

University of Massachusetts Boston

ScholarWorks at UMass Boston

Classics Faculty Publication Series

Classics

January 1988

Classical Allusion in the Count of Monte Cristo

Emily A. McDermott

University of Massachusetts Boston, emily.mcdermott@umb.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umb.edu/classics_faculty_pubs



Part of the [Classics Commons](#), and the [French and Francophone Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McDermott, Emily A., "Classical Allusion in the Count of Monte Cristo" (1988). *Classics Faculty Publication Series*. 10.

https://scholarworks.umb.edu/classics_faculty_pubs/10

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Classics at ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in Classics Faculty Publication Series by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact scholarworks@umb.edu.

CLASSICAL ALLUSION IN
THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO

EMILY A. McDERMOTT

THE PAGES OF *The Count of Monte Cristo* are dotted with classical allusions, little markers of the regimen of voracious reading which the previously little-lettered Dumas had undertaken at the onset of his literary career. To cite only a sample of close to a hundred such allusions, reference is made at one time or another in the novel to aspects of Plutarch (97), Martial (398), Pliny (404, 779), Caesar (475, 509), Cornelius Nepos (652-653), Ennius (954), and Pindar (625).¹ Gods, mythological figures, and figures from history or historical legend abound, from Jupiter (351, 601, 1309) to Hebe (351), from Tantalus (146), Icarus (355), and Omphale (1181) to Curtius (369), Nero (139, 778, 1198, 1388), and Poppaea (509). Ships, horses, and characters are graced with Greek and Latin names: Pharaon, Eurus, Médéah, Haydée, Coclès. In the scene in which Dantès first uncovers his treasure on the Isle of Monte Cristo, the hero is compared serially to Hercules, Sisyphus (who, ironically or not, in *The Count of Monte Cristo* is pushing his rock down), and a Titan (251-252); the Isle itself is styled "cet autre Pélion" (242). The briefly mentioned Hellenophobia of Albert de Morcerf (948) is well overbalanced by the classicophilia of Louis XVIII, who, in a scene of delicious parody (94f.), scribbles cribbed notes in his text of Horace and answers his advisors of state with gnomic pronouncements drawn from Vergil and Horace. In fact, a less hardy critic than the present one might well have been abashed to undertake a study of Dumas's use of classical allusion after reading the cutting description of the king as litterateur:

"Attendez, mon cher, attendez, je tiens une note très heureuse sur le *Pastor quum traheret*; attendez, et vous continuerez après."

Il se fit un instant de silence, pendant lequel Louis XVIII inscrivit, d'une écriture qu'il faisait aussi menue que possible, une nouvelle note en marge de son Horace; puis, cette note inscrite:

¹ Page references are cited from Alexandre Dumas, *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*, ed. Gilbert Sigaux (Paris: Gallimard, 1981).

"Continuez, mon cher duc," dit-il en se relevant de l'air satisfait d'un homme qui croit avoir eu une idée lorsqu'il a commenté l'idée d'un autre. "Continuez, je vous écoute."

(96)

All the examples of classical allusions or groups of allusions cited thus far are, in a sense, casual; that is, they are self-contained and fall into no pattern. While their identification serves as a gloss on the author's erudition and, perhaps even more, on the educational and literary prescriptions of the times, it provides no particular insight into Dumas's artistry. On the other hand, an early reference to a Roman hero provides more meat for analysis. The epithet "Brutus" is applied to Villefort when he returns to his betrothal dinner after treacherously committing Edmond Dantès to the Château d'If: "Eh bien! trancheur de têtes, soutien de l'État, Brutus royaliste!" s'écria l'un, 'qu'y a-t-il? voyons!' " (88). While more than one Brutus might merit the title "soutien de l'État," the conjunction of the name with the earlier epithet "trancheur de têtes" makes it clear that the reference is to the traditional story (Liv. 2.5) of Lucius Junius Brutus, who as consul meted out a sentence of death by beheading to his own two seditious sons.² The reference may thus be seen to contain—even more than the evident ironic comment by the author on Villefort's unjust treatment of Dantès—a neat prefiguring of the events at the end of the novel, when an agonized Villefort will be compelled to "sentence" his wife (and, through her, unwittingly, his son) to execution for her crimes. The chapter in which he ponders her punishment in fact picks up the beheading image of this early allusion to Brutus, as discussed below.

