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Résumé de l'article

Le critique Michael Finn a bien démontré que, malgré son attitude plutôt condescendante envers les romans d'Alexandre Dumas fils en général, Marcel Proust a été inspiré par un personnage de lui, Marguerite Gautier, en créant sa propre Odette Swann dans A la recherche du temps perdu. Cet article s'appuie sur le travail de Finn afin d'établir les parallèles dans le narratif et la caractérisation du roman de Proust et La Dame aux Camélias de Dumas fils, et propose que, comme il y a des ressemblances claires, l'analyse des différences entre Marguerite et Odette nous aidera à comprendre les spécificités stylistiques de ces romans. Je constate que la représentation de ces personnages rappelle les attributs structuraux des romans eux-mêmes. Le roman de Dumas fils et le personnage de Marguerite montrent une tendance vers la clarté et la certitude épistémologique, tandis que le roman de Proust et le personnage d'Odette révèlent un univers littéraire ouvert et hétérogène.

The Body of the Courtesan, the Body of the Novel: Characterizing *La Dame aux camélias* and *A la recherche du temps perdu* through Marguerite Gautier and Odette Swann

Maury Bruhn

Odette de Crécy, or Odette Swann, or Odette de Forcheville, or Miss Sacripant, or "la dame en soie rose" is one of *A la recherche du temps perdu*'s central characters, both a quintessential example of the social changes Proust maps across his novel, and an archetypal courtesan figure with roots in the nineteenth-century novel. Her character and her romance with Charles Swann resemble in certain ways the courtesan Marguerite Gautier and her romance with Armand Duval in Alexandre Dumas fils' *La Dame aux camélias,* as critic Michael Finn argues in his article "Proust and Dumas fils: Odette and *La Dame aux camélias*." Finn notes that these parallels are present in the *Recherche* not because Dumas fils was an important predecessor for Proust (rather, when his works are mentioned they are consistently associated with characters who are known for their poor taste) but because Proust is evoking the earlier courtesan figure Marguerite Gautier in order to subvert her characteristics through the figure of Odette.

Finn summarizes the central parallels between Odette and Marguerite as follows: "There are both general and very specific points of comparison between the story lines of *Un Amour de Swann* and *La Dame aux camélias*. Both novels describe how a man falls in love with a notorious cocotte, idealizes her, then becomes jealous and begins to spy on her" (531). In chapter XII of *La Dame aux camélias*, Marguerite cancels a rendez-vous with Armand and, convinced she is meeting another lover, he waits four hours for her on the Champs-Elysées, visits all the theaters she usually attends, and finally waits outside of her apartment, believing she is not home until one of her lovers enters and never reappears. In *Un amour de Swann*, finding Odette has left a dinner party early and he has missed an opportunity to see her, Swann frantically searches the restaurants in Paris where Odette might be (225-228) and later waits on the street outside of her apartment, believing she is with a lover (268-271). Finn goes on to note another important parallel in that "An important element in both novels too, is the flower symbolism attached to the couple's erotic encounters" (531). Marguerite's camellias are used to signal her sexual availability to her lovers (36), and the cattleyas Odette is wearing the first night she and Swann sleep together inspire their private euphemism for sex ("faire catleya") (230).

Building on Finn's work, I argue that throughout *La Dame aux camélias* and *A la recherche du temps perdu,* the descriptions of the bodies and personalities of Marguerite and Odette metonymically reflect the structure of the text in which they are found. Female beauty in these texts gives us a number of indicators as to how we should understand the aesthetic priorities of the novels at hand. Though the subject of Dumas fils' 1848 novel—the doomed love between a courtesan and a young bourgeois man—indicates the ever-expanding range of possible subjects for serious literature as the grip of classicism on French aesthetics weakened in the nineteenth century, its formal properties are that of an intricate but closed textual economy epitomized in the perfect body of Marguerite.[1] Her

