

# Virgil in the Works of Alexandre Dumas *père*

## An Introduction

*Revised from a paper given to the Virgil Society on 23 February 2008\**

In 1860, as a reward for his contribution to the end of Bourbon rule in the Kingdom of the Two-Sicilies, Alexander Dumas was appointed by Garibaldi Director of Excavations and Museums, and held the post, in the teeth of public opposition, for several months.<sup>1</sup> The fact that Dumas had so impressed on Garibaldi his interest in the excavations as to stimulate the appointment is intriguing. But Dumas was fascinated by Antiquity, and particularly by Rome,<sup>2</sup> and made this fascination part of his public persona:

“Si j’aime la mer comme une maîtresse, j’aime Rome comme une aïeule. Combien de fois ai-je été à Rome? Je n’en sais rien; je ne compte plus ... Oh! ce que je fais à Rome, c’est bien facile à dire: je vais voir la via Appia; je vais regarder couler le Tibre; je vais m’asseoir sous une arcade du Colisée, et je dis à part moi: ‘Il faut pourtant que je fasse une histoire de Rome’. – Pourquoi ne la faites-vous pas, alors?  
– Parce qu’elle serait trop amusante; personne ne la lirait. Vous ne ferez jamais accroire au public qu’Hérodote, Suétone et Walter Scott sont des historiens”.<sup>3</sup>

As the tone of the passage suggests, Dumas understood the dangers of engaging with the ancient world in literature. His own novels and plays about the ancient world were not, on the whole, a contemporary success. The fashion in literature, as Aziza observes, was for the medieval; classical antiquity in literature was too much associated with the

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<sup>1</sup> *Viva Garibaldi! Une Odyssée en 1860*, 443-44; Collet (1994) 139-71; Aziza (2003) 22.

<sup>2</sup> See Aziza (2003) 19-24.

<sup>3</sup> *Viva Garibaldi! Une Odyssée en 1860*, 69-70.

*ancien régime*.<sup>4</sup> Dumas's tragedy *Caligula* (performed at the Théâtre-Français in 1837) gave birth to a new expression on the Boulevards: "Tu me caligules", "You're boring me";<sup>5</sup> and neither *Acté* (1839), set in Neronian Rome, nor *Catilina* (1848), was greeted with enthusiasm.<sup>6</sup> The anticipated "seconde partie" of his *Mémoires d'Horace écrits par lui-même* never appeared,<sup>7</sup> and a publisher only took the risk of printing it as a book almost 150 years after it had first appeared as a feuilleton in *Le Siècle*;<sup>8</sup> *Auguste* (1857) has never been published as a book. Even in the initial notice for the *Mémoires d'Horace*, the editor of *Le Siècle* seems to have anticipated the lukewarm appreciation of his readers and, at the same time as describing it as "une esquisse très piquante et très curieuse", promised them that its publication would be interrupted by the publication of *romans proprement dits*.<sup>9</sup>

Against the background of apparent public indifference, if not hostility, to Dumas's theatrical and novelistic explorations of the ancient world, the constant presence of classical authors, especially Virgil, in his writing is all the more intriguing.

As we would expect, Virgil appears as a character in the *Mémoires d'Horace*, although, regrettably, Dumas does not make him speak. Horace meets Virgil and Varius when they are all three class-mates in the Epicurean school of "Syronus", which Dumas appears to locate in Rome. The difference in age prevents them from becoming friends immediately, but soon Virgil and Varius are close enough to Horace to be part of the party when he assumes the *toga virilis*.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Aziza (1984) 8. He notes as exceptions the success of Bulwer Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) and novels with a biblical or Christian theme (such as Wiseman's *Fabiola* (1854)). On the medieval fashion see also Durand-Le Guern (2003) 26-33, 38.

<sup>5</sup> Aziza (1984) 7.

<sup>6</sup> A modern critical assessment of *Acté* is more generous: Aziza (1984) 8.

<sup>7</sup> It is not clear, however, whether Dumas really intended to write this: "si je donne une seconde partie à ces *Mémoires* ..." (*Mémoires d'Horace*, 356). But see also Fucecchi (2009) 69, n.17.

<sup>8</sup> Between February and July, 1860. It was published in book form in 2006. On the original publication see Fucecchi (2009) 67.

<sup>9</sup> "Nous commençons aujourd'hui la publication d'un nouvel ouvrage de l'auteur de *Monte-Cristo* et des *Mousquetaires*; c'est une esquisse très piquante et très curieuse de la société romaine au temps de l'illustre poète latin, à qui, par une ingénieuse fiction, M. Alexandre Dumas laisse la parole. Comme cet ouvrage tient de l'étude de moeurs autant que du roman, nous le ferons paraître par séries de feuilletons seulement, dans l'intervalle des romans proprement dits que nous continuerons d'offrir régulièrement à nos lecteurs". *Mémoires d'Horace*, 1. Among these "romans proprement dits" was Dumas's own *Le père la Ruine* (Aziza (2006) XIII).

<sup>10</sup> *Mémoires d'Horace*, 93-96.