On the other hand, this critic at least has been at a loss to discover any meaningful connection between this first reference to Brutus in the novel and three which follow. In the next reference, Dantès himself, when he first arrives at the Isle of Monte Cristo, is likened to the same Lucius Brutus, who was said by the Romans to have become leader of Rome through his successful interpretation of a riddling oracle which bade him to kiss his mother (Liv. 1.56): "Dantès, malgré son empire ordinaire sur lui-même, ne put se contenir: il sauta le premier sur le rivage; s'il l'eût osé, comme Brutus, il eût baisé la terre" (242). Toward the end of the novel, the Count in turn likens himself to the Late Republican Marcus Brutus (like Lucius called by Dumas simply by his cognomen, "Brutus"): like Brutus before Philippi, he says, he too—on the eve of his duel with Albert—has seen a "fantôme," in the form of Mercédès (1111). In a fourth locus, Albert likens the Count of Monte Cristo ambiguously to one of these two Brutuses, saying: "Je pense que c'est un homme charmant, qui fait à merveille les honneurs de chez lui, qui a beaucoup vu, beaucoup étudié, beaucoup réfléchi, qui est, comme Brutus, de l'école stoïque, et... qui

² The collocation in this description of the epithets "Brutus" and "royaliste" constitutes an oxymoron, for the prime characteristic of Brutus the tyrannicide (as of his late Republican counterpart) was his anti-royalist adherence to the Roman Republican cause. Villefort is thus styled a Brutus who has gone over to the other side.

par-dessus tout cela possède d'excellents cigares" (429-430). One may wonder if the incongruity of the collocation of Stoic philosophy with hedonistic pleasure in the honors of the table and fine cigars may be taken as an index of Albert's self-noted failure to profit by his classical education. But these three later recurrences of reference to the Roman hero appear to be simply separate casual allusions, somewhat awkward in the aimless repetition of allusion to the same historical name.

In three other cases, however, I suggest that classical references by Dumas are more complex and, once fully appreciated, add wit, texture, and depth to his narrative.

The fifty-first chapter of *The Count of Monte Cristo* appears under the heading "Pyrame et Thisbé." The story begun therein, that of the courtship of Maximilien and Valentine through a garden gate, is thus obviously glossed by the tale told by Ovid (*Met.* 4.55f.) of young lovers whose only avenue of communication is a chink in the wall that separates their yards. But while the chapter heading itself is the only explicit reference in the novel to Ovid's star-crossed lovers, one and perhaps two elements of the diction of Dumas's narrative implicitly reinforce the identification of the two pairs of lovers. Twice Dumas attributes to Maximilien a heightened perceptivity occasioned by love: at one point in the narrative, Maximilien comprehends the cause of a delay in his assignation with Valentine "avec cette rapidité d'intuition particulière aux amants" (716); later, "avec cet instinct particulier aux amants" (877), he knows instantly that the death of Valentine's maternal grandfather bodes ill for their relationship. While such references to a lover's instinctive perceptivity may be too commonplace to have any special significance, it is at least conceivable that there is a specific echo here of Ovid's parenthetical exclamation concerning the perspicacity of lovers: "quid non sentit amor?" (4.68).

There is a clearer and more intricate relation between Ovid's and Dumas's narratives in the incident in which Valentine gives her little finger to Maximilien to kiss (727f.). The crack in Pyramus and Thisbe's wall is so small that it affords a path for speech alone: "vocis fecistis iter" (4.69), says Ovid in an apostrophe to the lovers; and again, "inque vices fuerat captatus anhelitus oris" (4.72). Fate, in the form of Dumas, has provided Maximilien and Valentine with a larger opening through which to communicate. Yet, when Maximilien requests that Valentine extend her little finger through the grating for a kiss, she responds, somewhat scandalized: "Maximilien, nous avions dit que nous serions l'un pour l'autre deux voix, deux ombres!" (727). It is as if she rebuked him for asking for more than their prototypes received—as if she had said, "Maximilien, we said we would be to each other as Pyramus and Thisbe, two voices only." But Maximilien is hurt at her refusal, and she relents. This ability to touch lips to little finger constitutes a clever "improvement" by Dumas on Pyramus and Thisbe's situation. In Ovid's narrative, the lovers berate the wall:

invide dicebant paries, quid amantibus obstas?
 quantum erat, ut sineres toto nos corpore iungi,
 aut, hoc si nimium est, vel *ad oscula danda* pateres?
 (*Met.* 4.73-75, emphasis mine)