1 While my argument is restricted to the novel, there is certainly a counterargument to be made here about the generic flexibility of Marguerite's story. See Roland A. Champagne's article "My Cup Runneth Over: The Semotic Stakes of the Courtesan Myth in the Metamorphoses of Marguerite Gautier" which tracks Marguerite's appearances in Dumas fils' novel and later play, an opera, and two films. He ultimately argues that "The many versions of Marguerite's courtesan myth explore the limitations that genres provide in the wider landscape of semiotics and its relationship to the communicative spaces of men and women" (56).

death, anterior to the novel's opening, means that the novel begins with the exquisite and now never-changing image of her beauty, which haunts the unnamed narrator, and her life story, unknown to this narrator when the text opens, becomes knowable through the memories of her lover. This story, as well as the intercalated letters and journal entries and the many intertextual references to *Manon Lescaut*, are tightly knit together to reinforce the narrator's, and thus the reader's, belief in the specialness of the novel's central love story.

Odette Swann, however, has quite a different role to play in Proust's 1913-1927 novel. Marguerite's trajectory through Dumas fils' novel is from a mystery to a reaffirmation of a quasi-Platonic association between beauty and goodness, but Odette in many ways remains illegible throughout Proust's novel, or rather, is continually misread in various ways. The young narrator's worshipful attitude toward Odette's beauty is not a powerful intuition of the real goodness of her character, as it is in the case of Armand and Dumas fils' narrator's admiration of Marguerite's beauty. Beauty is even called into question as a real feature of Odette's physical appearance, because of Charles Swann's low initial estimation of her attractiveness. Her appearance and her character—even her name—are constantly shifting before the reader, not to demonstrate the gradual separation of truth from illusion, as in the case of Marguerite, but rather to indicate an inherently multifaceted conception of character, presenting the reader with inconsistencies rather than clear characterization. This is patterned after the changeable characteristics of Proust's novel itself: inconsistent narrative voice, generic irregularities, unclear timeline, etc.

When the narrator of *La Dame aux camélias* describes seeing Marguerite for the first time, her appearance and bearing are described as follows: "Une distinction pas commune à ses semblables, distinction que rehaussait encore une beauté vraiment exceptionnelle" (12). Marguerite is beautiful, but moreover she is different from the other women of her social class. This short initial description is dense with reaffirmation of this point: "distinction" is repeated twice, and her beauty is described not only as exceptional but "vraiment exceptionnelle." Her appearance of aristocratic singularity is reaffirmed by her arrivals "toujours seule" on the Champs-Elysées (other courtesans arrive with friends) (12). Marguerite's singularity is what justifies her character's position in the story; she is a rare and precious object whose mystery provides the energy for Dumas fils' novel. We can contrast this initial description of Marguerite to the description of the first time Charles Swann meets Odette. Swann's evaluation of Odette's appearance is obfuscated by the rumors he has previously heard about her: "quand un jour au théâtre il fut présenté à Odette de Crécy par un de ses amis d'autrefois, qui lui avait parlé d'elle-même comme d'une femme ravissante avec qui il pourrait peut-être arriver à quelque chose" (192). He comes to find that he does not agree with his friend's evaluation of her appearance; he finds her "non pas certes sans beauté, mais d'un genre de beauté qui lui était indifférent" (193). In contrast with Marguerite's beauty, Odette's is both not distinctive (it is of a "genre") and supremely subjective ("ravissante" to Swann's friend, "indifférent" to Swann himself). Marguerite's unmissable singularity is underscored, whereas Odette's appearance can only be localized in relative terms: it can only be described in contrast to, in comparison with, or according to.

While Odette's beauty is not the source of her distinction, Martin Greenberg's article "Odette's Beauty" makes the point that her physical appearance is repeatedly evoked and described in detail more frequently than other female characters who might have equal narrative importance. Swann's initial evaluation of her beauty as "indifférent" is accompanied by a number of details about her specific features: her profile is "accusé," her skin is "fragile," her eyes "beaux" but too big (193). This detail-oriented approach is repeated when the narrator sees Odette in the Bois du Bologne in *Nom du pays: le nom* and