Dumas devotes several pages of the *Mémoires d'Horace* to a description of Virgil's life and habits;<sup>11</sup> we are therefore able to see that his principal source, directly or indirectly, was the version of Donatus' *Vita Vergilii* which was current in contemporary French editions of the poet.<sup>12</sup> So Virgil's route to favour with Octavian is through a dispute with Bathyllus over the authorship of the couplet *nocte pluit tota, redeunt spectacula mane: / divisum imperium cum Iove Caesar habet*, which he proves by writing *sic vos non vobis*.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, he is in love with Varius' wife, but refuses to allow Varius to divorce her so that he can take her; and he has a delicate physical constitution and chaste habits.<sup>14</sup> Dumas's reliance on the older version of Donatus can also be confirmed from elsewhere in his oeuvre. In *La Dame de Monsoreau*, Henri III illustrates a warning to the Duc d'Anjou with *sic vos non vobis*, helpfully attributing it to Virgil, for the sake of his readers: "Prenez garde, François, ce n'est pas un homme à être victime du *Sic vos non vobis* ... vous connaissez Virgile, *nidificatis, aves*".<sup>15</sup> In 'Ah! Qu'on est fier d'être français', one of his *Causeries*, Dumas refers to the 10,000 sesterces which Octavia is said to have paid Virgil for writing *Tu Marcellus eris*.<sup>16</sup> And in *Paris à Cadix*: "Eh bien! Il a plu toute la nuit: *Nocte pluit tota*, comme dit Virgile".<sup>17</sup>

What is absent from Dumas's projection of Donatus' Virgil, however, is any reference to the rumour *eum libidinis prouioris in pueros fuisse* or to his love for Cebes and Alexander in particular. He gives him Plotia Hieria as his mistress, a rumour which Donatus reports immediately after dealing with the boys: *Vulgatum est, consuevisse eum cum Plotia Hieria*, says Donatus; "ce qu'il y a de certain, c'est qu'il avait pour maîtresse Plotia Hieria", says Dumas-Horace.<sup>18</sup> It appears, therefore, that Dumas thought it best to limit what the readers of *Le Siècle* needed to know. A subsequent description of Virgil was, perhaps, as far as Dumas could safely go:

"Dans une autre époque, cent cinquante ans avant l'ère des Césars, Virgile eût passé pour un homme sensible, pour un voluptueux charmant, peut-être même pour un débauché; mais à la cour d'Auguste, ou plutôt d'Octave, il passait pour un homme rangé".<sup>19</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid* 272-77.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Donatus (1823), the *Vita* included in the Delphin edition of Virgil reprinted at Lyon in 1823. It is worth noting that the editor, Charles de la Rue S.J., was himself sceptical of the value of the *Vita* (see his comment at Donatus (1823) 28). For a modern edition of the *Vita* see Hardie (1957) 2-14. On Dumas's probable sources for the life of Horace, see Fucecchi (2009) 69-71.

<sup>13</sup> *Mémoires d'Horace*, 273-74; Donatus (1823) 24-25.

<sup>14</sup> *Mémoires d'Horace*, 276-77; Donatus (1823) 16.

<sup>15</sup> *Le Dame de Monsoreau* (vol. 2), 110.

<sup>16</sup> *Causeries*, 18-19; Donatus (1823) 20.

<sup>17</sup> *De Paris à Cadix*, 407; Donatus (1823) 24. Cf. *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, 423.

<sup>18</sup> Donatus (1823) 16; *Mémoires d'Horace*, 277.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid* 277.

If we turn to consider the employment of Virgilian quotations or references in Dumas's works, we can discern certain distinct strands.

When he places a quotation in the mouth of one of the characters of his novels, the purpose seems most often to be to provide that character with a source of quasi-proverbial wisdom or reflection. Thus, as we saw above,<sup>20</sup> in *La Dame de Monsoreau* Henri III offers *sic vos non vobis* as a proverb from which his brother can draw a warning. In *Les Louves de Machecoul*,

“Le voyageur regardait avec admiration ces beaux cheveux et ces beaux yeux noirs, ... et cette allure ferme et dégagée qui sembler révéler la déesse. Il murmura avec un sourire, en se rappelant son Virgile, cet homme qui, lui-même, est un sourire de l'antiquité: *Incessu patuit dea!*”<sup>21</sup>

In *Ange Pitou*, Pitou hears the sound of pursuing horsemen:

“Tout à coup, son oreille ... lui transmit le bruit d'un fer de cheval sonnante sur le pavé. Oh! Oh! fit Pitou, scandant le fameux vers de Virgile: *Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum*. Et il regarda. Mais il ne vit rien”.<sup>22</sup>

And in *Le Chevalier d'Harmental*, our hero watches from his window in Paris, as a neighbour tends his roof garden:

“D'Harmental admira l'active industrie du bourgeois de Paris qui parvient à se créer une campagne sur le bord de sa fenêtre, sur le coin d'un toit, et jusque dans le sillon de sa gouttière. Il murmura le fameux vers de Virgile: *O fortunatos nimium*, et puis, la brise étant assez froide ... il referma sa croisée”.<sup>23</sup>

D'Harmental's quotation is not just a passing comment on his neighbour's quasi-rustic beatitude: our hero is getting himself into the deep waters of conspiracy, and is in danger of losing *sua bona* for good.

Even from so small a sample, we can begin to see how Dumas proceeds: the phrases are short and memorable and he identifies their Virgilian provenance to the reader, even when it would be natural not to do so. The same procedure is also generally followed

<sup>20</sup> At n.15 (above).

<sup>21</sup> *Les Louves de Machecoul*, 243. See also at nn. 42-44 below.

<sup>22</sup> *Ange Pitou* (vol.1), 102. Cf. *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, 347: “Plusieurs cavaliers les suivaient avec le bruit si bien imité par les vers cadencés de Virgile”. Elsewhere he introduces a distancing tone of scepticism towards schoolmasters' professional admiration of the line: “C'était le bruit de ce lointain galop d'un cheval si bien imité dans la langue latine, au dire des professeurs, ébahis, depuis deux mille ans, d'admiration devant le vers de Virgile: *Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum*”. (*Le Page du Duc de Savoie* (vol. 2), 66).