What Pyramus and Thisbe ask of the wall in their contrary-to-fact wish, Dumas has wittily granted to Maximilien and Valentine. Their wall lies open for the giving of kisses.³

The identification of the pairs of lovers, Pyramus/Thisbe and Maximilien/Valentine, has a pervasive effect on the reader's experience of the events of the novel. The ancient lovers' story ends tragically. Thisbe, arriving first at their midnight assignation, is frightened by a mountain lion into hiding in a cave; in her haste she drops her shawl, which the lion tears with its bloodied jaws before retreating into the forest. When Pyramus arrives, he is deluded by this token into believing Thisbe dead. In sorrow and remorse at his late arrival he kills himself. Thisbe, upon finding him dying, in turn takes her own life. This succession of story elements—a false death followed by serial suicide, is reinforced by the more familiar Shakespearean version of the story.

The classically astute reader of Dumas's work, then, having been alerted by the chapter-heading, would be led to fear that the parallelism between the affairs would extend beyond the lovers' mode of communication and end with tragic death for both Maximilien and Valentine. When the Count of Monte Cristo stages Valentine's death and burial to ward off further attempts at her poisoning, her fictive death presents the reader with one more realized element in the foreshadowed correspondence between the romances; all that is wanted to complete the equation is Maximilien's suicide from grief at a death he believes to be real and, finally, Valentine's suicide to join him. Dumas's repeated allusion to Maximilien's suicidal intent purposefully heightens the tension which thus affects the reader. This tension reaches a climax when Mme. de Villefort's suicide unexpectedly results as well in the unwarranted death of little Édouard. The Count's shattered reaction to Édouard's murder, his realization that the events he has so carefully put into motion now have momentum of their own and can escape his control, make one fear all the more that the foreshadowed tragic ending may fall on Maximilien and Valentine despite the Count's "controlling" hand and will. When the Count returns home directly after Édouard's death and his own frantic attempt to revive the boy,

³ Somewhat perplexingly, this incident is preceded by an assignation between Maximilien and Valentine in which they exchange a kiss on the hand without any of the fanfare that accompanies this one: "J'ai été rivé à ma parole *comme un chevalier des temps passés*." (Emphasis mine: could this comparison point back to Pyramus?) "C'est vrai," dit Valentine, en passant entre deux planches le bout d'un de ses doigts effilés sur lequel Maximilien posa ses lèvres" (641).

The anomaly of Valentine's making an issue on page 727 of Maximilien's request for a hand to kiss when on page 641 she had so readily offered one serves essentially to signal the reader that some special significance is attached to the latter scene.

he meets Maximilien, "qui errait dans l'hôtel des Champs-Élysées, silencieux comme une ombre qui attend le moment fixé par Dieu pour rentrer dans son tombeau" (1329).⁴ Maximilien quickly makes it clear that the only obstacles between him and his longed-for release are the pledges he has made to the Count to meet certain conditions before he may indulge his suicidal desires. The reader who may have found the Count's timing recklessly close in averting Maximilien's father's suicide years before, who has since witnessed Édouard's unplanned death, and who has as well appreciated the ominous foreshadowing contained in the *Pyramus and Thisbe* parallel may be pardoned if his faith in the Count's ability to assure a happy ending for his protégés falters, at least temporarily.

In fact, Maximilien and Valentine's love story is destined to end happily. But until that happy ending has finally been achieved, the parallelism between the present lovers and Ovid's earlier ones (like Shakespeare's) has served to accentuate the reader's tense uncertainty of the outcome to be presented by the author and so to color his or her judgment of the righteousness of the Count's vengeful course of action.

