

# The Intersection of the Secular and the Sacred in *Un Cas de conscience* by Alexandre Dumas Père

STEFFIE VAN NESTE<sup>1</sup>

Ghent University

*Abstract.* '[E]ntre la foi et la negation [...] il reste le doute', states Alexandre Dumas père (1802–70).<sup>2</sup> This sceptical attitude not only embodies Dumas's own hesitancy between the sacred and the secular, it is also emblematic of the entire French nineteenth century. This article investigates the intersection of the sacred and the secular in Dumas's 1866 novella *Un Cas de conscience* (*A Question of Conscience*). *Un Cas de conscience* not only epitomizes the major (anti-)religious tensions of the 1860s, but also offers a privileged understanding of Dumas's view on religion. As in his pamphlet *Le Pape devant les Evangiles, l'histoire et la raison humaine* (*The Pope in View of the Gospels, History and Human Reason*), Dumas criticizes the hypocrisy of the reactionary Catholic ultramontanes. Yet Dumas has not abandoned faith. Like several French Romantic prophet-writers, Dumas subtly intertwines secular thoughts and religious elements in his work.

To whom did Alexandre Dumas père (1802–70) address his work? To devout Christians, to atheists, to both, or perhaps, to moderate or indifferent Republicans? It is a difficult question: Dumas's oeuvre is remarkably contradictory. Maxime Prévost rightly points out that Dumas's work stands poised between pure atheism and unstrained mysticism.<sup>3</sup> Julie Anselmini, too, observes that religious thought remains perceptible in Dumas's work, even though it contains many secularized ideas.<sup>4</sup> If Dumas's fictional work embodies a sustained tension between the secular and the sacred, his autobiographical work also encompasses a fundamental form of hesitancy. In his texts on Nerval, for example, Dumas

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<sup>2</sup> Alexandre Dumas, *Sur Gérard de Nerval. Nouveaux mémoires*, ed. by Claude Schopp (Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe, 1990), p. 117. '[B]etween belief and non-belief [...] exists doubt'. All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>3</sup> Maxime Prévost, 'L'Enchantement du monde: Alexandre Dumas et le merveilleux moderne', *Acta Fabula*, 14.1 (2013) <<http://www.fabula.org/acta/document7464.php>> [accessed 15 June 2018].

<sup>4</sup> Julie Anselmini, *Le Roman d'Alexandre Dumas père* (Genève: Droz, 2010), p. 434.

writes that his faith is ‘chancelante’.<sup>5</sup> This results in a fundamental form of doubt: ‘entre la foi et la negation [...] il reste le doute’.<sup>6</sup>

The aim of this article is to explore the intersection between the secular and the sacred in Alexandre Dumas’s novella *Un Cas de conscience* (1866).<sup>7</sup> Firstly, this paper will assess how Dumas’s novella epitomizes the major tensions between the sacred and the secular during the French Second Empire. Heavily censored for its anticlerical passages on ultramontane Catholicism, *Un Cas de conscience* provides an excellent platform from which to study the tensions: it shows how ultramontane Catholics and anticlerical Republicans came into conflict with each other in the 1860s.

On the other hand, secular and sacred tendencies often converged in nineteenth-century French literature and culture, especially in the Romantic era. Gérard Cholvy, for example, points out that the French nineteenth century was marked by a constant ‘flux et [...] reflux du sentiment religieux’.<sup>8</sup> Paul Bénichou, too, notes that ‘[f]oi et doute se sont rapprochés au XIXe siècle, se tenant la main et refusant de se séparer’.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, in the second part of the paper, I will show that the secular and the sacred are not rival conceptions to Dumas. Although Dumas criticizes, as do several French Romantic writers, a Catholic view of the sacred, he brings his secular, anticlerical views together with sacred elements and tries to establish a new kind of synthesis.

