

# The *Loterie des Lingots d'or*: Chance, Power, and Social Control in Nineteenth-Century France

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Received: January 23, 2026

Accepted: March 2, 2026

Published: April 11, 2026

doi:10.5296/ijl.v18i2.23709

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v18i2.23709>

## Abstract

This article examines Alexandre Dumas fils's *Histoire de la Loterie depuis la première jusqu'à la dernière* (1851), a largely neglected pamphlet that sheds light on the cultural, social, and political significance of gambling in mid-nineteenth-century France. Written in support of the *Loterie des Lingots d'or*, the text reveals Dumas's complex fascination with money, chance, and easy wealth at the dawn of the Second Empire, a period marked by the growing dominance of financial values. Through historical, mythological, and contemporary examples, Dumas situates the lottery within a long tradition of games of chance, from antiquity to modern Europe. The article argues that the pamphlet is both promotional and prophetic, anticipating the central role of money in modern society and exposing the ambiguities of philanthropy, speculation, and state power. By linking the lottery to the Californian Gold Rush and political strategies of exclusion, Dumas's discourse ultimately presents chance as a governing principle of life itself, encapsulated in his assertion that "everything in this world is a lottery."

**Keywords:** Dumas fils, Pamphlet, Lottery, Discourse, Textual analysis, Second Empire France

## 1. Introduction

Alexandre Dumas fils, widely known to the general public as the author of *La Dame aux camélias*, published *Histoire de la Loterie depuis la première jusqu'à la dernière* in 1851. This short pamphlet, today almost entirely forgotten, nevertheless proves to be far from insignificant. On the contrary, it offers valuable insight into the cultural climate of the mid-nineteenth century and demonstrates, among other things, the extent to which gambling continued to exert a powerful and underestimated influence even during the Romantic period. Far from being a marginal or purely recreational practice, the game of chance appears here as a revealing social phenomenon, deeply intertwined with economic aspirations and collective fantasies.

The immediate pretext for Dumas's text is provided by the public exhibition of gold ingots, a spectacle designed to attract large crowds and to entice them into staking modest sums of money in the hope of sudden enrichment. By transforming gold into a visible and tantalizing object, the event encourages the masses to test their luck, thus blurring the boundary between spectacle, commerce, and illusion. Dumas positions himself explicitly in favor of the lottery and does not conceal his enthusiasm. In the letter of authorization sent to his publisher, he openly declares himself «heureux d'avoir en quelque chose concouru à la publicité d'une loterie que je trouve originale et que je crois utile» (Dumas Fils, 1851, p. 3). This statement leaves little doubt as to his active participation in promoting the initiative.

Indeed, it is no secret that Dumas, as Bernard Vassor bluntly observes, even «vendu sa plume afin d'accréditer cette supercherie» (Vassor, 2011). Such criticism underscores the ambiguity of the author's role, oscillating between intellectual endorsement and commercial complicity. One should not overlook the fact that Dumas fils, much like his father, maintained a particularly complex and dependent relationship with money, largely due to the significant debts he had accumulated over time. In this context, the lottery fascinated him not only as a social phenomenon but also as a personal opportunity, since it evoked the dream of fabulous winnings. The composition of the pamphlet thus became, quite concretely, a source of income, allowing him to settle—at least partially—his numerous financial obligations. More broadly,

Alexandre Dumas fils est l'un des premiers à se rendre compte clairement des changements au sein de la société et de l'importance grandissante de l'argent. En effet, l'argent est le nouvel idole du Second Empire, et le dramaturge le considère avec un sentiment fait de désir, d'admiration, mais aussi de terreur, car sa force démoniaque peut pousser les hommes à accomplir n'importe quel geste, parfois répréhensible (Diglio, *L'éthique...*, 2009, p. 66).