A second significant classical allusion introduces a pattern of imagery woven into the chapter headed "Le Juge," in which M. de Villefort arrives at his resolution to exact from his wife full penalty for her crimes. Villefort's painful deliberations are characterized by Dumas as follows:

c'était dans un moment où le magistrat, harassé de fatigue, était descendu dans le jardin de son hôtel, et sombre, courbé sous une implacable pensée, pareil à Tarquin abattant avec sa badine les têtes des pavots les plus élevés, M. de Villefort abattait avec sa canne les longues et mourantes tiges des roses trémières qui se dressaient le long des allées comme les spectres de ces fleurs si brillantes dans la saison qui venait de s'écouler.

(1295)

We have already recognized from Dumas's references (previously discussed) to Lucius Brutus that the author was familiar with the first books of Livy. In this passage, when Villefort slashes at flowers while steeling himself to bring his wife to justice, he is significantly compared to Tarquinius Superbus, who in Livy's narration (in turn derived from Herodotus 5.92.6)⁵ sends a covertly murderous response to his son Sextus' inquiry concerning the next step in the campaign against a foe:

⁴ The comparison of Maximilien here to an "ombre" (a "shade" even before death) constitute an ironic reference back to Valentine's statement (quoted above) that she and Maximilien had promised to be but two shadows ("ombres") to one another: since even their ghostly form of communication has been removed by her death (so Maximilien thinks), he has no choice but to join her in death as a literal ghost.

⁵ The story is briefly retold by Ovid (*Fast.* 2.701-710).

nihil voce responsum est; rex velut deliberandus in hortum aedium transit sequente nuntio filii; ibi inambulans tacitus summa papaverum capita dicitur baculo decussisse.

(Liv. 1.54)

The messenger cannot figure out why Tarquin will speak no word of answer to him; but when he reports Tarquin's actions and inexplicable silence to Sextus, Sextus immediately understands that his father's symbolic answer was that he should eradicate the enemy forthwith. The parallels between the two passages are patent: a sentence of death is decided after the judge has "descendu dans le jardin" (cf. "in hortum aedium transit"); there, "courbé sous une implacable pensée" (cf. "tacitus"), he beheads flowers in a manner which betokens the summary judgment soon to fall upon his victims.

The metaphorical identification between Villefort's role as judge and the motif of cutting or slashing is continued in two further passages within the same chapter. When Villefort awakes the morning after the flower-decapitation incident (recall his address as "trancheur de têtes" on page 88), even the phenomena of morning meteorology suggest the necessity for his following through in fact on the course of action symbolized by his actions the day before in the garden:⁶

Il ouvrit sa fenêtre: une grande bande orangée traversait au loin le ciel et coupait en deux les minces peupliers qui se profilaient en noir sur l'horizon....

L'air humide de l'aube inonda la tête de Villefort et rafraîchit sa mémoire.

"Ce sera pour aujourd'hui, dit-il avec effort; aujourd'hui l'homme qui va tenir le glaive de la justice doit frapper partout où sont les coupables."

(1297; emphasis mine)

And, finally, as Villefort prepares to deliver to his wife the ultimatum that she must commit suicide or face public trial and execution, the same motif infects the father's last meeting with his son, whom Mme. de Villefort will include, Medea-like, in her suicide. Villefort bids his son leave the adults alone:

Édouard avait levé la tête, avait regardé sa mère; puis, voyant qu'elle ne confirmait point l'ordre de M. de Villefort, il s'était remis à couper la tête à ses soldats de plomb.

(1300)

It is not necessary to strain to explain the transfer of the decapitator image from Villefort to his son: we may simply note that the very presence of this third repetition of cutting/beheading imagery contributes to and continues the

⁶ A parallel sympathetic identification between characters and their environment occurs at the highly dramatic moment when Villefort is reciting to Mme. Danglars his vain attempt to find and unearth the casket containing the bones of their illegitimate infant son: "Novembre finissait, toute la verdure du jardin avait disparu, les arbres n'étaient plus que des squelettes aux longs bras décharnés et les feuilles mortes criaient avec le sable sous mes pas" (825, emphasis mine).

grimly foreboding atmosphere surrounding the events which will lead to Villefort's family ruin.⁷ And, while the recurrent imagery itself might be noticeable without appreciation of the allusion to Livy, it is only in light of the Tarquin parallel that its import may be fully felt.