### Two *cas de conscience*: the secular versus the sacred

First, a few words about Dumas’s plot.<sup>10</sup> One evening, Giuseppe Garibaldi relates his military exploits to an assembly of noble ladies. The Comtesse d’Argyle indiscreetly asks him: ‘Général [...] quelle est l’action que vous vous reprochez le plus sévèrement?’<sup>11</sup> Surprisingly, Garibaldi confesses that he deeply regrets forgetting to honour a dog called Mustang: the dog saved his life during a battle after the Expedition of the Thousand.<sup>12</sup> Soon after the clash, the dog disappeared with its master, Edward Syton. It is the vanishing of the dog that leads eventually to a real *cas de conscience*. In an inserted story, Alexandre Dumas, the author who appears as the narrator, reveals that a priest gave him

<sup>5</sup> Dumas, *Sur Nerval*, p. 120. ‘[U]nsteady’. For a further study of this passage, see Maxime Prévost, *Alexandre Dumas mythographe et mythologue. L’Aventure extérieure* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2018), pp. 45–49.

<sup>6</sup> Dumas, *Sur Nerval*, p. 117. ‘[B]etween belief and non-belief [...] exists doubt’.

<sup>7</sup> Alexandre Dumas, *Un Cas de conscience*, ed. by Claude Schopp (Paris: Phébus, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Gérard Cholvy, *La Religion en France de la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> à nos jours* (Paris: Hachette, 1991), p. 189. ‘[E]bb and [...] flow of religious sentiment’.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Bénichou, *Les Mages romantiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p. 441. ‘Faith and doubt drew closer to each other in the nineteenth century, holding hands and refusing to separate’.

<sup>10</sup> For the summary of the plot, I took inspiration from the back flap of *Un Cas de conscience*.

<sup>11</sup> Dumas, *Un Cas de conscience*, p. 26. ‘General, [...] what is the action for which you reproach yourself most severely?’

<sup>12</sup> During the Expedition of the Thousand (1860), Garibaldi, accompanied by a thousand men, overthrew the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which was dominated by the Bourbons.

a manuscript concerning the truth of Mustang's fate. The priest explains in the manuscript how the Marquise de Blairey, a Catholic ultramontane lady, came to him in order to pose a moral question: can a crime, she asked, be justified in the eyes of God when it is committed in the name of the faith? By asking this, she confessed to being Mustang's killer. Over the course of the story, the reader discovers that the marquise wanted to convert a melancholic lady called Lady Anna to Catholicism. Lady Anna had lived in sadness ever since she had to abandon her son, Edward Syton. Her whole life, she had been desperately waiting for her son, until one day his dog, Mustang, suddenly appeared. Mustang's arrival had an enormous impact on Lady Anna: she became joyful, and she refused to listen any longer to the proselytizing preaching of the marquise. Moreover, she then openly expressed her admiration for the Republican ideals of the anticlerical Garibaldi, on whose side her son and his dog had fought: 'Cette femme [...] désespérée [Lady Anna] semblait ressuscitée depuis que ce misérable chien était entré dans la maison; elle portait un Garibaldi rouge et un bonnet aux couleurs italiennes.'<sup>13</sup> When the marquise establishes a link between the heretical transformation of Lady Anna and the sudden appearance of Mustang, the dog that saved Garibaldi, the marquise decides to kill it.

Dumas's *cas de conscience* mirror the turbulent religious and political tensions of the 1860s, both in Italy and France.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the novella needs to be read in the light of the unification of Italy, and more precisely in the light of the Roman Question.<sup>15</sup> When Garibaldi overthrew the reactionary Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies during the Expedition of the Thousand (1860), the entire Italian peninsula came close to being politically united. However, until 1870, the temporal sovereignty of Pope Pius IX over Rome remained the main obstacle to the complete unification of Italy, as Napoleon III protected the independence of Rome from Italy, impeding, for example, Garibaldi's attempts to liberate Rome.<sup>16</sup> Hence, the French intervention in the Papal States provoked a strong division in France: while the French ultramontanes aggressively defended the temporal power of the Pope (they aimed for a centralized Church controlled by the authority of the Pope), the Republican opposition claimed a sharp separation between the spiritual and the temporal power of the Pope.<sup>17</sup> Even though Catholicism regained an institutional power during the Second Empire, the anti-modern attitude of the reactionary ultramontanes reinforced a strong sentiment of anticlericalism in France.<sup>18</sup> Anticlericalism flourished in

<sup>13</sup> Dumas, *Un Cas de conscience*, p. 93. 'That [...] desperate woman [Lady Anna] seemed resurrected since that terrible dog entered the house; she wore a red Garibaldi shirt and a bonnet in Italian colors'.