describes her dress, her hair, her "sourire ambigu" (412). His description combines a fascinated intensity with a fleeting instability, and emphasizes the changeability that will become the hallmark of her appearance for much of the novel until she finally becomes unrecognizable by ceasing to change with age. Her physical changeability is repeatedly underlined in the Bois du Bologne scene: the narrator notes that Odette's hair is "maintenant blond," emphasizing that it has changed; her "sourire ambigu" mentioned above is interpreted in different ways by the different men watching her; and the narrator must constantly change positions to catch a glimpse of her as she walks by. Her appearance is hyper-malleable and thus hyper-interpretable, and Odette "means" something distinct to the young, impressionable narrator, who is in love with her daughter; something else to the men of her acquaintance who are watching her; and something else yet to those observers who don't know her but sense something "singulier" and "excessif" about her (412).

Marguerite's status as a courtesan comes to be seen by Armand as an error of sorts; a tragic occupation that obscures the true goodness of her character. In the case of Odette, it is the flexibility of her status as a courtesan that assures her extensive representability in Proust's novel, as her *aventures* mean that multiple versions of Odette are generated by the people she interacts with as she moves through different strata of society. Swann reevaluates more than once his attitude towards her (i.e. towards her beauty, or towards her moral character), and the narrator does the same. Indeed, in the case of the narrator, there are several scenes where he sees Odette but cannot identify her: she is the "dame en soie rose" whom his parents are horrified to learn he has met at his uncle's (*Du côté de chez Swann* 75), the "dame en blanc" he sees with Gilberte while out walking in the countryside with his parents (*Du côté de chez Swann* 140), and the cross-dressed "Miss Sacripant" in a painting in Elstir's atelier (*A l'ombre de jeunes filles en fleur* 485). In each of these moments, Odette represents something different to the narrator: in the first, his obsession with the theater leads him to the delighted belief that she is an actress; in the second, she is an object of interest because of her proximity to Gilberte, to whom the narrator is attracted; in the third her portrait is an example of the material power of Elstir's painting. Each time the narrator is drawn to her but out of different impulses, and without being aware, for much of the novel, that all of these women are actually one, and it is difficult for the first-time reader to come to this conclusion as well.

Both Marguerite and Odette, in their status as courtesans, function as nexuses around which conversation—gossip—cluster. The opening scene of *La Dame aux camélias* and parts of *Un amour de Swann* and *Nom du pays: le nom* similarly dramatize the figure of the courtesan as a generative site of interest and speculation. The initial scene in *La Dame aux camélias* of the sale of Marguerite's possessions is full of women searching for "les traces de cette vie de courtisane," a curiosity that applies to the narrator as well (3). As the narrator's fascination with Marguerite deepens after meeting Armand, he finds that Marguerite's "nom est revenu si fréquemment à mes oreilles" that he begins to ask his acquaintances if they had known her. The habitual response, he discovers, is "Beaucoup" followed by a knowing smile (105-106). Odette is similarly the focus of both speculation and gloating. During their relationship, Swann is pained when, out in society, he learns "J'ai vu hier Mme de Crécy, elle était avec un monsieur que ne je ne connais pas" and reassured when he hears that on the contrary "Elle ne connaissait personne, elle n'a parlé à personne" (311). The narrator, watching Odette at the Bois du Bologne, hears snippets of discussion about her, a mix of fascination and curiosity ("Vous savez qui c'est? Mme Swann !" 413) with lascivious detail ("Je me rappelle que j'ai couché avec elle le jour de la démission de Mac-Mahon" 413). These murmurs and rumors surrounding Marguerite and Odette engage the reader's curiosity about the truth behind them, and provide another thematic link between the two characters.

However, the diverging conclusions of this narratively productive conversational energy reinforce the different structural roles these two characters play in their novels. Marguerite's character is the object of *La Dame aux camélias*' revelation, but while the *Recherche* as a whole contains many revelatory objects, Odette's character is instead the site of a proliferation of representations and connections that never resolve into the quasi-mystical clarity of, for example, the scenes of involuntary memory. The revelation of Marguerite's innate goodness, however, is teased at the beginning *La Dame aux camélias* in a very similar way to how Proust introduces his narrator's first experience of involuntary memory via the madeleine and tisane. When Dumas fils' narrator is at the sale of Marguerite's apartment, he believes that the desire he and the other lookers have to learn about Marguerite's life is in vain, as "les mystères étaient morts avec la déesse" (3). Proust's narrator, early in the text, musing on his inability to voluntarily recall the details of his childhood, seems to similarly imply this desire to reexperience his past is futile: "Tout cela était mort pour moi. Mort à jamais ? C'était possible" (43). Highlighting the impenetrability of the past functions in both cases to elevate the mysterious object and induce a sense of awe in the characters and the reader as the powerful truth comes to be revealed.