The final classical allusion to be discussed here occurs early in the novel, at the point when Mercédès approaches Villefort seeking news following Dantès's arrest. Discomfited by Mercédès's dignity and (we may infer) by his own awareness of wrong-doing, Villefort falls prey to a sense of role reversal: "il lui sembla que c'était lui l'accusé, et que c'était elle le juge" (91). He responds brusquely and disengages himself:

Et, gêné par ce regard fin et cette suppliante attitude, il repoussa Mercédès et rentra, refermant vivement la porte, comme pour laisser dehors cette douleur qu'on lui apportait.

Mais la douleur ne se laisse pas repousser ainsi. Comme le trait mortel dont parle Virgile, l'homme blessé l'emporte avec lui. Villefort rentra, referma la porte, mais arrivé dans son salon les jambes lui manquèrent à son tour; il poussa un soupir qui ressemblait à un sanglot, et se laissa tomber dans un fauteuil. (91)

"Comme le trait mortel dont parle Virgile, l'homme blessé l'emporte avec lui." What is the point of the comparison of a guilt-ridden Villefort to a wounded character in the *Aeneid*? The evident point of reference is that "douleur" follows its object behind closed doors as if it were a physical weapon stuck in a wound. If that is the sole point of correspondence between the two compared loci, the allusion is clearly of the class I have earlier labelled "casual." Such an explication, however—while it offers a suitable interpretation of the point of reference in the equation *Villefort/l'homme blessé*—does not do full justice to the organic effect of the allusion. Rather, I suggest, the effect of Dumas's evocation of the *Aeneid* here is to prefigure Villefort's ruin at the end of the novel and to reveal a complexity which is not usually imputed to Dumas's work.

First I will submit that readers of Vergil, upon initially reading Dumas's line, may be a bit taken aback. Arrows left in wounds? There are several in the *Aeneid*, but attempts to pinpoint a single Vergilian locus as Dumas's archetype here encounter various difficulties.

At least one translator has assumed that primary reference is to book 12 of the *Aeneid*, where Aeneas is struck by an arrow (12.318-319) while trying to calm the armies in preparation for his single combat with Turnus; wounded, he is helped back into camp by his comrades, where they remove the arrow,

⁷ Édouard has even earlier exhibited a predisposition for cutting and slashing, as we see in the scene when (to his mother's chagrin) he quotes Cornelius Nepos while his mother and the Count chat about poisons: "'Mithridates, rex Ponticus,' dit l'étourdi en découpant des silhouettes dans un magnifique album" (652).

treat his leg and send him back into battle (12.383f.).⁸ Several points, however, argue against this assumption. First, that location of the reference is complicated by the patent incongruity of Aeneas' god-aided recovery and Dumas's application of the epithet "mortel" to the offending arrow. Even beyond the simple inapplicability of the epithet, the substantive parallelism asserted by such an allusion—that festering grief or guilt is like an arrow left in a wound—would surely be skewed by the miraculously speedy and complete recovery of Villefort's classical counterpart. On the other hand, this locus is the only one of those to be discussed in which the setting of the arrow-in-a-wound trope is such that Dumas's application of the trope to "l'homme blessé" is fully appropriate: for the other loci present us, respectively, with a wounded lion, woman, and deer, never a man or hero.⁹

A second conceivable location of the allusion is the *Aeneid* passage in which Turnus' wrath in battle is compared to that of a wounded lion (*Aen.* 12.4-8). But such a location is inhibited by a context and effect which are strikingly dissimilar to those of Dumas's passage: whereas the keynote of the arrow which strikes Villefort is the lingering, hidden damage it inflicts, the missile ("telum": an "arrow" is not specified) which the lion bites off in his wound enrages him and spurs him on to greater ferocity. The lion's fearless joy in combat ("gaudet" [12.6], "impavidus" [12.8]) is far removed from Villefort's sinking, sighing capitulation to uncertainty.