<sup>14</sup> See Claude Schopp, 'Préface', in *Un Cas de conscience*, pp. 7–21.

<sup>15</sup> A nineteenth-century dispute between the Roman Catholic Church and the Italian State regarding Rome, which was physical territory of the Pope as well as the (desired) capital of Italy.

<sup>16</sup> In addition to his spiritual power, the Pope also exercised sovereign, worldly power as ruler of the Papal States.

<sup>17</sup> Cholvy, *La Religion en France*, p. 56.

<sup>18</sup> On ultramontanism and the anti-modern attitude of the Church (1850–70), see Claire Fredj, *La*

particular among a new positivist Republican generation, who were influenced by the theories of Emile Littré.<sup>19</sup>

Dumas's characters Garibaldi and the Marquise de Blairey embody these religious tensions of the 1860s in an allegorical way. Whereas Garibaldi stands for a Republican, anti-clerical worldview that clearly implies a secularization of political institutions, the Marquise de Blairey represents a sacred, ultramontane worldview relying on a reactionary vision of God and society. At first sight, the setting of the story underlines these incompatible worldviews (the secular versus the sacred): while Garibaldi utters his confession in an entirely secularized setting, a salon where he exchanges Enlightenment ideas with noble ladies through conversation, the marquise expresses her confession in a religious setting, that is, in front of a priest.

Nonetheless, Dumas goes beyond strictly opposing the sacred and the secular: he uses a technique of inversion. Remarkably, Dumas represents the anticlerical Garibaldi as a Christian who humbly expresses a sincere admission of guilt: 'J'avais tant de choses à faire que je ne pensai ni au maître ni au chien. A Caprera, seulement, en songeant qu'on était [...] ingrat envers moi, je me rappelai que j'avais été ingrat envers les autres'.<sup>20</sup> Considering the acts of an animal equal to those of a human, Garibaldi carries out the Christian ideas of charity: 'j'ai commis l'injustice de ne pas nommer Mustang colonel'.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Mustang, supporter of Garibaldi, is represented as an intelligent, Republican dog that has been sent by God (Mustang is 'le doigt de Dieu') to disturb the projects of the marquise.<sup>22</sup>

The very Catholic marquise, by contrast, is represented as an anti-Christian. Turning into a furious Medea, she transgresses the Christian laws of charity and love and the prohibition against killing.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, when the priest insists that she misused God to commit an illegitimate and cruel murder, she denies his authority: 'J'ai servi Dieu [...] ce sera une affaire à régler entre Dieu et moi!'<sup>24</sup> In this way, she contradicts a fundamental principle of the Catholic Church: the priest as a representative of the Church is a necessary intermediary between God and the individual Christian. Lastly, Dumas inverts the act of granting forgiveness: whereas the audience does not condemn Garibaldi's act — he shows true remorse — the marquise does not receive absolution. Indeed, the marquise

*France au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: PUF, 2016), pp. 201–03.

<sup>19</sup> See Sylvie Aprile, *1815–1870 La Révolution inachevée*, ed. by Joël Cornette (Paris: Belin, 2010), pp. 475–76.

<sup>20</sup> Dumas, *Un Cas de conscience*, p. 35. 'I had so much to do that I did not think of the dog nor of his master. Only in Caprera, when I was thinking about how some had shown [...] ingratitude towards me, did I remember that I had shown ingratitude towards others'.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 'I committed the injustice of not appointing Mustang colonel'.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64. 'The finger of God'. On the role of dogs in Dumas's *œuvre*, see Charles Grivel, *Alexandre Dumas, l'homme 100 têtes* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2008), pp. 240–53.