Alexandre Dumas fils was among the first writers to perceive with clarity the profound transformations taking place within society and the growing centrality of money. Under the Second Empire, money emerged as a new idol, commanding admiration and obedience while reshaping social hierarchies and moral values. The playwright regards wealth with a complex mixture of desire and fascination, but also with fear, fully aware of its almost demonic power. Money, in his view, possesses the capacity to drive individuals toward any action whatsoever, including morally questionable or outright reprehensible behaviour. This ambivalence reflects a broader anxiety characteristic of the period, in which economic success increasingly supplanted traditional ideals.

For this reason, on the eve of the advent of the Second Empire, Dumas's text takes on an almost prophetic dimension. By celebrating easy wealth and the seductive mirage of gold, it anticipates the reality that was about to materialize and to shape an entire era: the predominance of money as the ultimate social value. What initially appears as a light or opportunistic reflection on gambling thus becomes a revealing commentary on the ideological foundations of modern capitalism.

The original and ostensibly noble motivation behind the establishment of the lottery - and, consequently, behind Dumas's brief reflections on gambling - was in fact an act of generosity

and philanthropy. The aim was to enable five thousand unemployed gold prospectors to afford passage to California, following John Marshall's discovery of gold there in 1848 (Lemonnier, 1947). In this sense, the lottery presented itself as a collective mechanism of hope and social mobility. The legal guarantor of the enterprise was the prefect of police, Pierre Carlier, who in 1850 identified a location where anyone could participate, test their luck, and potentially obtain a gold ingot without leaving Paris. Acting on behalf of the prefect, Monsieur Langlois rented premises at number 10, rue Montmartre, on the corner with what was then known as the passage Jouffroy. This carefully chosen urban setting further contributed to transforming the lottery into a public spectacle and a powerful symbol of the era's faith in chance, wealth, and rapid success.

## 2. *La Loterie: An Ancient Art*

The existence of the Lottery, originally conceived with a clearly defined and ostensibly noble purpose, proved to be relatively short-lived, lasting no more than three years. Its termination was officially decreed through an act of liquidation carried out by a certain Monsieur Oudin é, thus bringing the enterprise to a definitive close. With this act, the role of Monsieur Langlois also came to an end, having been responsible for managing the game throughout its entire duration. The selection of the lottery's beneficiaries fell instead under the authority of the prefect, whose decisions contributed to the remarkable resonance the initiative enjoyed within Parisian society and, more broadly, across France.

The stakes involved were far from negligible. The first gold ingot offered as a prize was valued at no less than forty thousand francs, a sum sufficiently substantial to capture the public imagination. In order to amplify the symbolic and emotional impact of the operation, the ingot was publicly displayed at the lottery's premises, ensuring maximum visibility and transforming it into an almost familiar object in the eyes of potential players. By rendering the prize tangible and constantly present, the organizers effectively nurtured desire and anticipation, reinforcing the illusion of proximity between the individual and sudden wealth.

These developments took place during a particularly turbulent period in French history, marked by the transition from the Republic of 1848 to the coup d'état of the future Napoleon III. In this unstable political climate, theatres, circuses, and daily newspapers were financially compensated by the prefect of police for agreeing to publicize the lottery. The scale of this media campaign is clearly illustrated by the incipit of Dumas's text: «L'exhibition publique du principal Lingot de la Loterie des Lingots d'or est un de ces événements qui, après avoir excité au plus haut degré la curiosité de la capitale, exercent sur la province une influence toute pareille» (Dumas fils, 1851, p. 3). Through these words, the author emphasizes the national importance of the event and its ability to mobilize collective attention well beyond the capital.

The lottery thus became a true media phenomenon, widely known and discussed, whose philanthropic value was repeatedly emphasized. Thanks to its proceeds, seventeen ships carrying approximately three thousand individuals were able to depart for San Francisco. Vassor, in his article *La loterie des lingots d'or, une escroquerie gouvernementale pour éloigner les quarante-huitards*, points out that Alexandre Dumas fils had sold his pen in order to lend credibility to this hoax, and specifies that there were to be 3,293 of them. After a long,

dangerous, and adventurous journey, these emigrants received a one-time financial allowance before being left to face their uncertain fate. The humanitarian dimension of the enterprise, however fragile or symbolic, served to legitimize the lottery in the public eye and to frame it as an instrument of collective hope.

