

Jane de La Vaudère and Maupassant: A New Appreciation of Plagiarism

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The highly prolific *fin-de-siècle* author Jane de La Vaudère (1857-1908) signed her name to over thirty novels and multiple short story collections, yet was denounced by the press as a plagiarist at various moments in her writing career. Shortly following the publication of her novel *Le sang* in 1898, a revolted Han Ryner wrote, “. . . j’ai sous la main *le [sic] Sang*, nouveau recueil de phrases de Barbey d’Aurevilly et de Guy de Maupassant, mises en désordre, rendues incorrectes et salies par les soins de Jane de La Vaudère” (251). Similarly, Georges Maurevert’s *Le livre des plagiats* (1922), a registry of literary forgers, includes a reference to the “aimable bas-bleu” whose serial novel *La belle Émilienne* (1901) bears undeniable traces of Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (300). Furthermore, as Patrick Chadoqueau has more recently brought to our attention, an 1897 issue of the literary periodical *La Province nouvelle* documented, not without irony, a few “curieuses coïncidences” (69; emphasis in original) between Maupassant’s novel *Notre cœur* (1890) and La Vaudère’s *Les demi-sexes* (1897). Although these references signal an intermittent pattern of doubt regarding La Vaudère’s originality, they offer little commentary on the aesthetic implications of her plagiarism. In fact, with the exception of Jean de Palacio, who has studied in detail Huysmans’ influence on La Vaudère and other authors, few scholars have yet to acknowledge and examine the role of borrowing in La Vaudère’s *œuvre*, despite the recent attention that her works have drawn among nineteenth-century specialists.¹ Given this new interest in recovering her previously forgotten work, a more in-depth study of the circumstances of La Vaudère’s plagiarism would contextualize her writing among other texts of the *fin de siècle*. More specifically, close, comparative readings of selected passages from her *Les demi-sexes* and Maupassant’s *Notre cœur* can inform our understanding of how this woman author of Decadent literature engaged with—at times

¹ Relatively widely read at the turn of the century and translated throughout Europe, La Vaudère has recently elicited renewed attention from Decadent and Naturalist scholars alike, many of whom share a particular interest in the intersecting role of medicine and sexual difference in her works. For example, in her discussion of medical and matrimonial discourses in *fin-de-siècle* fiction, Rachel Mesch examines the morally ambivalent portrayal of the doctor in *Les demi-sexes*. Similarly, Peter Cryle considers the representation of the spasm in a selection of her novels, while Guy Ducrey explores how La Vaudère’s graphic depictions of blood contribute to Naturalist and Decadent aesthetics.

subversively—male-authored fiction of her time and its discursive preoccupation with malevolent femininity. Instead of dismissing La Vaudère's various works as mere products of plagiarism, this study proposes a comparative analysis that recognizes them as innovative sites for rewriting one-dimensional models of womanhood to privilege female subjectivity.

At a cursory glance, there is no question that La Vaudère liberally copied from other works and reproduced multiple passages in her writing. Whereas *La Province nouvelle* links only four passages from *Les demi-sexes* to corresponding moments in *Notre cœur* ("De ci, de là" 204), a more thorough comparison of the two works reveals this to be a gross underestimate. In fact, a myriad of passages were reproduced from Maupassant's novel, and numerous descriptions of her protagonist's Sicilian honeymoon were lifted from his travel memoirs, "La Sicile" (1886) and "La côte italienne" (1890).² While these plagiarized depictions of the Mediterranean landscape deserve consideration, La Vaudère's continued borrowing of lengthy passages from *Notre cœur* is of particular interest to this discussion, for it provides an opportunity to examine how two similarly themed novels enter into dialogue.³ Though ostensibly contradictory at times, both of these novels resort to conventional discourses on femininity and sexual difference that characterize many Decadent and Naturalist works of the period. *Notre cœur* centers on André Mariolle's unrequited and frustrating relationship with Mme de Burne, an enigmatic and seductive widow whose character draws upon the clichéd figures of the narcissistic *femme fatale* and frigid lesbian. Like many contemporary works of fiction, the novel traces the male protagonist's emotional and psychological devastation at the hands of a merciless mistress.⁴ Ironically, in light of this hackneyed model of femininity, *Notre cœur* is in many ways the less original of the two texts. By contrast, the complicated and contradictory *Les demi-sexes* documents the aftermath of Camille de Luzac's *ovariotomie*, a clandestine procedure that allows her to embark upon a quest for sexual fulfillment that would otherwise be hindered by a looming fear of pregnancy.⁵ Despite the novel's apparent feminist assertion of sexual freedom and rejection of normative, procreative gender roles, Camille falls madly in love, marries, and ultimately deeply regrets her fateful decision. She and her coterie of "demi-sexes" are eventually punished by death or imprisonment, and the novel concludes with an emphatic and seemingly contradictory return to moral and sexual