Dumas fils' narrator's elegy elevates Marguerite above her station as a courtesan and into that of a "déesse," taking her mysteries with her as she leaves the earth, but these mysteries are neither dead for the narrator nor for the reader. The truth about Marguerite's character and her life, as Armand sees her, is relatively complete for the reader by the end of the novel. The reader may be confused about particularities when, for example, Marguerite leaves Armand to return to her life as a courtesan. But, having already read her deathbed letter to him and knowing that he retrospectively considers her to be an "ange," we can safely preclude the possibility that she did so out of entirely selfish or callous reasons. As Bernadette C. Lindz notes in her article on Marguerite and Manon Lescaut, the former's deathbed letter "convey[s] Marguerite's forgiveness to Armand and suggests, through its style steeped in religious rhetoric, that the conversion of the dying courtesan has indeed occurred" (29). Her secrets are revealed throughout the novel in the interest of presenting a unified portrait of Marguerite. She is perhaps somewhat flighty, she has a taste for luxury, but she is consistently presented as fundamentally worthy of the narrator's appraisal of her "distinction" when he first sees her, and of Armand's love for her that he refuses to abandon. By the end of the novel, the truth about Marguerite is accessible and elevates her to the status of a character who, though a courtesan, is singular and worthy of love, and thus proves that she deserves the extensive artistic representation she receives.

Odette's character and actions, too, create a series of mysteries throughout the *Recherche* that the narrator and the reader solve, but these resolutions do not have anywhere near the narrative power nor the unity of the revelatory structure associated with Marguerite in *La Dame aux camélias.* The scope and narrative complexity of Proust's novel means that often, by the time that mysteries about Odette have been explained, there is no longer any pressing emotional need for that explanation, and there is certainly no emotional equivalent to Armand learning that Marguerite had always loved him. The explanations the reader does receive tend to reinforce the view that Odette is vulgar and unfaithful; an opportunist who betrays Swann with Forcheville and by the end of the novel betrays Forcheville with the duke of Guermantes. In the famous "dame en soie rose" scene, the narrator is fascinated by Odette, but he also finds her somewhat ordinary. He understands that she is not like the respectable women he knows because she is alone with his uncle and because of material signals such as her "voiture à deux chevaux, la robe rose, le collier des perles" (76). However, despite her clothing and carriage, he finds Odette not different than "des autres jolies dames que j'avais vues quelquefois dans ma famille" and has trouble

thinking of her as anything but "une jeune fille de bonne famille," a mistake that Swann also makes (76). While Marguerite is set apart by her exceptional beauty, apparent immediately, Odette is simply familiar to the narrator, like a member of his extended family. This appearance of commonality is only interrupted by the objects she owns and wears and by the fine cigarettes she smokes, which signal that she is *entretenue.*

The question of the social status of the "dame en soie rose" is only temporarily interesting to the narrator and the reader, and it is all but forgotten when the "dame" is eventually revealed to be Odette. With the exception of Swann's obsessive jealousy during the height of his love for her, Odette's mysteries are constantly productive of conversation and rumor, but the resolution of these mysteries is of little import to most of the participants in the dialogue surrounding her. Marguerite's mysteries, on the other hand, are not only important to her obsessively jealous lover, but also to the narrator, who did not know her when she was alive, and, presumably, to the reader. Odette is a cocotte, a *femme entretenue*, a courtesan; social roles that require a certain projection of mystery to cultivate the (sexual) curiosity of men. The rumors about her serve to confirm this status, and to vacate her mystery of any potential power—the rumors are true, in other words. For the narrator of *La Dame aux camélias*, the secret of Marguerite's life has an almost hermeneutic preciousness; none of the rumor and conversation that revolves around her can come close to the truth about Marguerite, which is only provided by the revelation of the love between her and Armand.