<sup>23</sup> Dumas, *Un Cas de conscience*, p. 94.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100. 'I have served God [...] it is a matter that needs to be settled between God and me!'

does not show remorse at all: she states that she has no ‘remords’ and that she has acted out of pure ‘vengeance’.<sup>25</sup> Why does Dumas stage a Christian in a secularized setting and an anti-Christian in a religious setting? Undoubtedly, this technique of inversion conveys Dumas’s own anticlerical and Republican views. In the words of Claude Schopp, Dumas puts his ‘virtuosité narrative [...] au service d’un profond engagement politique’.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Garibaldi’s ideals were a matter very close to Dumas’s heart. Having fought for the ideals of liberty in the French Revolution of 1848, Dumas did not hesitate to support Garibaldi during the Expedition of the Thousand.<sup>27</sup> He was eager to follow Garibaldi, ‘l’apôtre de la liberté universelle’, who ‘a reçu de la Providence mission de surveiller ce réveil des peuples’.<sup>28</sup> Dumas assigns a messianic, providential role to the general: he represents Garibaldi as the ‘messie de la liberté’, liberating the Italian people from the yoke of tyranny.<sup>29</sup>

Not surprisingly then, Dumas considers Pope Pius IX, the anti-modern pope who impedes the movement of ‘liberté contre tyrannie’, as the Anti-Christ: ‘Garibaldi a dit: le pape est l’Antechrist. En vérité, Garibaldi n’avait-il pas raison?’<sup>30</sup> In his pamphlet *Le Pape devant Les Evangiles, l’histoire et la raison humaine* (1861), Dumas strongly criticizes his temporal sovereignty: ‘aujourd’hui, aux yeux de la raison et du progrès de la philosophie [...], c’est un inconcevable et monstrueux paradoxe que de voir un souverain, juge temporel et spirituel en même temps’.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Dumas disparages ultramontane Catholicism in *Un Cas de conscience* by judging the actions of the Marquise de Blairey, as Schopp points out: ‘Cette figure [...] est une façon de poursuivre par la fiction son combat contre le catholicisme ultramontain réactionnaire’.<sup>32</sup> Rather than fulfilling her Christian duties, the marquise is interested only in material benefits for the Church, in prestige and power:

Mon amour-propre [de la marquise de Blairey] s’épanouissait [...] chaque fois que je touchais pour mes chers catholiques l’argent de cette huguenote [Lady Anna] [...] pour la gloire de l’Église, pour les nécessités du Saint-Père, mon espoir était immense.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 62. ‘[R]emorse’; ‘vengeance’.

<sup>26</sup> Schopp, ‘Préface’, p. 21. ‘[N]arrative virtuosity [...] at the service of a deep political commitment’.

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed introduction to Dumas and Italy, see Henri Troyat, *Alexandre Dumas: le cinquième mousquetaire* (Paris: Grasset, 2008), pp. 539–68.

<sup>28</sup> Alexandre Dumas, *Causeries* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1860), pp. 257–58. ‘[T]he apostle of universal liberty [...] received from Providence the mission to watch over the people’s awakening’.

<sup>29</sup> Dumas, *Un Cas de conscience*, p. 24. ‘[M]essiah of freedom’.

<sup>30</sup> Dumas, *Le Pape devant les Evangiles, l’histoire et la raison humaine*, ed. by A. Craig Bell (Villers-Cotterêts: Ressouvenances, 2009), p. 192; p. 107. ‘[L]iberty against tyranny’; ‘Garibaldi said: the pope is the anti-Christ. [...] Was Garibaldi not right?’

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 180–81. ‘In the eyes of reason and progress of philosophy [...] it is nowadays an inconceivable and monstrous paradox to see a sovereign being temporal and spiritual judge at the same time’.

<sup>32</sup> Schopp, ‘Préface’, p. 14. ‘This character [...] is a way to pursue through fiction his fight against ultramontane reactionary Catholicism’.