² To my knowledge, there is no concrete evidence that La Vaudère and Maupassant were ever in contact with one another. However, it is worth noting that both writers published various works with Ollendorff, including *Notre cœur* and *Les demi-sexes*, and it is likely that their paths crossed before Maupassant's death in 1893. Most curious, perhaps, is that no editor at Ollendorff denounced the similarities between the two novels. I wish to thank Marlo Johnston for her gracious correspondence and help with this matter.

³ Given the far reach of La Vaudère's plagiarism, it is my hope that this study will encourage the continued examination of her critical engagement with other nineteenth-century texts, including Maupassant's travel memoirs.

⁴ Examples of similarly themed novels from the period include Émile Zola's *Nana* (1880), Catulle Mendès's *La première maîtresse* (1887), Pierre Louÿs's *La femme et le pantin* (1898), and Octave Mirbeau's *Le jardin des supplices* (1899), to name just a few. For an extremely detailed account of the figure of the *femme fatale* in late nineteenth-century fiction, see Mireille Dottin-Orsini's *Cette femme qu'ils disent fatale*.

⁵ As Michael Finn notes, "ovariotomie" was the term commonly used by the French medical community to refer to the removal of a woman's ovaries (27).

order. The narrative vacillates between this initial declaration of female sexual agency and its imminent promotion of conservative doctrines advocating marriage and maternity.

The thematic similarities between the novels are palpable. In both texts, Maupassant and La Vaudère privilege discourses on normative sexual difference that demonize non-procreative femininity. However, La Vaudère's plagiarism complicates those parallels. Granted, many of her pivotal passages on feminine subjectivity and sexuality are taken from Maupassant's most vehement portrayals of female sexual malevolence. At first glance, these male-authored, misogynist conceptions of femininity seemingly shape La Vaudère's novel about female sexual emancipation and its consequences. However, a closer comparative analysis, particularly a dialogic one, reveals a far more nuanced understanding of Maupassant's discursive contributions to La Vaudère's work—and vice versa. As a result, such a reading can inform our understanding of the ostensibly contradictory and somewhat puzzling shift in moral tone of *Les demi-sexes*. While the passages common to both novels are abundant, a closer look at a selection of moments brings to light the discursive relationship between the two texts. More precisely, these comparisons seek to expose La Vaudère's subtle yet subversive reappropriation of *Notre cœur*'s underlying warnings against the malevolence of modern femininity.

Plagiarism is a sticky subject, tied to perpetually evolving legal, cultural, and aesthetic understandings of authorship and intellectual property.⁶ In her compelling study on the literary and cultural implications of plagiarism, Hélène Maurel-Indart underscores the inevitable interconnectedness of literary production. "Le livre ne vient jamais seul," she notes. "Le langage littéraire est dialogue de langages... Écrire, c'est réécrire" (203). Inspired by the postmodern notions of *bricolage* and intertextuality, Maurel-Indart's emphasis on an infinite network of textual and discursive interchange provides a framework that privileges literary exchange and reciprocity over ethical questions and criteria for authorship. For the purpose of this study, postmodernist approaches to plagiarism offer the possibility of considering so-called stolen texts as distinct products of literary creation that are in active and continuous relation to their predecessors. Such positions view contemporary notions of originality and authorship—and plagiarism—as fluid and in constant negotiation with aesthetic and cultural influences. Recognizing plagiarism as a cultural construct challenges the notion of solitary and exclusive authorship, thereby leaving room for an interrogation of the relationship between texts.⁷