La Dame aux camélias' incipit sets up the narrator's belief that he is the privileged recipient of a truth that would otherwise be impossible to reconstruct: "seul je pouvais les écrire, car seul j'ai été le confiant des derniers détails" (2). Proust's narrator has no such belief; in addition to not being able to recognize Odette when he sees her with Gilberte in Combray, it is unclear how exactly the narrator knows in such intimate detail the story recounted in *Un amour de Swann*, or whether we are to take parts as his own invention. In *Nom du pays: le nom* we are presented with fragments of conversation about Odette at the Bois du Bologne, but the narrator apparently does even not hear these fragments directly; he understands Odette is being talked about "Sans entendre les réflexions" (413). Dumas fils' narrator discovers Marguerite's story and recounts it to the reader, but Proust's narrator is presented simply as one observer of many, looking at isolated parts of Odette's life. Stories about Odette are constructed, contradicted, and reconstructed throughout the *Recherche,* and the model of the courtesan story in *La Dame aux camélias* is reconfigured as the source of a multiplicity of episodic and anecdotal variants throughout Proust's novel.

Through the use of social gossip and rumor, both texts build up tension by presenting as irreconcilable two impulses on the part of the lover: the impulse to judge the woman's life as a courtesan, and the impulse to believe in her essential goodness and honesty. Finn notes that both couples are tragic, but for opposite reasons: Armand and Marguerite are a tragic couple because Armand is unable to trust his initial (correct) impression that Marguerite's extraordinary beauty must indicate extraordinary character as well (542). Swann, on the other hand, "had the misfortune to believe, in the beginning, that Odette was good, naive, idealistic, and incapable of lies" (542). He consistently misunderstands her character, despite proof to the contrary—if Armand puts too much faith in rumor and reputation, Swann trusts them too little. He has heard that Odette is a courtesan, but finds it difficult to believe these rumors:

> On lui avait parlé d'Odette comme d'une femme entretenue, et où une fois de plus il s'amusait à opposer cette personnification étrange : la femme entretenue—chatoyant amalgame d'éléments inconnus et diaboliques, serti, comme une apparition de Gustave Moreau, de fleurs vénéneuses entrelacées à des joyaux précieux—et cette Odette sur le visage de qui il avait vu passer les

> mêmes sentiments de pitié pour un malheureux, de révolte contre une injustice […] qu'il avait vu éprouver par sa propre mère, par ses amis (263).

This reverie on "la femme entretenue" sets up a false dichotomy between the Huysmanian image of poisonous flowers and precious stones, the "inconnus et diaboliques" elements proper to a Moreau fantasy; and the natural, human feelings (pity, anger at injustice) that Swann sees in those he trusts. Odette, however, fits neither category: she is certainly a kept woman, but her sexuality is more banal than diabolical.

The epistemological thrust of Armand's story in *La Dame aux camélias* is the refining of impressions and understanding, the exposure of the nerve of truth under a social web of deceit and rumor. Armand's instinctive appraisal of Marguerite's worth is at odds with the associations of his conceptual category of courtesan, but this problem is resolved through the course of the text by separating the social station Marguerite occupies from the truth of her character. Armand dreams of a Marguerite he can understand entirely; his ultimate possession of Marguerite comes not from sex but from the legibility her emotions and actions take on after her death, when he can no longer doubt her love for him. Swann never has that opportunity for a retrospective view—Odette outlives her husband, and goes on to marry into the aristocracy—but moreover, prior to their marriage he no longer hopes for proof of Odette's love. By the end of *Un amour de Swann*, Swann is aware both that "le sentiment qu'Odette avait eu pour lui ne renaîtrait jamais, que ses espérances de bonheur ne se réaliseraient plus" (347) and that his love for Odette was always without foundation; thus *Un amour*'s famous closing line "Dire que j'ai gâché des années de ma vie […] que j'ai eu mon plus grand amour, pour une femme qui ne me plaisait pas, qui n'était pas mon genre !" (375). Armand's love for Marguerite is sustained and rewarded by the promise that someday he will be able to learn how to interpret her actions as proof of her love for him. Swann's love, on the other hand, is sustained precisely by the ambiguity of Odette's actions. Musing on the fact that he still desires Odette despite recently finding her physically less appealing, he attributes this attraction to knowing that "sous cette chrysalide nouvelle, c'était toujours Odette qui vivait, toujours la même volonté fugace, insaisissable et sournoise, suffisait à Swann pour qu'il continuât de mettre la même passion à chercher à la capter" (287). He sees Odette as ephemeral, evasive, and sly, and it is that lack of resolution, that constant lack of clarity and lack of wholeness, that leads him, fascinated, back to Odette.