<sup>33</sup> Dumas, *Un Cas de conscience*, p. 91. ‘[M]y [the Marquise de Blairey’s] self-respect grew [...] every time I was able to use the Huguenot’s [Lady Anna’s] money for my dear Catholics, for the glory of the

Dumas thereby reveals the hypocrisy of the reactionary ultramontane French Catholics. Yet, as I will show in the second part of this paper, Dumas's anti-clerical, secular points of view do not necessarily imply that he has abandoned faith.

### Intertwining the secular with the sacred

If *Un Cas de conscience* epitomizes the major tensions between sacred and secular forces during the Second Empire, the novella also shows how the secular and the sacred can harmoniously converge. Indeed, although Dumas clearly rejects the Catholic view of the sacred, the author subtly intertwines secular thoughts with new sacred values.

A close reading of a passage in *Un Cas de conscience* sheds light on Dumas's understanding of the sacred and the secular. When Dumas, the narrator figure, explains that a priest gave him a manuscript concerning the truth of Mustang's fate, he also mentions that the priest left him the choice to read it either in a Voltairean armchair in a drawing room or in a garden under an arbour of clematis and jasmine:<sup>34</sup>

L'abbé Marsolier [...] me laiss[a] le choix de le lire [le manuscrit] soit au salon [...] dans un grand fauteuil à la Voltaire, soit dans le jardin sous une tonnelle de clématite et de jasmin. Je préférâi la clématite, le jasmin, la tonnelle et surtout le grand air; je descendis et m'installai dans un de ces ustensiles de jardin qui sont à la fois des fauteuils et des balançoires.<sup>35</sup>

This choice between the armchair of Voltaire and the garden with climbing plants can be considered as two different readings of the manuscript: that is to say, a secularized one (Voltaire) versus a religious one (the climbing plants). Voltaire can certainly be considered as an Enlightenment thinker traditionally associated with secularism (he rejects, for example, formalized religion and aims for religious tolerance). Equally clematis and jasmine are both linked to Christianity. Clematis, on the one hand, evokes the Latin word *clamans*, which recalls the voice of the Saint John the Baptist crying in the wilderness (*vox clamantis in deserto*).<sup>36</sup> The jasmine, on the other hand, is associated with the Virgin Mary, as the flowers blossom in May, the month devoted to her. Its whiteness indicates her purity and innocence.<sup>37</sup>

At first glance, Dumas might seem to opt for an orthodox reading, as he decides to read the manuscript in the garden with climbing plants. Nonetheless,

Church, for the necessities of the Holy Father, my hope was immense'.

<sup>34</sup> Dumas often stages himself in his fictional work. See Daniel Desormeaux, *Alexandre Dumas, fabrique d'immortalité* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014), pp. 113–41.

<sup>35</sup> Dumas, *Un Cas de conscience*, p. 40. 'The priest Marsolier [...] [left] me the choice to read it [the manuscript] in the drawing room, [...] in a huge Voltairean armchair or to read it in a garden under an arbour with clematis and jasmine. I preferred the clematis, the jasmine, the arbour and above all the fresh air; I descended and installed myself in one of these garden tools that are armchairs and swings at the same time'.

<sup>36</sup> John 1. 22–23.

<sup>37</sup> Lucia Impelluso, *Nature and Its Symbols* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004), p. 101.

I argue that a close reading of the fragment shows a remarkable degree of secularization. The focus on the climbing plants shifts towards the fresh air and then ends with a second armchair: 'Je préférerais la clématite, le jasmin, la tonnelle et surtout le grand air; je descendis et m'installai dans un de ces ustensiles de jardin qui sont à la fois des fauteuils et des balançoires'.<sup>38</sup> This armchair in the garden is undoubtedly an implicit reference to the armchair of Voltaire. How can we interpret this shift from the climbing plants to the fresh air? And why does Dumas abandon the first Voltairean armchair, only to retrieve it in the fresh air? There are several steps we must take to answer this question.