A relational approach to La Vaudère's plagiarism is a useful strategy for feminist scholarship seeking to contextualize her contributions to Decadent portrayals of

⁶ Notions of authors' rights continually evolved throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as evidenced by the numerous legislative developments that addressed intellectual property and literary reproduction. The revolutionary law of 1791, for example, specifically granted playwrights property rights over the theatrical representation of their works. In 1793, the Convention expanded the law to include the reproduction of texts appearing in print and increased the duration of protection from five to ten years after the author's death. Throughout the nineteenth century, these groundbreaking laws continued to evolve, and by 1866, authors' rights were protected for fifty years postmortem. In 1886, shortly before the publication of *Notre cœur*, France signed the Berne Convention, an international copyright agreement recognizing authors' rights in all signatory countries (a total of 168 today). For a detailed account of the legal history of authors' rights in France since the fifteenth century, see Anne Latournerie.

⁷ For a compelling anthology of essays on postmodern approaches to plagiarism across the disciplines, see Lise Buranen and Alice M. Roy, *Perspectives on Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Postmodern World*.

malevolent femininity. As Debora Halbert argues, a postmodern feminist framework for understanding plagiarism is also valuable in that it may consider the “copying” of a male-authored text as a subversive act of appropriation (111). This methodology exposes the ways in which the new, often disputed work, actually calls for an interrogation of the original. More specifically, such conceptualizations of originality and authorship enlighten our understanding of La Vaudère’s contributions to nineteenth-century literature. Instead of approaching *Les demi-sexes* as a novel of plagiarism, we may approach it as a response to *Notre cœur* and contemplate the ways in which the two novels build off each other. A close and comparative study of various passages from *Les demi-sexes* and *Notre cœur* demonstrates how La Vaudère’s plagiarism is, paradoxically, a tool for literary creation and reimagining a Decadent model of femininity.

Malevolent Female Sexuality

In order to fully contextualize La Vaudère’s engagement with the themes of *Notre cœur*, we must first consider Maupassant’s unforgiving portrayal of malevolent femininity. At the core of his novel is a lamentation about the modern woman. Among the many stock characters that form Mme de Burne’s loyal entourage of suitors, writer Gaston de Lamarthe best embodies this deep regret for the femininity of earlier times. A “romancier . . . psychologue,” Lamarthe is particularly interested in “les détraquées contemporaines” that make up “cette race nouvelle de femmes agitées par des nerfs d’hystériques raisonnables” (59). An obvious *porte-parole* for Maupassant, Lamarthe classifies Mme de Burne within this new category of women. He warns Mariolle of her break from traditional femininity and from “les femmes d’autrefois, les femmes à âme, les femmes à cœur, les femmes à sensibilité, les femmes des romans passés” (76). Through a striking *mise en abîme*, Lamarthe’s meditation on evolving ideals of womanhood extends to the realm of literature. In evoking a shift in contemporary fictional representations of femininity, he draws attention to Mme de Burne, whose very name (slang for “testicle”) confirms the trend.⁸ Perhaps she is a forerunner to La Vaudère’s “half-sexed”—that is, sterilized—women? For what Lamarthe and Maupassant bemoan most about the modern woman is her rejection of conventional doctrines of marriage and procreation. Gesturing toward Mme de Burne and her female peers, Lamarthe explains to Mariolle, “Non, ce ne sont pas des femmes. . . . Voyez-vous, mon cher, la femme n’est créée et venue en ce monde que pour deux choses. . . : l’amour et l’enfant. . . . Or celles-ci sont incapables d’amour, et elles ne veulent pas d’enfants. . . . En vérité, ce sont des monstres” (160). This conflation of modern womanhood with the refusal of reproductive responsibilities provides a provocative backdrop for La Vaudère’s novel about sterilized women at the *fin de siècle*. In that regard, her barren “demi-sexes” are the inevitable end result of this regressive form of femininity, imminent mutations and descendants of Mme de Burne. Though La Vaudère likely plagiarized various texts throughout her career, the fact that she borrowed from a work that overtly disparages