<sup>23</sup> *Le Chevalier d'Harmental* (vol. 1), 188.

when he introduces direct Virgilian references as narrator. A poignant (if melodramatic) example can be given from *Le Collier de la Reine*:

“Marie-Antoinette s’approcha vivement d’un miroir: elle éblouissait. Son col fin et souple autant que celui de Jeanne Gray, ce col mignon comme le tube d’un lis, destiné comme la fleur de Virgile à tomber sous le fer, s’élevait gracieusement avec ses boucles dorées et frisées du sein de ce flot lumineux”.<sup>24</sup>

Another example can be found in *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, when d’Artagnan visits the home of the Comte de La Fère (Athos) to see the corpse of his friend, and finds also the corpse of his friend’s son:

“D’Artagnan fut frappé de voir deux cercueils ouverts dans ce salon; il ... vit dans l’un d’eux Athos, beau jusque dans la mort, et, dans l’autre Raoul, les yeux fermés, les joues nacrées comme le Pallas de Virgil”.<sup>25</sup>

The reader who has read the *Aeneid* will feel his pathos for the dead Raoul de Bragelonne intensified by the intertext. But Dumas’s identification of Pallas here as *le Pallas de Virgile* gives his less knowledgeable reader what is required for a superficial appreciation of the comparison: the reader who does not know who Pallas is can pass on, knowing that Dumas has in mind a pale boy or man (and quite probably a dead boy or man) from one of Virgil’s poems.

Not all of Dumas’s Virgilian allusions resonate quite so well. There is a certain boiler-plate element to some of his references and quotations. Coquettish women, for example, are like the Galatea of *Eclogue 3*: “Une petite fille, comme la Galatée de Virgile, ne se cachait que pour être vue” (*Le Caucase*);<sup>26</sup> “Décidément, la Galatée de Virgile, qui fuit vers les saules et qui désire d’être vue avant que d’y arriver, est de tous les pays, même du Maroc” (*Le Véloce*);<sup>27</sup> “Manette [Thierry] ... toujours chantant pour faire entendre sa voix, toujours riant pour montrer ses dents, toujours courant pour laisser voir son pied, sa cheville, ses mollets même; la Galatée de Virgile, qu’elle ne connaissait pas de nom, fuyant pour être poursuivie, se cachant pour être vue avant d’être cachée” (*Mes Mémoires*).<sup>28</sup> The same reference can also be prompted, just as automatically, but

<sup>24</sup> *Le Collier de la Reine* (vol. 6), 123. Cf. the description of Louise de la Vallière’s fainting: “Elle tomba pliée en deux, pareille à cette fleur dont parle Virgile et qu’a touchée le faux du moissonneur”. (*Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, 418).

<sup>25</sup> *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, 799. (A reference to *Aen.*11.39, *caput nivei fulturn Pallantis*).

<sup>26</sup> 58.

<sup>27</sup> 62.

<sup>28</sup> vol. 1, 388.

rather less aptly, by the description of a boy escaping from and then ambushing his pursuing tutor (*Mes Mémoires*).<sup>29</sup>

Other phrases or Virgilian tropes become familiar to Dumas's readers. *O fortunatos nimium*, which we have already seen quoted by the Chevalier d'Harmental, recurs several times.<sup>30</sup> *Facilis descensus Averni* may be used as a teasing warning (as in the conversation between Mlle. de Launay and d'Harmental in *Le Chevalier d'Harmental*),<sup>31</sup> or in a local description in a novel (as in *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*)<sup>32</sup> or in one of Dumas's travel-writings (as in *Le Caucase*).<sup>33</sup> In a conversation, the participants may be said to alternate comme "deux bergers de Virgile" (*Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*);<sup>34</sup> in a naval punishment, "l'exécution commença, les deux aides opérant chacun à leur tour avec la régularité des bergers de Virgile";<sup>35</sup> Virgil's shepherds are even brought to mind by two men pursuing a pig as each tries to catch it ("qui alternaient à sa queue avec une régularité digne des bergers de Virgile").<sup>36</sup> Cups may also recall those "que les bergers de Virgile se disputaient par leurs chants" (*En Suisse*).<sup>37</sup> A woman may look at a man "comme Didon regarda Énée aux Champs Élyséens, farouche et terrible" (*Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*),<sup>38</sup> or "de travers, comme Didon regardait Énée prêt à partir" (*Joseph Balsamo*),<sup>39</sup> or may continue, "comme Didon, à tenir ses yeux fixés sur la terre" (*Olympe de Clèves*).<sup>40</sup> A woman who walks with dignity may recall Venus in *Aeneid* 2: we have already seen one example from *Les Louves de Machecoul*,<sup>41</sup> in the *Mémoires*, Dumas

<sup>29</sup> vol. 5, 402: (of the young Eugène Sue): "Il avait un répétiteur à domicile, le père Delteil ... qui, pour remplir son devoir de répétition, n'hésitait pas à soutenir des luttes corps à corps avec son élève, lequel fuyait dans le jardin, mais fuyait à la manière de la Galatée de Virgile, pour être poursuivi. Une fois dans le jardin, l'écolier rebelle se trouvait à la fois dans un arsenal d'armes défensives et offensives".

<sup>30</sup> The Chevalier d'Harmental at n.23 (above). Cf. also *Ange Pitou* (vol.1), 52: "'Oui, mais vous, monsieur Billot, vous n'êtes pas abbé, vous êtes cultivateur, *agricola*, comme dit Virgile. *O fortunatos nimium* ...'"; and *Les Quarante-cinq* (vol. 3), 135 at n.58 (below).