Odette's mystery thus keeps Swann's love alive, and the gradual revelation of the "truth" about her—that she has never been faithful to Swann, despite consistently denying infidelity—brings about the death of his love for her. When we first meet Odette in *Un amour de Swann* she is dressed in such a way that "donnait à la femme l'air d'être composée de pièces différentes" (194). Odette herself and the *Recherche* as a whole are constructed as compositions of disparate elements, whereas Marguerite and *La Dame aux camélias* demonstrate a certain coherence of character and narrative. The "truth" about Odette is not the revelation of her inherent qualities, as with Marguerite, but instead shows her life with Swann to be a murky terrain of lies, illusions, and manipulations. The love story between Swann and Odette is marked by a lack of coherence for the reader—it is never quite clear why Swann falls in love with Odette, nor is it clear why he marries her once that love is dead—and this ambiguity is echoed again and again in the central narrative of the *Recherche*, particularly in the narrator's love for Albertine, but moreover in the very openness and fluidity of the novel as a whole, in contrast with the narrative economy of *La Dame aux camélias*.

The romance between Marguerite and Armand functions as it does because Armand's projection of a tight knot of entwined concepts—beauty, goodness, love—onto the body and self of the courtesan turns out to be a correct assessment of the relationship between

them; this tight grouping of interrelated traits in the characterization of Marguerite is echoed on the level of narrative by the tightness of the chronological structure. The narrative begins after Marguerite has died, ensuring the reconstruction of her story will end at a definite—and meaningful—point; the kind of structure by which Walter Benjamin characterizes the novel, wherein for any given character "the 'meaning' of his life is revealed only in his death" (100-101). That, were Marguerite to live, these interrelated traits that are revealed to be the 'meaning' of her story would inevitably begin to dissolve is indicated early on by the narrator, who muses as he observes her apartment that "En effet, quoi de plus triste à voir que la vieillesse du vice ?" (5). Marguerite, at the end of her life and at the end of the novel, is associated with neither age nor vice; she remains young and is forgiven for her life as a courtesan. After her death, Armand can say without irony, as he does to the narrator, that "elle était un ange" (40). The tightness of the novel's structure is assured by her death which guarantees that these associations will remain strong.

Benjamin's essay quoted above, "The Storyteller," argues that the psychological appeal of the novel as a literary form is in its illusion of completeness: an entire human life is described in the novel, which Benjamin argues always ends in the death of the character (in an intra- or extra-diegetic sense). Marguerite's death, by allowing the narrator to enter her apartments during an auction and buy the copy of *Manon Lescaut* that will eventually lead him to Armand, both bookends the novel and allows its existence. Her death ensures that her life will be comprehensible—she will remain young, and beautiful, and, once her secrets are exposed, eternally good as well. This associative knot is reflected in the structure of the novel, which is constructed as a series of mise-en-abymes reflecting and affirming one another: letters, journals, intercalated narration, intertextual references to *Manon Lescaut.* Lindz notes of the structure of *La Dame aux camélias* that "The novel displays a high degree of literary self-awareness, incorporating as it does a number of self-reflexive devices and an extensive metanarrative discourse that are aimed at shaping its readability. The most prominent of these devices is the use of intertextual reference" (25). In addition to these intertextual parallels, *La Dame aux camélias* includes an intermedial reference to Marguerite as well. The novel describes a portrait made of Marguerite by Vidal, which looks exactly like her (15). Her physical form itself becomes an artistic work, and the narrator remarks, learning of her death, that "Je regrettais la mort de cette fille comme on regrette la destruction totale d'une belle œuvre" (14). This initial vision of the total destruction of the beautiful artistic work that is Marguerite is revised through the text as it takes shape around the image of the dead courtesan, becoming one with the artistic object (the text) created to enshrine her as she is one with her portrait. The text is bound by the carefully delineated "image" of her. Marguerite becomes a fixed and singular artistic work; the novel that begins with the narrator's curiosity about her grows to be an artistic object in her image as he "fills in" her portrait.