⁸ Mme de Burne recalls the figure of the New Woman, or *femme nouvelle*, a popular trope at the turn of the century. Ubiquitous in the Belle Époque imagination, the masculinized New Woman was ridiculed for her rejection of conventional gender norms and rebellion against the duties of marriage and motherhood. For a detailed study on the New Woman, see Mary Louise Roberts’ *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France*.

non-reproductive femininity in her writing about *ovariotomies* must not be dismissed as arbitrary. Instead, those thematic parallels suggest the possibility of an active exchange between the two novels, in which La Vaudère privileges the complexities of female subjectivity. In so doing, as we shall see, this relational perspective problematizes La Vaudère's final denunciation of sterilized women and positions her work as a subversive reaction to Maupassant's original vision of femininity.

In the early pages of his novel, Maupassant introduces Mme de Burne's character with an emphasis on her predatory drive. Nearly verbatim, La Vaudère draws upon this clichéd portrayal of feminine malevolence in *Les demi-sexes*. There Nina, the unscrupulous lesbian figure and scheming ringleader of the "demi-sexes,"⁹ appears to have been modeled from Mme de Burne, as evidenced in the way that she presents herself to protagonist Camille:

Notre cœur:

Mais surtout [Mme de Burne] était née coquette ; et, dès qu'elle se sentit libre dans l'existence, elle se mit à poursuivre et à dompter les amoureux, comme le chasseur poursuit le gibier, rien que pour les voir tomber. Son cœur cependant n'était point avide d'émotions comme celui des femmes tendres et sentimentales ; elle ne recherchait point l'amour unique d'un homme ni le bonheur dans une passion. Il lui fallait seulement autour d'elle l'admiration de tous, des hommages, des agenouillements, un encensement de tendresse... Elle les gouvernait avec une adresse savante, suivant leurs défauts et leurs qualités et la nature de leur jalousie. (80-81)

Les demi-sexes:

Je suis née méchante ; j'aime à poursuivre et à dompter des êtres humains, comme le chasseur poursuit des bêtes, rien que pour les voir tomber ! Mon âme est violente et point avide d'émotions comme celle des femmes tendres et sentimentales. Je dédaigne l'amour unique d'un homme et la satisfaction dans une passion. Je veux l'admiration de tous, les hommages, les agenouillements, les soumissions et les prières devant l'autel de ma beauté... Je gouverne avec une adresse savante, suivant les défauts, les qualités, la nature des jalousies, et je reste, au moral, indifférente et glacée. (190-91)

Like Maupassant's character, Nina possesses many of the typical qualities of the *femme fatale*. Not surprisingly, her dangerous influence extends to many of the women in her entourage whom she repeatedly convinces to be sterilized. La Vaudère's reproduction of these passages, however, does not perpetuate such masculine discourses about malicious femininity, but instead allows her to subtly modify those demonizing representations. For example, as a closer look at this amorous *tête-à-tête* reveals, Nina also encourages the newly sterilized Camille to take full advantage of her seductive powers over her vulnerable suitors:

⁹ On the hackneyed figure of the monstrous and malicious lesbian in nineteenth-century French literature, see Jennifer Waelti-Walters. For a comprehensive study of lesbianism in Decadent fiction, see Nicole G. Albert. More recently, though focused solely on male authors, Gretchen Schultz's *Sapphic Fathers* provides a compelling discussion of the literary and medical discourses of lesbianism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Notre cœur:

Elle avait fait naître si souvent, avec une adresse féline et une curiosité inépuisable, ce mal secret et torturant dans les yeux de tous les hommes qu'elle avait pu séduire ! Cela l'amusait tant de les sentir envahis peu à peu, conquis, dominés par sa puissance invincible de femme, de devenir pour eux l'Unique, l'Idole capricieuse et souveraine ! Cela avait poussé en elle tout doucement, comme un instinct caché qui se développe, l'instinct de la guerre et de la conquête. (80)

Les demi-sexes:

... tu sais faire naître, avec une adresse féline et une curiosité inépuisable, le mal secret et torturant dans les yeux de tous ceux que tu veux séduire ; tu ne crains rien et tu méprises les plus redoutables !... Si tu savais comme cela m'amuse de sentir tous ces beaux messieurs envahis, conquis, dominés par ma puissance invincible ; de devenir pour eux l'unique idole capricieuse et souveraine !... Et puis, est-ce que nous n'avons pas toutes cet instinct secret qui pousse en nous doucement et se développe : l'instinct de la guerre et de la conquête ? (189-90)

Whereas Maupassant's description focuses solely on Mme de Burne's one-dimensional cruelty and vanity, Nina's monologue takes a feminist turn, as La Vaudère amends her predecessor's text with a rallying cry for sexual equality. "Seulement, nous sommes désarmées par la nature et le mâle brutal a sur nous le droit du plus fort..." Nina pontificates. "N'est-ce donc rien, ma chérie, de pouvoir traiter, enfin, d'égal à égal et d'en avoir fini avec toutes les misères de notre sexe ?" (190). For Nina, voluntary sterilization is a gesture toward sexual autonomy and a refusal of what she sees as the tragic destiny of motherhood: "... je ne me révolte pas seulement contre l'humanité, mais contre la nature qui nous a donné toutes les souffrances, toutes les peines, tous les châtements, sans nulle compensation, sans nulle joie réelle..." (193). Maupassant's modern (predatory) woman refuses motherhood because she is a "monstre" (160); La Vaudère's does so because it is the embodiment of a tragic inequality. Though clearly inspired by Mme de Burne, Nina articulates what Maupassant's enigmatic character cannot: the principles and motivations behind her unconventional lifestyle.

But Nina is far from blameless. At the novel's conclusion, readers learn of her suspicious financial arrangement with the surgeon, and her feminist ideals are quickly eclipsed by her self-interest and manipulation. Certainly, in this context, Nina's predatory character is a familiar cliché of Decadent and Naturalist fiction, and her death in the final pages reads as fitting punishment for her moral and sexual corruption of her female peers. However, when considered against Maupassant's original descriptions of Mme de Burne, Nina's character demonstrates an added dimension that complicates her apparent demonization. La Vaudère thus transforms the enigmatic and indifferent Mme de Burne into a champion of sexual emancipation who, though eliminated at the novel's conclusion, provides a noteworthy feminist element to the novel that can be more fully appreciated through textual comparison. In other words, it is by way of La Vaudère's plagiarism that we gain access to a new and complicated vision of both Nina and the novel's final pages.

Female Romantic Subjectivity

Similarly, a comparison of the two novels also brings to light the many ways in which La Vaudère deviates from her predecessor to value female sexual subjectivity. While *Les demi-sexes* addresses the possibilities of female sexual pleasure and autonomy, much of Mme de