<sup>31</sup> 90.

<sup>32</sup> 112; cf. *Isaac Laquedem* (vol. 4), 237.

<sup>33</sup> 34.

<sup>34</sup> 25.

<sup>35</sup> *Le Capitaine Pamphile*, 145

<sup>36</sup> *Georges*, 202.

<sup>37</sup> vol. 2, 60.

<sup>38</sup> 39. A man may also be "farouche et terrible" like Dido (*ibid.* 704): "– Je n'avais pas d'armes, murmura [Aramis], farouche et terrible comme l'ombre de Didon".

<sup>39</sup> vol. 3, 262.

<sup>40</sup> vol. 1, 163.

<sup>41</sup> At n.21 above.

recounts how the actress, Mlle. Raucourt, took a liking to Mlle. George Weymer, “en voyant le pas de la déesse se révéler en elle, comme dit Virgile”,<sup>42</sup> Haydée, leaving the court after witnessing the disgrace of the Comte de Morcerf, “sortit de ce pas dont Virgile voyait marcher les déesses” (*Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*);<sup>43</sup> another woman is “celle qui ne m’était apparue qu’un instant et qui, comme la mère d’Énée, m’avait par sa seule démarche révélé sa divinité” (*Les Aventures de John Davys*).<sup>44</sup>

As can be seen in the examples above, it appears that Dumas does not need to identify Aeneas or Dido (unlike the fleeing Galatea) as characters in a poem by Virgil; indeed, as in the final citation above, reference to Aeneas can replace reference to Virgil as a means of identifying the source of Dumas’s comparison. This suggests that Dumas felt he could expect his readers to know who Dido and Aeneas were, at least in the sense of knowing the story and being able to associate them with Virgil.

Elsewhere, Dumas’s use of the name “Virgil” may sometimes be little more than a label, giving distinction by way of circumlocution: Latin thus becomes “la langue de Virgile” (*Isaac Laquedem*).<sup>45</sup> The circumlocution can be padded with names, so that the inclusion of Virgil becomes even less significant, except as a further demonstration of Dumas’s general knowledge of the ancient world: so a visit to Italy is “notre excursion sur la terre de Virgile, d’Horace et de Tacite” (*Le Corricolo*);<sup>46</sup> and Sicily is identified as “le vieux monde d’Horace, de Virgile, d’Ovide et de Théocrite” (*Le Speronare*).<sup>47</sup> In *Le Grand Dictionnaire de Cuisine*, however, Dumas’s use of Virgil’s name seems intended to demonstrate specific knowledge and thus his authority in the field: he points out that Virgil describes garlic as a plant useful to harvesters;<sup>48</sup> he traces the history of the plate by reference to *Aen.* 7.107-17;<sup>49</sup> he informs his readers that Virgil and Horace speak of cheese, but not of butter;<sup>50</sup> and he observes that Virgil and Horace particularly praised wines from Psara in Chios.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>42</sup> *Mes Mémoires* (vol. 2), 210.

<sup>43</sup> 310.

<sup>44</sup> vol. 2, 154.

<sup>45</sup> vol. 1, 22: “se jetant des fadaises dans la langue de Virgile”.

<sup>46</sup> 388.

<sup>47</sup> 259.

<sup>48</sup> *s.v.* “ail”, 21; Virgil, *Ecl.* 2.10-11.

<sup>49</sup> *s.v.* “assiette”, 61.

<sup>50</sup> *s.v.* “beurre”, 90.

<sup>51</sup> *s.v.* “vins”, 690: “les vins de Chio étaient les meilleurs de Grèce; Virgile et Horace les trouvaient excellents, tous deux les ont chantés vantant particulièrement celui du quartier de Psara”.

Dumas's introduction to Virgil is described in his *Mémoires*. After his schoolmaster lost his licence to keep a *pension*, the young Alexandre had lessons at home:

“Labbé Grégoire venait tous les jours, à onze heures du matin; la leçon durait deux heures; j'avais à moi à peu près le reste de la journée, et voici comment:

Mon professeur, pour se donner moins de peine, avait un Virgile et un Tacite avec la traduction en regard. Or, pour ne pas apporter et remporter chaque jour ces deux volumes, il les laissait à la maison, enfermés dans une petite cassette.

Cette petite cassette, il en emportait la clef avec soin; car il savait la tentation grande pour un paresseux comme moi.

Malheureusement, j'avais découvert que la boîte avait des charnières extérieures. A l'aide d'un tourne-vis, j'entre-bâillais les charnières, et, à l'aide de l'entre-bâillement, je tirais, selon mes besoins, ou le chantre d'Énée, ou l'historien des Césars; grâce à qui, aidé de la traduction française, je faisais des versions qui surprenaient mon professeur lui-même”.<sup>52</sup>

Although in the *Mémoires* Dumas remarks that he judged it prudent not to change his tactic for securing good marks in translating Virgil, not least because those good marks meant he could go shooting, he also takes pains to emphasise that his familiarity with the poet was not limited by this. He explains that for his “satisfaction personnelle” he would learn two or three hundred verses of Virgil (by which he seems to mean here the *Aeneid*), and he uses this explanation as the springboard for an account of what Virgil means to him:

“Si mauvais latiniste que je sois, j'ai toujours adoré Virgile: cette compassion des exilés, cette mélancolie de la mort, cette prévoyance du Dieu inconnu qui sont en lui, m'ont dès l'abord souverainement attendri; la mélodie de ses vers, leur facilité à être scandés me charmaient surtout, et parfois me bercent encore dans mes demi-sommeils. J'ai su par cœur des chants entiers de l'*Énéide*, et, aujourd'hui, je crois que je pourrais dire d'un bout à l'autre le récit d'Énée à Didon, quoique je ne sois pas capable de construire une phrase latine sans faire trois ou quatre barbarismes”.<sup>53</sup>