Odette, like Marguerite, in a sense remains young at her novel's close, but for a very different reason. The *Recherche*'s final volume includes a scene where the narrator, having spent many years in sanatoriums, returns to Parisian society for an afternoon. Seeing his friends provides a shock; he has not watched them age gradually as one would with someone they see regularly, but rather he sees them change all at once. The sight is so strange he initially assumes they must be wearing makeup. As he adjusts to the new appearances of familiar faces, he is again disoriented when he sees Odette: she looks strange not because she has aged, but because she has not. Odette's final appearance in the text thus contradicts not only the linear thrust of novels in general, but even draws attention to itself within a scene that is already striking because of its, in Joseph Frank's words, "discontinuous presentation of character" across disparate temporal moments (239). Odette is the discontinuity of discontinuity, an uncanny vision because of her similarity to a self

she can no longer possibly be. The narrator describes the rule-overturning surprise of Odette's youthfulness: "son aspect, une fois qu'on savait son âge et qu'on attendait à une vieille femme, semblait un défi plus miraculeux aux lois de la chronologie que la conservation du radium celles de la nature" (254). The opposition of "chronologie" and "nature" that structures this comparison yields, upon closer examination, a metareferential commentary on novelistic characterization and time.

Contrasting the laws of chronology to the laws of nature is not necessary to make the point about Odette's unusual youthfulness. Proust's comparison could just as easily only include one or the other, especially the latter: a human who does not age is certainly contrary to the laws of nature as well as those of chronology. The opposition chronology-nature, with Odette's failure to age placed on the side of chronological rather than natural mystery, counterintuitively implies that the temporal effects the narrator has been noticing and commenting on are not simply a meditation on the real natural progress of age. There is human work involved in establishing a chronology; the process implies the selection and organization of elements rather than the natural unfolding of events. Odette's lack of aging is non-natural not only in being opposed to the laws of aging that govern living beings, but by being in opposition as well to the laws of chronology that govern texts such as the novel in which she appears. Odette's discontinuous presentation is discontinuous at every level. A properly articulated *histoire* can undo a good many of the striking temporal effects associated with Odette's appearances in the *récit* of the novel, such as the narrator's late realization that Odette was the lady in pink he saw at his uncle's as a child, but her escape from the laws of chronology still exists at any story level: her aging is not presented out of order; it simply stops occurring after a certain point. The simple forward flow of time, both as a fact of our reality and as a precondition for the existence of a novel—which necessarily unfolds for the reader over time—does not touch Odette. Her last appearance in the text begins with her being unrecognizable *because* she is the same as we and the narrator have seen her earlier, a sort of Dorian Gray effect lacking any explanation.