Burne's mystification lies in her seeming disinterest in her sexual encounters with Mariolle. Perplexed and disheartened, the protagonist ponders her unresponsiveness against his own understanding of the apparent stages of female sexual experience. "Comment n'avait-elle pas eu au moins cette période d'entraînement qui succède chez presque toutes les femmes à l'abandon volontaire et désintéressé de leur corps? Elle est courte souvent, suivie par la fatigue et puis par le dégoût. Mais il est si rare qu'elle n'existe pas du tout, pas une heure, pas un jour!" (179). Mme de Burne's break from such formulaic notions of female sexuality is the veritable source of her perceived cruelty. Her inability to confirm and conform to Mariolle's perception of feminine subjectivity is the foundation of her enigma and the driving force of the novel's plot. La Vaudère's text, by contrast, begins as a celebration of female sexual independence from similar discourses that aim to define—and confine—female sexual experiences. Though the novel eventually concludes with an unequivocal condemnation of these non-procreative women, La Vaudère's preoccupation with sexual emancipation and unique appropriation of corresponding passages from *Notre cœur* betray an engagement with masculine discourses on female sexuality. In that light, reading the pivotal passages that follow against Maupassant's originals offers insight into the conflicting doctrines of sexual emancipation and marital duties in *Les demi-sexes*. Instead of reducing the novel's final message to a contradictory promotion of normative gender roles, La Vaudère's plagiarism reveals a complicated rewriting of conservative male-authored discourses on femininity, sexual difference, and sexual fulfillment.

For example, in one particular passage in *Les demi-sexes*, La Vaudère borrows from Maupassant to describe the intense sexual connection between Camille and Nina. Maupassant's original passage, however, concerns Mariolle's fervent attachment to Mme de Burne, not lesbianism:

Notre cœur:

Il s'attachait à elle par la caresse, lien redoutable, le plus fort de tous, le seul dont on ne se délivre jamais quand il a bien enlacé et quand il serre jusqu'au sang la chair d'un homme. . . .

Elle venait de trois jours en trois jours, sans résistances, attirée, semblait-il autant par l'amusement de ce rendez-vous, par le charme de la petite maison devenue une serre de fleurs rares, et par la nouveauté de cette vie d'amour, à peine dangereuse, puisque personne n'avait le droit de la suivre, mais pleine de mystère cependant, que séduite par la tendresse prosternée et grandissante de son amant. (148-49)

Les demi-sexes:

Elle s'attachait à elle par la caresse, lien redoutable, le plus fort de tous, le seul dont on ne se délivre jamais quand il a bien enlacé et quand il serre jusqu'au sang la chair d'une femme.

Camille allait chez Nina régulièrement, sans résistance, attirée, semblait-il, autant par l'amusement de ces rendez-vous, par le charme du petit rez-de-chaussée discret devenu une serre de fleurs rares que par l'habitude de cette vie coupable, à peine dangereuse, puisque chacun avait intérêt à se taire. C'était encore auprès de madame Saurel qu'elle avait goûté les joies les plus vives, et, de toutes ses folies, aucune ne lui avait laissé une impression aussi durable. (194-95)

The most notable difference between these two passages is *Les demi-sexes's* privileging of the female perspective. While Maupassant's passage opens with a discussion of the powers that the feminine touch ("lien redoutable") holds on a man, La Vaudère subversively reappropriates those details by shifting the focus to female subjectivity ("quand il [le lien

redoutable] serre jusqu'au sang la chair *d'une femme*"). In addition, though Maupassant offers a rare glimpse into Mme de Burne's motives for continuing her visits with Mariolle, La Vaudère takes this one step further to include details about Camille's momentous sexual awakening with Nina. La Vaudère thus rewrites masculine discourses on female sexuality to value the female subjective experience, and in that case, one that excludes men: lesbianism.

In Maupassant's text, Mariolle's suffering and desperation revolves around Mme de Burne's emotional and physical frigidity. As Lamarthe laments, modern women such as Mme de Burne are "incapables d'amour" (160) and abandon conventional romantic doctrines of marriage and family for a lifestyle of autonomy and sentimental impenetrability. Mariolle is the victim of this new form of femininity, and in a moment of great anguish, he reflects on the physical and emotional transformation that he has undergone since meeting Mme de Burne. Mourning his loss of free will and rational thinking, Mariolle presents his victimhood in opposition to Mme de Burne's cruel authority. The corresponding passage in *Les demi-sexes*, however, does not adhere to such typical *fin-de-siècle* discourses on feminine malevolence. In La Vaudère's episode, Camille similarly contemplates her physical and emotional transformation upon meeting her husband, artist Georges Darvy. However, unlike with Mariolle, the looming menace to this love is not malicious femininity. Instead, Camille's adversary is the jealous and possessive Philippe de Talberg and his unrelenting threats to reveal her sterilization to the unknowing Georges. La Vaudère underscores Camille's profound love for her husband and her emotional vulnerability in the face of Philippe's blackmail:

Notre cœur:

Ses jambes ne le soutenaient plus, défaillantes de faiblesse; son cœur battait; tout son corps semblait meurtri par une inconcevable courbature...

Il se disait: « Je n'avais jamais subi d'entraînement... [J]'ai plus de jugement que d'instinct, de curiosités que d'appétits, de fantaisie que de persévérance... J'ai aimé les choses de la vie sans m'y attacher jamais beaucoup, avec des sens d'expert qui savoure et ne se grise point, qui comprend trop pour perdre la tête. Je raisonne tout, et j'analyse d'ordinaire trop bien mes goûts pour les subir aveuglément... Et voilà que cette femme s'est imposée à moi, malgré moi, malgré ma peur et ma connaissance d'elle; et elle me possède comme si elle avait cueilli une à une toutes les aspirations diverses qui étaient en moi. [»] (229-30)

Les demi-sexes:

Son âme tressaillait de colère impuissante, ses jambes ne la soutenaient plus, son cœur battait follement, tout son corps semblait meurtri par une inconcevable courbature... Elle se disait: «... Avant de connaître Georges, je n'avais subi aucun entraînement; je n'avais que des instincts, des curiosités et des appétits;... Mes sens savouraient sans se griser jamais; je comprenais trop pour perdre la tête, je raisonnais et j'analysais trop bien mes goûts pour les subir aveuglément. Et voilà que cet homme [Philippe] qui me menace aujourd'hui s'est imposé à moi; malgré moi, malgré ma répulsion et ma résistance, il m'a dicté sa volonté et me soumet encore par sa seule présence!... » (252-53)

Though an obvious copying of Maupassant's text, this passage actually distances Camille from the enigmatic and indifferent Mme de Burne, whose cruelty depends on her inability to reciprocate Mariolle's devotion. Instead, readers witness Camille's transformation from an emotionally unresponsive, disinterested seductress to a sensitive and compassionate wife. While Mariolle's anxiety lies with Mme de Burne's amorous incapacities, Camille is troubled here by the intensity of her emotional development with Georges and the threat that Philippe poses to their marriage, a marriage that, given her secret, is doomed to fail. In other words, this copied passage draws parallels between Camille's victimhood and that of the amiable and sympathetic Mariolle. Moving beyond blatant plagiarism, La Vaudère's reproduction of this passage serves as a medium to rewrite masculine discourses that portray the modern woman as cruel and unfeeling to instead focus on female romantic subjectivity.

It is here that La Vaudère's text diverges most significantly from Maupassant's, for unlike the cold-hearted Mme de Burne, Camille's intense attachment to Georges provides a crucial glimpse into her humanity. Although both characters have similar points of departure and have never experienced unconstrained love for any man, their trajectories ultimately differ. Reflecting on her relationship with Mariolle, Mme de Burne admits, "Oui, je l'aime, mais je manque d'élan : c'est la faute de ma nature" (120). Camille, however, is genuinely "capable d'amour" and her emotional vulnerability allows for a narrative shift in the last chapters that privileges her tragic love with Georges (Mesch 99). Longing in vain to have a child with the man whom she married, Camille's ultimate suicide signals her inability to reconcile modern feminist values with a deeper, ultimately stronger, drive for love. This modern woman thus deviates from her cold-hearted self-sufficient predecessor to embody a poignant sentimentality that remains faithful to conventional notions of femininity. La Vaudère's version of modern femininity is not centered on male victimhood, but instead on female experience. In that specific case, focusing on Camille's failed marriage and ensuing death elicits sympathy from readers. The protagonist's love story thus breathes new life into the plotline and serves as a response to Maupassant's *Lamarthe*, who disparages contemporary literature's influence on feminine sensibilities. "Au temps où les romanciers et les poètes les exaltaient et les faisaient rêver," he preaches to Mariolle in another ironic *mise en abîme*, "elles cherchaient et croyaient trouver dans la vie l'équivalent de ce que leur cœur avait pressenti dans leurs lectures. Aujourd'hui, vous vous obstinez à supprimer toutes les apparences poétiques et séduisantes, pour ne montrer que les réalités désillusionnantes. Or, mon cher, plus d'amour dans les livres, plus d'amour dans la vie" (162). The privileging of the romantic storyline in the final chapters of *Les demi-sexes* allows La Vaudère to create a space in which to negotiate the aesthetics of the modern novel and the complexities of the female experience, otherwise bemoaned by Maupassant's *porte-parole*.