Two themes can be identified in Dumas's description of himself as a reader of Virgil, which demand particular attention. The first is his emphatic claim to familiarity with Virgil (or at least with the *Aeneid*); the second is his careful rejection of any claim to be learned. Critics have recognised the strategies of self-fictionalisation that Dumas

<sup>52</sup> *Mes Mémoires* (vol. 1), 268-69.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* (vol. 1), 317.

employs in his autobiographical writings,<sup>54</sup> and it is important to be alert to them. He wishes to portray himself as educated enough to know and love Virgil – albeit for reasons which are easily explicable and have nothing to do with scholarship; and he does not wish to be thought of as (and could not claim to be) a *savant*. The fact that his *Mémoires* were first published as a serial in *La Presse* and *Le Mousquetaire* provides essential background for understanding Dumas's approach.<sup>55</sup> He was addressing himself to a newspaper audience which had only recently expanded, as a result of a deliberate policy of price-cutting, to include less affluent members of the bourgeoisie and the *franges populaires* dependent on the bourgeoisie,<sup>56</sup> and he seems to be deliberately minimising (but certainly not eradicating) the distance between himself and his average reader.

In 'Ah! Qu'on est fier d'être français', Dumas attributes to Virgil the Horatian line *nil desperandum Teucro duce et auspice Teucro*, and seems also to attribute to him another phrase, *bimarii* (sic) *Corinthi*, from the same Ode.<sup>57</sup> The reader is therefore forced to address the question of how to analyse the implications of Dumas's misquotations. In the case of 'Ah! Qu'on est fier ...' this question is complicated by the fact that the whole essay, an attack on the latinity of the inscription composed by the Institut for Napoleon's column in the Place Vendôme, is (or at least is *probably*) tongue-in-cheek: a slip might therefore be a deliberate subversion of the voice making such an attack; on the other hand, in remembering the line, it is possible he took *Teucro duce* to refer to Aeneas, and was confirmed in his error by the hexameter. Similarly, when in *Les Quarante-Cinq* Henri III attributes a line from the *Georgics* to the *Bucolics* while talking to his fool Chicot, this might be Dumas nodding, or it might deliberately undermine the King's casual claim to learning.<sup>58</sup> It is certainly possible that these misattributions are deliberate. Dumas claims (in the Preface to *Le Capitaine Paul*) that when he was unable to remember whether a particular half-line (*habent sua fata libelli*) was or was

<sup>54</sup> "Si l'on examine attentivement ses ouvrages d'apparence 'autobiographique' ... on remarque que partout il est question d'une 'autofictionalisation du moi' qui lui est propre". (Neř (1997) 12).

<sup>55</sup> *Mes Mémoires* first appeared in *La Presse* between 16<sup>th</sup> December, 1851, and 26<sup>th</sup> October, 1853 and in *Le Mousquetaire* between 12<sup>th</sup> December, 1853, and 21<sup>st</sup> April, 1855. (For the history of their publication, see the introduction by P. Josserand in *Mes Mémoires* (vol. 1), 16-20).

<sup>56</sup> Queffelec (1989) 31-34. On the expansion of the newspaper-reading audience, see also the other literature cited at n.72 (below).

<sup>57</sup> *Causeries*, 19-20. *Nil desperandum Teucro duce et auspice Teucro* and *bimariis Corinthi* are to be found at Hor. *Carm.* 1.7.27 and 1.7.2, respectively.

<sup>58</sup> "– Chicot, nous en revenons à Virgile. – À quel endroit de Virgile? – Aux *Bucoliques*. *O fortunatos nimium!* – Ah! très bien ..." (*Les Quarante-cinq* (vol. 3), 135). Chicot's response is so deliciously laconic as to make it unlikely that he and Dumas have not noticed the King's error.

not Horatian: “chercher dans les cinqs or six mille vers d’Horace, c’était bien long, et je n’ai pas de temps à perdre”.<sup>59</sup> His solution is a letter to Joseph Méry,<sup>60</sup> which yields the response that the phrase is half of a line by Terentianus Maurus. The picture of Dumas thus drawn is of a busy practical man, yet one in touch with the world of scholarship, whose own head contains recondite classical material but not in such a way as to distract him from the occupations of daily life.

The distinction between acceptable learning and scholarly pedantry is found repeatedly in his writing. An excellent example is to be found in *Le Speronare*:

“Je dis Cocalus sur la foi de Diodore de Sicile: entendons-nous bien, car avec les savants ultramontains il faut mettre les points sur les i. Une erreur de date, une faute de typographie, ont de si graves inconvénients dans la patrie de Virgile et de Théocrite, qu’il faut y faire attention. Un pauvre voyageur inoffensif met sans penser à mal un *a* pour un *o* ou un *5* pour un *6*; tout à coup il disparaît, on n’en entend plus parler; la famille s’inquiète, le gouvernement informe, et on le retrouve enseveli sous une masse d’in-folios, comme Tarpeïa sous les boucliers des Sabins. Si on l’en tire vivant, il se sauve à toutes jambes, et on ne l’y reprend plus; mais pour le plus souvent il est mort, à moins que, comme Enclade, il ne soit de force à secouer l’Etna. Je dis Cocalus comme je dirais autre chose, sans la moindre prétension à faire autorité”.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly, after being introduced to Auguste Maquet, the collaborator with whom he later publicly and spectacularly fell out,<sup>62</sup> he wrote that he was “à la fois un esprit sévère et pittoresque dans lequel l’étude des langues antiques a ajouté à la science sans nuire à l’originalité”.<sup>63</sup>

The examination made thus far is perhaps best to be understood in relation to Dumas’s claim to have a vocation as a *vulgarisateur*: “Lamartine est un rêveur, Hugo est un penseur; moi, je suis un vulgarisateur”.<sup>64</sup> The construction of pedantry as an

<sup>59</sup> *Le Capitaine Paul*, I-III.