The two passages in Vergil which not only leap to mind immediately upon reading Dumas's allusion but also provide the most fitting parallels to Villefort's sufferings here are the two striking and thematically interconnected passages in which first Dido, then a tame deer are struck by arrows. In the former, Dido in love is likened to a deer pierced by a hunter's arrow:

est mollis flamma medullas
interea et tacitum vivit sub pectore vulnus.
uritur infelix Dido totaque vagatur
urbe furens, qualis coniecta cerva sagitta,
quam procul incautam nemora inter Cresia fixit
pastor agens telis liquitque volatile ferrum
nescius: illa fuga silvas saltusque peragrat
Dictaeos; haeret lateri letalis harundo.

(*Aen.* 4.66-73, emphasis mine)

⁸ In an English-language edition of the novel (which is also rather crudely abridged), the unnamed translator's assumption that the allusion is to Aeneas is clear from his translation: "Like the wounded hero of Virgil he carried the arrow in his wound" (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., n.d., 42).

⁹ One might, of course, make a case that, as a generalizing characterization roughly equivalent to *l'on, l'homme blessé* is not incongruous after all: "the wounded one carries *douleur* with him like the arrow." In that case, I would argue unequivocally that the most likely Vergilian loci to come to the reader's mind are those involving Dido and the deer. But the incongruity seems to me to be real and not so easily explained away.

The specific description of Dido's wound ("vulnus") as festering "tacitum...sub pectore" is strikingly echoed by Dumas's further reflections on Villefort's "blessure" on the page following his Vergilian allusion; after describing Villefort as prey to "ce battement sourd...retentissant *au fond de son coeur et emplissant sa poitrine de vagues appréhensions*" (emphasis mine), Dumas continues:

Mais la blessure qu'avait reçue Villefort était de celles qui ne se ferment pas, ou qui ne se ferment que pour se rouvrir plus sanglantes et plus douloureuses qu'auparavant.

(92)

The motif appears again in book 7, when war is incited between Italians and Trojans as a result of Ascanius' thoughtless killing of an Italian herder's pet deer. This deer, nurtured since its infancy by human hands, wears garlands in its horns, obeys human commands, and nightly returns home of its own accord to its master's table. Pierced by Ascanius' arrow "perque uterum...perque ilia," the wounded pet staggers home to die:

saucius at quadripes nota intra tecta refugit
 successitque gemens stabulis, questuque cruentus
 atque imploranti similis tectum omne replebat.

(Aen. 7.500-502)

Both the deer's attempt to solace itself by retreat to its own home and the human-like sobs and laments with which it fills the house ("gemens," "questu," "imploranti similis") are forerunners of Villefort's sighing and sobbing as he sinks into his chair.

These two Vergilian loci are elaborately worked out in Vergil's opus and significantly connected. The female Dido compromises her role as leader of Carthage by capitulating to her more "natural" feminine subjugation to emotion and masculine domination; the tame deer represents a Golden Age harmony between man and nature which obtains in Italy before the arrival of the Trojans. Both fall victim to Aeneas in his march toward the destiny whereby he will found a nation whose summum opus will be to "regere imperio populos" (Aen. 6.851). The clear significance of the arrow-in-a-wound motif in these passages ensures that Dumas's mention of that motif in Vergil will bring them, willy nilly, to the reader's mind, despite the initial incongruity of coupling the referent "l'homme blessé" with allusion to an animal and a woman. Villefort's mental suffering is thus likened—through evocation of a broad Vergilian context in which suffering victims carry arrows in their wounds—not only to Aeneas' physical pain in book 12, but also to the suffering of Dido and a deer. The effects of this comparison are complex. Let us look first at the Dido parallel.

The implied identification of Villefort with a woman pierced by love and destined to be forever abandoned by her lover constitutes, along the lines of a transferred epithet, a metaphor transferred to Villefort's guilt from

seemingly more appropriate object, Mercédès's wound of love. This transferral underscores the topsy-turvydom of Villefort's stated emotions at this moment: "il lui sembla que c'était lui l'accusé, et que c'était elle le juge." Villefort's encounter with Mercédès has temporarily deposed him from his lofty, stern and essentially extra-human role as judge. He submits instead to the emotions of the judged; he becomes vulnerable; and for a brief moment he feels his true mortal helplessness in the face of the universe:

si la belle Mercédès fût entrée et lui eût dit: "*Au nom du Dieu qui nous regarde et qui nous juge, rendez-moi mon fiancé,*" oui, ce front à moitié plié sous la nécessité s'y fût courbé tout à fait.