Toward a New Understanding of Plagiarism

While contemplating his troubled relationship with Mme de Burne, Mariolle lauds the transparencies of an epistolary correspondence to conclude that "les mots noirs sur le papier blanc, c'est l'âme toute nue" (182). Mariolle is especially interested in Mme de Burne's letters because women, unlike men, are incapable of concealing their true emotional state when they pick up a pen:

L'homme, par des artifices de rhétorique, par des habilités professionnelles, par l'habitude d'employer la plume pour traiter toutes les affaires de la vie, parvient souvent à déguiser sa nature propre dans sa prose impersonnelle, utilitaire ou littéraire. Mais la femme n'écrit guère que pour parler d'elle, et elle met un peu d'elle en chaque mot. Elle ne sait point les ruses du style, et elle se livre tout entière dans l'innocence des expressions. Il se rappela les correspondances et les mémoires des femmes célèbres qu'il avait lus. Comme elles apparaissaient nettement, les précieuses, les spirituelles, et les sensibles ! . . . La femme ne travaille point ses termes : c'est l'émotion directe qui les jette à son esprit ; elle ne fouille pas les dictionnaires. Quand elle sent très fort, elle exprime très juste, sans peine et sans recherche, dans la sincérité mobile de sa nature. (182-83)

His reflections on his personal correspondence with Mme de Burne lead Mariolle to reduce women writers in general as overly sentimental figures who lack the cerebral capacity for critical and creative literary production. These vitriolic comments are particularly striking given La Vaudère's subsequent reliance on *Notre cœur*. Certainly, readers may be tempted to view her copying as evidence of such aesthetic banality. However, this study's close and comparative readings of her plagiarized passages have indicated otherwise. Mariolle's commentary is not an eerie foreshadowing of the circumstances behind *Les demi-sexes*, but instead a reflection of discourses about women writers and sexual difference. Ironically, La Vaudère's novel challenges those ideologies through the so-called plagiaristic act. Indeed, by copying various passages she subsequently creates a space in which to further explore and rework the discursive tensions inherent in both novels.

In her work on plagiarism and pragmatics, Marilyn Randall has argued that acts such as these are examples of "guerilla plagiarism," or ways in which plagiarism serves as an "oppositional stance with respect to prevailing aesthetics, as well as to the political ideologies that support those aesthetics" (221). As we have seen, La Vaudère challenges male-authored, one-dimensional notions of femininity by rewriting and amending various passages in order to privilege female subjectivity. In addition, the comparative study of these two novels has demonstrated how La Vaudère has contributed to literary discourses on womanhood and why she deserves continued scholarly attention. By reappropriating preexisting models of femininity represented in *Notre cœur* and reimagining them with her own feminist twist, she underscores the precariousness and instability of such discourses as they evolve within *fin-de-siècle* fiction. In short, it is through La Vaudère's so-called plagiarism that we witness a work emerge that confronts, in all of its originality, nineteenth-century ideologies about female sexuality, amorous subjectivity, and authorship.

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