<sup>60</sup> Identified as “l’antiquité incarnée”. In another letter to Méry, he describes their relationship as being like that of Virgil and Varius: “s’il existe une fraternité littéraire depuis Virgile et Varius, c’est bien la nôtre”. (25<sup>th</sup> January, 1863, quoted in Schopp (1985) 500-01).

<sup>61</sup> *Le Speronare*, 407; Pouget (2003) 386 well sums up the effect of this passage: “il sait tourner en dérision l’érudition excessive”.

<sup>62</sup> On Dumas’s relationship with Maquet see Fillaire (2002). The title of Fillaire’s book is clearly intended to recall that of Mirecourt’s pamphlet.

<sup>63</sup> *De Paris à Cadix*, 19.

<sup>64</sup> *Causerie* in *Le Mousquetaire, journal de M. Alexandre Dumas*, 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1853, 1. Dumas subsequently took up the idea in almost the same words in a famous letter to Napoleon III dated 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1864: “il y a encore trois hommes à la tête de la littérature française: Victor Hugo, Lamartine et moi ... Quoique je sois le moins digne des trois, ils m’ont fait dans les cinq parties du monde, le plus populaire des trois ... parce que l’un est un penseur, l’autre un rêveur, et que je ne suis, moi, qu’un vulgarisateur”. (quoted in Fucecchi (2009) 76).

unacceptable opposition to sensibly calibrated knowledge (especially his own sensibly calibrated knowledge) is, in part, the reaction of the *vulgarisateur* against the tendency of scholarship to hide knowledge from the people. (“Qu’ou me pardonne de dire *Clovis*. Je le disais alors, je le dis encore aujourd’hui mais, de 1833 à 1840, j’ai dit Hlode-wig. Il est vrai que personne ne me comprenait, c’est pour cela que je suis revenu à dire Clovis, comme tout le monde”).<sup>65</sup> But, as Sarah Mombert has argued,<sup>66</sup> it is also both a reaction to criticism of his own learning and a way of negotiating the fact that, by comparison with most of the inhabitants of the French literary world, his education was weak. He certainly realised this, describing at one poignant moment his terror at not knowing when he was thirty things that other men had learned when they were twelve.<sup>67</sup> And notwithstanding the profession he makes in the *Mémoires* of his youthful devotion to Virgil, it is striking that the reading-list drawn up for his improvement as an aspiring writer by Espérance-Hippolyte Lassagne, with whom he shared a room in the Private Office of the Duc d’Orléans when he first arrived in Paris, included Virgil as an author he needed to read.<sup>68</sup>

Dumas’s claim to be a *vulgarisateur* also needs to be seen in the context of the vigorous (indeed, sometimes brutal) nineteenth-century French debate which set “proper” books against “la littérature industrielle”,<sup>69</sup> or as one trenchant critic of Dumas put it, his “fabrique de romans”.<sup>70</sup> Although this is not the place to examine the development of literature and reading in nineteenth-century France,<sup>71</sup> two points are particularly significant here. First, as we have already noted, there was a revolutionary expansion in the reading public created by the foundation of newspapers which depended not principally on income from subscriptions, but on income from advertising, and which attracted that advertising by employing writers such as Dumas to write serialised

<sup>65</sup> *Mes Mémoires* (vol. 5), 100.

<sup>66</sup> Mombert (2003) 600: “La vocation de vulgarisateur de Dumas naît de l’expérience traumatisante de sa propre ignorance ... La faiblesse de son instruction, à une époque où les hommes de lettres sont encore massivement formés aux humanités, lui sera constamment reprochée”.

<sup>67</sup> *Mes Mémoires* (vol. 5), 103-04

<sup>68</sup> *Mes Mémoires* (vol. 2), 160. See also Schopp (1985) 68.

<sup>69</sup> Key texts in the early phase of this debate are reprinted in Dumasy (1999a), including Sainte-Beuve’s essay, ‘De la littérature industrielle’ (Sainte-Beuve (1999)). See also Mombert (2003) 590-93.

<sup>70</sup> Mirecourt (1845); cf. Nettement (1846) 305-07: “Les uns veulent que M. Alexandre Dumas ait, dans quelque quartier reculé, une manufacture littéraire où des manœuvres sont employés à équarrir des sujets ... En tout cas ... il met, pour parler la langue du commerce, sa marque sur les produits de ses manufactures”.

<sup>71</sup> Lyons (2001) is a convenient starting-point for this.

novels.<sup>72</sup> Secondly, we should take note of the opposition constructed by the enemies of “industrial literature” between literature which educated its readers and the *romans-feuilleton* which depraved them.<sup>73</sup> A barb aimed at Dumas himself, both as dramatist and novelist, by the Baron de Chapuys-Montlaville in the *Chambre des députés* in 1847 gives the flavour:<sup>74</sup>

“Nous sommes en proie, à cette heure, à une bande noire ... qui démolit à son tour les grands monuments de notre histoire, ne respectant rien, ni les traditions nationales, ni la vérité historique; et à ce propos j’adresserai un reproche sérieux à M. le ministre de l’Intérieur ... pour avoir permis aux feuilletonistes de faire parader sur les tréteaux les personnages menteurs de leurs prétendus romans d’histoire”.