I believe that the shift from the climbing plants to the fresh air draws upon a shift from Christian (revealed) religion to natural religion. As I have already mentioned, Dumas's *Un Cas de conscience* can be considered as a plea against ultramontane Catholicism. Unlike Catholic dogma, natural religion relies on the conviction that the existence of God can be understood through the observation of nature and reason: it returns to a simple common truth with universal principles, a truth that does not depend on external ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, for Dumas, the adoration of God draws upon an inner attitude, as evidenced by his *Mémoires*: 'je me suis toujours senti, en dehors des pratiques extérieures, un sentiment profondément religieux [...]. Je ne fus point l'homme de la pratique religieuse'.<sup>40</sup>

Several utterances in his *Mémoires* indicate that Dumas's natural religion takes the form of Providential Deism. As Taylor states, Providential Deism is based on the idea that God has no further purposes in his creation beyond the simple realization of his plan, which means that we owe him 'essentially the achievement of our own good'.<sup>41</sup> Dumas represents God as an architect of the universe who has created the natural order for our benefit: 'toutes les choses créées [...] doivent contribuer au bien-être de l'homme, au bonheur de l'humanité'.<sup>42</sup> And in *La San Félice* (*The San Felice*) he emphasizes the human need to flourish in order to fulfil God's plan, which implies that reason and religion are in harmony:

Dieu, en douant l'homme d'intelligence et en lui laissant libre arbitre, l'a chargé incontestablement de cette grande et sainte mission de s'améliorer [...] afin qu'il arrivât au seul résultat qui donne aux nations la conscience de leur grandeur, c'est-à-dire à la liberté et à la lumière.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Dumas, *Un Cas de conscience*, p. 40. 'I preferred the clematis, the jasmine, the arbour and above all the fresh air; I descended and installed myself in one of these garden tools that are armchairs and swings at the same time'.

<sup>39</sup> See Jacqueline Lagrée, *La Religion naturelle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991).

<sup>40</sup> Alexandre Dumas, *Mes Mémoires* (Paris: Robert Lafont, 1989), pp. 236–39. 'I have always felt deeply religious, apart from external observances [...] I was not the type of man to practise religion', Alexandre Dumas, *My Memoirs, Vol. I*, (London: Methuen & Company, 1821), pp. 349–54.

<sup>41</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 222.

<sup>42</sup> Dumas, *Mémoires*, p. 552. '[A]ll created things [...] are meant to contribute to the well-being of humans, to the happiness of humanity'.

<sup>43</sup> Alexandre Dumas, *La San Félice* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 1138. 'By endowing man with

I argue that the idea that God created the universe for man's happiness and well-being might also elucidate Dumas's use of the word 'ustensiles de jardin'.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the word *ustensiles* is linked to the concept of utilitarianism (< *utilitas*), both derived from the verb *uti* ('make use of'). In this way, the word *ustensiles* is associated with the idea that human actions should maximize utility, that is, happiness and well-being.

We return now to where it all began: the Voltairean armchair. One should bear in mind that the first armchair stands in a drawing room: 'L'abbé Marsolier [...] me laiss[a] le choix de le [le manuscrit] lire [...] au salon'.<sup>45</sup> This drawing room ('le salon') recalls undoubtedly the secularized setting of Garibaldi's confession, the exclusive gathering of aristocratic ladies in the salon. Thus, Dumas abandons an entirely secularized setting (the drawing room with Voltaire's armchair) in favor of a pure religious setting (the fresh air) freed from its orthodox connotations (in the shift away from the clematis and the jasmine). This pure religious setting (natural religion), however, is compatible with secularized ideas (the second armchair of Voltaire, the garden tools or *ustensiles*): it takes the form of Providential Deism.<sup>46</sup>