(92, emphasis mine)

Concomitant to the reversal of Villefort's and Mercédès's role as judge and judged is a distinct gender-reversal. A long-traditional antinomy of male and female asserts that allegiances to abstractions, like Villefort's to Justice or Aeneas' to pietas, are "masculine," while by contrast emotionalism such as Mercédès's or Dido's subjection to human love is "feminine." Likewise, strength and domination over others are traditionally viewed as masculine; passivity and victimization as feminine. Thus, Villefort's reduction in this passage from Judge/decapitator to a victim prone to Clarissa-like sighs, sobs and sinkings betokens as well his assumption of a female/passive victim's role. The completion of the transferral to Villefort of a role which is more naturally Mercédès's is glossed by the fact that her involuntary "sob" upon hearing his callous words concerning her lover's fate (91) is picked up and outdone by his own emotional breakdown behind closed doors.

The evocation of the Vergilian episode of Ascanius' deer-slaying compounds the same effects and adds a further dimension. The deer falls victim to Ascanius' ambition to achieve honor in the masculine world ("laudis succensus amore" [7.496]). In Ascanius' world the joint means to this end were war and the hunt; in Villefort's society such honor was won more often by wealth and power—the sort of wealth and power for which Villefort compromises his judge's soul in condemning Dantès, "cet homme qu'il sacrifiait à son ambition" (91).¹⁰ The predictable equation, then, would be of Ascanius with Villefort as hunter and of the deer with Mercédès/Dantès as the hunted. As with the Dido parallel, however, the reference is transferred so that Villefort is likened instead to the hunted and wounded animal.

Thus, an apparently casual reference to Vergil's *Aeneid* in the scene in which Mercédès confronts Villefort seeking news of her imprisoned lover brings a broader Vergilian context to bear on itself. Through these allusions, the reversal of Mercédès and Villefort's roles as culprit and judge, which is stated by Dumas explicitly but briefly, is accentuated to such a point that Villefort's temporary

¹⁰ For mention of ambition as Villefort's motivating force, cf. 51, 58, 100, 119, 179, and especially 125: "Dantès devait être brisé entre les rouages de son ambition."

failure of nerve provides a true prefiguring of his final peripeteia at the end of the novel—for in the end it will be readily apparent that Villefort will be the victim, the hunted one, while Dantès/the Count will have become the hunter.¹¹

In summary, then, it may be said that, although the majority of classical allusions in *The Count of Monte Cristo* are casual, aimed at display of authorial learning and replication of the kind of wittily erudite conversation which, one must assume, was de rigueur among the French upper class of Dumas's time, others are used in subtler and more thematically significant ways. The comparison of Villefort's executionary ruminations to those of Tarquinius Superbus colors the chapter in which several protagonists' doom is prepared, heightening the reader's sense of the disaster to come. Two early allusions (the first Brutus analogy and the reference to the *Aeneid*) prefigure Villefort's peripeteia from the heights of control and success to the nadir of defeated insanity. Conversely, the apparent prefiguring contained within the Pyramus/Thisbe analogy—which proves to be false, in that the foreshadowed doom does not actually befall Maximilien and Valentine—serves not only to heighten the suspense felt by the reader in anticipation of the outcome of events, but also subtly to call into question the moral premise upon which the Count's course of vengeance is based. All in all, Dumas's use of classical allusion suggests that, beyond being no mean reader of the classics, he exhibits in his writing an artful knack for turning the old to new and interesting use.

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AT BOSTON

¹¹ A parallel ironic reversal of roles between the Count and one of his objects of revenge is achieved glancingly when Dumas presents us with a Danglars who, upon suffering one of the financial reversals arranged by the Count, is described in terms which suggest a comparison with Dantès/the Count on his escape from the Château d'If: "Derrière sa femme descendit le banquier pâle comme s'il fût sorti du sépulcre au lieu de sortir de son coupé" (770). Emphasis on the Count's sepulchral pallor, of course, is a recurrent topic throughout the novel.