The eulogy in the *Mémoires* reveals some of the qualities Dumas professed to find in Virgil’s poetry, seen from his personal perspective as a reader; elsewhere we find him addressing Virgil the poet more obviously from the standpoint of a narrator of historical fiction and *vulgarisateur*. In *Isaac Laquedem* he purports to set Virgil in the context of the readers for whom he claims Virgil originally wrote:

“... à ces jeunes gens aux têtes légères, à ces femmes aux coeurs frêlates, à ces fils de familles qui laissent leur santé dans les lupanars et leurs bourses dans les tavernes ... C’est pour ces jeunes gens, pour ces femmes, pour ces fils de famille, pour ce peuple que Virgile, le doux cygne mantouan, le poète chrétien de cœur, sinon d’éducation, chante le bonheur champêtre, maudit l’ambition républicaine, flétrit l’impiété des guerres civiles, et prépare le plus beau et le plus grand poème qui aura été fait depuis Homère, et qu’il brûlera, le trouvant indigne, non-seulement de la postérité, mais encore de ces contemporains!”<sup>75</sup>

The absence of adult men as a separate class among Virgil’s given readers is striking, and the similarity of Virgil’s audience, young people, women, *filis de famille*,

<sup>72</sup> See Queffélec (1989) 4-56, de la Motte (2000) 340-346, Lyons (2001) 10-11. The first newspapers to be operated on this basis were *Le Siècle* and *La Presse*, both founded on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1836. In 1844 one critic wrote: “Aujourd’hui, le nombre des lecteurs s’est démesurément augmenté. Tout le monde lit et veut lire beaucoup ... et, en tout cas, nous sommes persuadés que si l’envie nous prenait de descendre dans l’échoppe du dernier artisan parisien pour y raisonner sur *Le Juif errant*, nous trouverions à qui parler”. (Gobineau (1999) 88). *Le Juif errant*, a *roman-feuilleton* by Eugène Sue, appeared in *Le Constitutionnel* in 1844.

<sup>73</sup> Queffélec (1989) 35 on the speeches of the Baron de Chapuys-Montlaville in the *Chambre des députés* in the 1840’s; see de Chapuys-Montlaville (1999a), (1999b), (1999c) for the speeches themselves; and Desnoyers (1999) 121-56 for a journalist’s reply in *Le Siècle*.

<sup>74</sup> de Chapuys-Montlaville (1999c) 110. Reference shortly afterwards to the *Théâtre-Historique*, which Dumas opened in February 1847, makes it clear that Dumas is the particular target here, as Dumasy (1999a) 110, n.5 points out.

<sup>75</sup> *Isaac Laquedem* (vol.1), 34-35.

to contemporary constructions of the readership of the *roman-feuilleton* is surely not accidental.<sup>76</sup> Nor is the conclusion that Virgil was writing for the people, just as Dumas claimed that the *roman-feuilleton* as a genre, which he also claimed to have invented,<sup>77</sup> “apprenait l’histoire aux historiens et au peuple”.<sup>78</sup> This portrait of Virgil’s audience, drawn in such a way as to make it like contemporary views of the typical audience of the novel in which it appears, seems to be an attempt by Dumas to assimilate the two audiences, and may be seen as a claim to be performing the same role in French society as Virgil performed in his own. Virgil speaks to the people through his writing and teaches them; so does Dumas. Dumas appears, therefore, to be appropriating Virgil as an ally in the contest over the moral and educational value of his own work.

Previously Dumas had offered what seems to be a commentary of contrast between himself and Virgil. In *Le Corricolo*, a narrative of his travels in the Bay of Naples published ten years before *Isaac Laquedem*, Dumas used the excuse of a visit to Virgil’s Tomb to meditate on the changing nature of Virgil’s poems, taking as his theme the idea that “la littérature n’est jamais l’expression de l’époque, mais tout au contraire, et si l’on peut se servir de ce mot, sa palinodie”.<sup>79</sup> Thus

“après cette suprême bataille de Philippes, où le génie républicain vient de succomber sous le géant impérial; après cette lutte ... qui a ébranlé le monde, que fait Virgile? Il polit sa première églogue. Quelle grande pensée le poursuit dans ce grand bouleversement? Celle de pauvres bergers qui ... sont obligés de quitter leur doux champs et leur belle patrie. ... Peut-être les grands événements qui vont se succéder vont-ils arracher le poète à ses préoccupations bocagères. Voici venir Actium; voici l’orient qui se soulève une fois encore contre l’occident ... que fait Virgile, que fait l’ami du vainqueur, que fait le prince des poètes latins? Il chante le pasteur Aristée, il chante les abeilles perdues, il chante une mère consolant son

<sup>76</sup> See the summary in Dumasy (1999b) 19: “La figure du lecteur de roman-feuilleton dessinée par ses détracteurs est essentiellement féminine, enfantine (voir le *topos* du peuple-enfant) et en position de dépendance ... Elle se définit par la passivité, l’absence de jugement politique, esthétique et même plus souvent moral, l’attrait pour la jouissance immédiate, la passivité. Par opposition se dessine la figure du sujet politique: homme, adulte, cultivé”. On women as holders of “une place de choix parmi les lecteurs des textes de vulgarisation”, see Mombert (2003) 603, and Lyons (2001) 81-85 (quoting, *inter alia*, comments by Stendhal on novel-reading as the great preoccupation of French provincial women).