This strange union of secular, humanitarian ideas and spiritual reflections in *Un Cas de conscience* can be retraced in several texts of French Romantic writers. In his *Le Sacre de l'écrivain* (*The Consecration of the Writer*), Bénichou shows how the Romantic era created the figure of a secular spiritual authority assumed by the poet as a response to a spiritual vacuum left behind in the wake of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, tending in this way to dispossess 'l'Eglise traditionnelle au profit d'une autorité laïque'.<sup>47</sup> Born out of a paradoxical synthesis between Enlightenment progressivism (secular tendencies) and the counter-revolution (religious revival) at the end of the Restoration (1830), the figure of the poet-thinker claimed to be endowed with a 'quasi-divine capacity to understand and guide humanity'.<sup>48</sup> Possessing 'une inspiration d'en haut', he was able to offer an authentic form of human spirituality outside formalized religion, while remaining compatible with

intelligence and by leaving him free will, God has unquestionably charged him with this great and holy mission of improving himself [...] so that he may arrive at the only result which gives the nations the consciousness of their greatness, that is, liberty and light'.

<sup>44</sup> Dumas, *Un Cas de conscience*, p. 40. '[G]arden tools'.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 'The priest Marsolier [...] [left] me the choice to read it [the manuscript] in the drawing room'.

<sup>46</sup> This might also better explain the link with Voltaire. Although Voltaire expresses a lot of secularized ideas, he also refuses an entire abnegation of God. Indeed, Voltaire is known to be a Deist. See Paul Pelckmans, 'Une âme naturellement chrétienne? A propos de l'article "Providence"', *Cahiers Voltaire, Société Voltaire*, 6 (2007), 165-71.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Bénichou, *Le Sacre de l'écrivain, 1750-1830. Essai sur l'avènement d'un pouvoir spirituel laïque dans la France moderne* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1973), p. 473. '[T]he traditional church to the benefit of secular authority', Mark K. Jensen, *The Consecration of the Writer, 1750-1830* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), p. 341.

<sup>48</sup> Cited in Mark K. Jensen, *The Difficult Ideal of Paul Bénichou: An Interpretative Essay, Part III* <<https://community.plu.edu/~jensenmk/Bénichoudiff3.html>> [accessed 15 August 2018].

Enlightenment philosophy.<sup>49</sup> In short, the Romantic poet-thinker was ‘un inspiré porteur des lumières modernes en même temps que de mystère’.<sup>50</sup>

Like Lamartine, Hugo and Vigny, Dumas belongs to the great Romantic prophetic poet-thinkers — he is, as Prévost rightly points out, ‘le grand absent de la somme critique de Paul Bénichou’.<sup>51</sup> As in his other texts on the Italian Unification, Dumas professes in *Un Cas de conscience* the typical progressive, humanitarian *credo* of Romanticism. Seeing God as the source of human flourishing (Providential Deism), Dumas diffuses the widespread, optimistic Romantic belief in a Progress (the secular) guided by Providence (the sacred): both Garibaldi (the Messiah) and his adept Mustang (the finger of God) are represented as elected subjects realizing Providence’s plan of Progress (that is to say, the liberation of Italy — and France — from reactionary politics and ultramontanism). If several French Romantic writers turned to pessimism after 1848, Dumas did not cease to believe in the writer’s divine mission to guide humanity in its fight for liberty against tyranny. Indeed, *Un Cas de conscience* emblemizes the revolt of the writer against the anti-modern, ultramontane Church that regained its official spiritual authority during the French Second Empire. Yet, the novella does not praise the anti-clerical, positivist Republicans of the 1860s either: it glorifies an anti-clerical Garibaldi with spiritual features. Hence, *Un Cas de conscience* incarnates the great Romantic paradox. Refusing both a sacred view offered by the priest as well as an entirely disenchanting view offered by the philosopher, Dumas transcends, like most French Romantic writers, the classical dichotomy: he refuses spirituality without a body and materialism without a spirit.

<sup>49</sup> Bénichou, *Le Sacre de l'écrivain*, p. 469. ‘[A]n inspiration from on high’, Jensen, *The Consecration of the Writer*, p. 338.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 470. ‘[A]n inspired bearer of modern Enlightenment as well as of mystery’, Jensen, *The Consecration of the Writer*, p. 338.

<sup>51</sup> Prévost, *Alexandre Dumas mythographe et mythologue*, p. 229. ‘[T]he most notable absentee of Paul Bénichou’s critical list’.