind they are far in advance of us everyday people, for they draw upon sources which we have not yet opened up for science.116

The power of literature is knowledge. Therefore at the beginning of this essay we essentially find a conception that is different from the one shown in the essay “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming”, in which literature and creative writing are conceived as a way to replace the play of childhood. The perspective in the “Gradiva” essay is different and even richer and more elaborate. Freud wants to say that literary creation knows the mystery of human psychology even when it is unaware of theoretical and scientific discoveries:

Perhaps, too, in most people’s eyes we are doing our author a poor service in declaring his work to be a psychiatric study. An author, we hear them say, should keep out of the way of any contact with psychiatry and should leave the description of pathological states to the doctors. The truth is that no truly creative writer has ever obeyed this injunction. The description of the human mind is indeed the domain which is most his own; he has from time immemorial been the precursor of science, and so too of scientific psychology. [...] Thus the creative writer cannot evade the psychiatrist nor the psychiatrist the creative writer, and the poetic treatment of a psychiatric theme can turn out to be correct without any sacrifice of its beauty.117

It is necessary to summarize the story of Wilhelm Jensen and the scientific value Freud appreciates in it. The story explains the return to reality after a delusion. As Freud writes, recalling the first moment when he knew of the existence of Jensen’s tale:

[T]he story was set in the frame of Pompeii and dealt with a young archaeologist who had surrendered his interest in life in exchange for an interest in the remains of classical antiquity and who was now brought back to real life by a roundabout path which was strange but perfectly logical.118

The archaeologist Norbert Hanold is obsessed by the image of an ancient bas-relief representing a walking woman. He travels to Pompeii because he illogically and randomly thinks that the woman was from Pompeii and, at the end, he realizes that the bas-relief was just his own projection of a real woman he loved and forgot as the effect of a repression. Although the story seems to have little to do with our case, nevertheless it shows the mechanism of the return to reality that seems to give another view of the power of literature. The writer Jensen, without knowing anything about Freud’s theories, gives a precise description of a therapeutic course. Now I would like to propose something which is different in its implications but similar in the value of the knowledge of the mind’s balances and unbalances that Freud assigns to literary creation.

118 Ibid., p. 6.
In conclusion we can say that the tale of *Mes Mémoires* is totally recognizable as a “family romance”, with its tendency towards idealization, empowerment and mystification, and that the fictional literary tale, the creative literary tale (that of the cycle of the *Musketeers*) is instead an attempt to overcome and get over the mystification. We have said that collectively the features of the three musketeers recall the feature of General Dumas, but among the three musketeers Dumas has chosen a reliable father figure, a severe but loving father: Athos. It is as if Dumas wanted to demystify the size and might of Porthos, Herculean like General Dumas, and the effeminacy of Aramis, which is another projection of the effeminacy of the father, with his feminine hands and feet (linked to the disquieting theory of parents combinés, as we tried to show in the introduction). After having demystified them he creates and recovers, through a literary invention, an actual figure of a father, a pure masculinity that faces the masculinity of the son (as in the final dialogue between Athos and Raoul by the sea). The mechanism of compensation is naturally present but, in Dumas’s case, it is a compensation which makes up for a loss while creating a still painful but true and liberating relationship between father and son, especially in the culminating moment of the death of the two. Dumas creates a father with whom the son is free to die (it is tempting to also use Freud’s essay about the choice of the casket: the musketeers are three like the caskets and Athos is the one to be chosen and associated to the idea of Death). Beyond the roles, bounds, conflicts and frustrations of reality they both find themselves again in the absolute love that is hidden behind the curtain of reality’s appearances.