<sup>77</sup> *Le Capitaine Paul*, xxxvi: “Cependant, vers 1835, je crois, *La Presse* s’était fondée, et j’y avais inventé le *roman-feuilleton*”. (*La Presse* was in fact founded in 1836: see n.72 above).

<sup>78</sup> *La Comtesse de Charny* (vol.1), 11: “il est vrai que cela apprenait l’histoire aux historiens et au peuple, il est vrai que cela créait quatre millions de lecteurs à la France et cinquante millions de lecteurs à l’étranger”.

<sup>79</sup> *Le Corricolo*, 316.

fil de ce que ses ruches sont désertes, et n'ayant rien de plus à demander à Apollon, comment avec le sang d'un taureau on peut faire de nouveaux essais. ... Mais aussi que César ferme le temple de Janus, qu'Auguste pour la seconde fois rendu la paix au monde, alors Virgile devient belliqueux".<sup>80</sup>

Even if the context of Dumas's remarks is the way in which literature offers its contemporary readers aesthetic refreshment from the experiences of their lives, it is difficult not to hear a criticism, albeit muted, of what he appears to see as Virgil's failure to engage with the events which were shaking the Roman world when he was writing. Whereas in the previous passage, Virgil and Dumas shared the same vocation as educators, here Dumas seems to contrast the political engagement that marked his own life with what he sees as the poet's quietism.

Alfred Nettement remarked in 1846, "M. Alexandre Dumas oppose à la critique un obstacle qu'il n'est pas facile de surmonter; c'est la fécondité redoutable d'un talent qui permet, en ce moment, au *Siècle*, de promettre au public ses œuvres en deux cents volumes".<sup>81</sup> Without wanting to adopt the rest of Nettement's views, it must be admitted that the critic quails before the vastness of Dumas's output. It is for that reason that I have subtitled this paper "An Introduction". Some attempt should nonetheless be made to draw conclusions, understood as provisional.

While we should acknowledge the self-creation of his autobiographical works and references, Dumas allows himself to project a particular anxiety about his own education and therefore also about his own suitability for a conventional literary career. The validity of that anxiety is borne out to some degree by the attacks of his critics on an "érudition vulgaire que l'on peut acquérir en quelques heures, mais qui impose cependant à la foule".<sup>82</sup> The creation of the *roman-feuilleton* and the discovery of his vocation as a *vulgarisateur* permit him to address an audience which can be impressed by his demonstrations of his knowledge of Virgil; and those same demonstrations themselves warrant his authority as an educator.

Dumas claimed to have created four million readers in France; one measure of his popularity is that his works were cited in 23 out of 30 responses by prefects to a Ministry of Education questionnaire circulated in June 1866 to discover books which were popular

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<sup>80</sup> *Le Corricolo*, 317-18.

<sup>81</sup> Nettement (1846) 305. Returning to the theme later he remarks (1846, 307): "On analyse un roman, trois romans, six romans, mais comment s'y prendre pour analyser une bibliothèque?"

<sup>82</sup> Nettement (1846) 310.

among rural readers;<sup>83</sup> within two months of its foundation *Le Mousquetaire*, journal de M. Alexandre Dumas had 4,000 subscribers and was selling 6,000 copies in Paris alone;<sup>84</sup> and in the winter of 1897 more than 12 percent of readers asked for something by Dumas at the municipal library in Lyons.<sup>85</sup> To the extent that women had a particular place in his audience,<sup>86</sup> it should also be borne in mind that they had practically no access to classical education in nineteenth-century France.<sup>87</sup> It is significant, therefore, that in the works so far surveyed the speakers of Virgil in Dumas (and I include Dumas himself whether as narrator or protagonist) are, with the exception of Mlle. de Launay in *Le Chevalier d'Harmental*, men. What is more, Dumas draws attention to the exception by having d'Harmental himself express his surprise at Mlle. de Launay's ability to cite Virgil and by having her identified by another character as "notre savante".<sup>88</sup> The ability to quote easily from Virgil is to be seen as a badge not only of the authority of learning but particularly of the authority of masculine learning.<sup>89</sup>

There is no reason to doubt that Dumas loved Virgil's poetry; but no less significant is the authority that demonstrations of familiarity with the ancient poet conferred on him as a writer. His techniques of quotation from and reference to Virgil are deliberately not off-putting, and the quotations and references themselves are a badge of a learning which, while decent and unpretentious, nonetheless confirms his right to educate a popular audience while entertaining them.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Lyons (2001) 144-49, 164-65. *Robinson Crusoe* (28 mentions), the *Fables* of La Fontaine (24 mentions), and Loudun's *Victoires de l'Empire* (also 24 mentions) were ahead of him.

<sup>84</sup> Audebrand (2002) 116.

<sup>85</sup> 338 readers of 2757: Mombert (2003) 590, citing the figures from Louis Maigron, *Le Roman historique à l'époque romantique. Essai sur l'influence de Walter Scott*, 1898, Paris, 382.

<sup>86</sup> See n.76 (above).

<sup>87</sup> De Bellaigue (2007) 192 surveys the curriculum offered in 113 private girls' schools in France between 1800 and 1880, and finds that none of them offered either Latin or Greek.

<sup>88</sup> *Le Chevalier d'Harmental*, 74.

<sup>89</sup> Mombert (2003) 603 suggests that female readers of the *roman-feuilleton* should be understood as "prêtes à accepter la domination de l'homme qui sait".

<sup>90</sup> On Dumas's attempt to reconcile "les fonctions antagonistes de plaire et d'instruire" see Mombert (2003) 593.

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