Odette's discontinuous presentation draws attention to Proust's use throughout the *Recherche* of metareferential effects meant to draw attention to the construction of the novel as a novel. In the volume *Metareference Across Media*, edited by Werner Wolf, Wolf's introduction draws a distinction between self-reference and metareference. Both go beyond what Wolf calls heteroreference, "a primary reference to 'reality' at large or […] a represented (possible) world" (22). Self-reference "refers to text and media and related issues […] regardless of their also being conceived of as a part of 'reality' or a represented world or not" (22). Self-referentially, such as *La Dame aux camélia*'s use of *Manon Lescaut*, thus uses the evocation or presence of multiple narrative forms or levels of discourse to reinforce on all levels the thematic elements or plot points of the central story. Metareference, however "goes one step further: it establishes a secondary reference to texts and media […] by, as it were, viewing them 'from the outside' [and] they are consequently seen as different from unmediated reality and the content of represented worlds" (22-23). Texts that can be said to be properly metareferential thus evoke or incorporate these forms and levels to comment on its own construction or the construction of texts (or works of art more broadly) in general. When Proust's narrator sees the painting in Elstir's studio of a young Odette in costume, he does not recognize her, despite knowing the present-day Odette quite well. When he sees Odette at the 'bal de têtes,' he does not recognize her again, this time because she resembles herself too much. The problems of Odette's representability, her dissimilarity to herself, means that she can only be properly represented in a transitory moment. Elstir's portrait of her is considered a success by the narrator not because it looks like Odette, but because it captures something of her that could not be seen otherwise; as critic Momcilo Milovanovic writes, "Le peintre avait démontré

l'harmonie construite par Odette pour en refaire une autre différente, répondant à sa sensibilité propre, sa subjectivité" (53). This method of presentation, where Odette is represented in the narrative as a series of discontinuous portraits rather than as a developing character, is more appropriate to painting than to literature. The narrator's fascination with Elstir's medium-appropriate representation of her as Miss Sacripant in his painting draws the reader's attention to the different standards of medium-appropriate representation in literature, and thus to Proust's subversion of these standards in his presentation of Odette.

Odette, like Marguerite, is inscribed into art through the *Recherche.* While Marguerite represents the artistic work as unified and fixed, Odette represents the artistic work as constantly shifting in means; as viewed and interpreted from different perspectives. She becomes art in multiple inconsistent moments and multiple inconsistent genres and mediums. While Marguerite is a priori associated with art (she is a "belle oeuvre" for the narrator before he even begins to learn her life story), Odette dips in and out of artistic representation. She becomes attractive to Swann when he begins to see her as a painting, but a partial one: he compares her to a Botticelli fresco, but not as a whole: "un fragment de la fresque apparaissait dans son visage et dans son corps, que dès lors il chercha toujours à y retrouver" (220). She is not the "belle oeuvre" with which the body of Marguerite is synonymous; instead a fragment of the fresco appears in her face and body, as if willed by Swann.

Marguerite and Armand's love story is predetermined and, despite the nonchronological structure of *La Dame aux camélias*, highly linear. Introduced to the feverish intensity of Marguerite's life, Armand muses: "Comme on s'aperçoit que la vie doit être courte par la rapidité des sensations" (172). Marguerite's lifestyle necessitates her early death; Dumas fils' novel structure necessitates this same death in order for Marguerite to be fully representable as a character. Marguerite's death does not make her character less stable; in fact, it does the opposite. She is rendered immortal within a traditionally tragic love story.

In *Le Peintre de la vie moderne,* Baudelaire associates two contradictory sets of characteristics with modern art. It is simultaneously "transitoire," "fugitif," and "contingent"—reflecting the lived modernity of the artist—and "éternel" and "immutable," reflecting its status as artistic object ("La Modernité" IV). The *Recherche* is situated precisely at this juncture—one point Frank expresses in his article on spatial form is that Proust is both "the novelist of time *par excellence*" (the transitory) and making use of a nonlinear novel form that requires the reader to make sense of the novel's characters by perceiving them at multiple moments in time simultaneously (the eternal, in his concept of "pure time"). Proust shows the effects of time on a number of levels; the political ramifications of events such as the Dreyfus affair and World War I, the societal mutations that occur as the bourgeoisie gains in power and the aristocracy begins to fade, the impact of new technologies on sensory awareness (the telephone and the automobile, for example). In this sense, he represents modernity in a very concrete way. The novel's structure is largely episodic rather than using continual narrative development; it is fragmented in a way that Dumas fils' earlier novel is not. Just as Odette, fickle, shallow, constantly transforming, endures until the end of Proust's work and represents its best example of lasting, immortal, female beauty, Proust's representation of modernity in *A la recherche du temps perdu* ends with an aesthetic experience that takes the reader outside of time, or rather encompasses time entirely, uniting the transitory and the eternal.

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