Dumas is careful to remind his readers that the Lottery was by no means an innovation of the modern era. On the contrary, it was rooted in a long and venerable tradition, as illustrated by his ironic evocation of biblical times:

La Loterie vient de loin: nous ne savons pas si elle a précédé le déluge; mais une vénérable tradition affirme que les fils de Noé, avant de quitter l'arche, ont joué à la mourre, espèce de loterie encore en usage parmi les lazzaroni de Naples (Diglio & Dotoli, 2009, p. 111).

References to antiquity - an intellectual domain that deeply influenced Dumas - abound throughout the text. The author invokes well-known events and figures from classical history in order to substantiate his argument and to demonstrate the universality of chance-based practices. Among these examples is the oracle of Athens, consulted by magistrates upon the arrival of refugees in the city. This episode provides the occasion for a detailed and dramatic description of a ritual governed by fate, a tragic form of lottery imbued with mythological resonance.

In this specific case, the drawing of lots determines the individual who must be sacrificed to the gods to ensure the refugees' acceptance into the city. Yet the narrative takes a decisive turn with the intervention of Macaria, the youngest niece of Hercules. In a gesture worthy of classical tragedy, she chooses to offer herself in place of the designated victim, solemnly requesting the goddess Minerva to accept her sacrifice. Here, the tragic dimension of fatality emerges with particular intensity: the stake is not victory or gain, but death itself, endowed with a redemptive value for an entire community of displaced and stateless individuals. Chance does not ultimately prevail; instead, an act of absolute generosity overturns the logic of hasard, rendering the situation even more profoundly tragic.

Very different tones characterize the Roman context, where, during the Saturnalia, every individual—including slaves—received a ticket, such that «Pour les uns c'était la fortune, pour les autres la liberté, et pour tous l'espérance» (Dumas fils, 1851, p. 5). In this festive inversion of social hierarchies, the lottery becomes a temporary suspension of order and a source of collective expectation. Yet Dumas does not shy away from grotesque and macabre examples either, as in the pirate contexts associated with the fearsome figure of Kahir-Eddin Barbarossa. Here, the lottery becomes a cruel form of entertainment, a pastime through which the pirate leader determines the fate of his captives. Gathering the Christian slaves «dans une salle de son harem et leur faisait distribuer à tous des numéros» (Dumas fils, 1851, p. 6), Barbarossa transforms chance into a spectacle of terror. The “prizes” consist of horrific punishments: decapitation, disembowelment, flaying alive, or being tied to the tail of a galloping horse.

Nevertheless, the form of lottery that most closely resembles the *Loterie des Lingots d'or* is the one practiced in Genoa, which would later give rise to the Italian Lotto and similar games

elsewhere. In the Ligurian city, the lottery is fully institutionalized, as the stake is nothing less than the government of the maritime republic itself. Candidates' names are written on slips of paper and publicly drawn, conferring political power through chance. This practice prompts Dumas to reflect on his own era, which he describes as «si positive, que si l'on instituait des Loteries pour décerner des fonctions publiques à la charge de les exercer gratuitement, elles trouveraient certes moins de souscripteurs que la Loterie des Lingots d'or» (Dumas fils, 1851, p. 6). He refrains from condemning his contemporaries, who would rather possess a gold ingot worth four hundred thousand francs than receive an honorary title. Here, the Californian gold rush recedes into the background, replaced by an explicit critique of modern materialism. Through his pamphlet, Dumas implicitly encourages readers to test their luck in the hope of achieving a gain capable of transforming their lives irreversibly.

Finally, Dumas openly opposes moralists who condemn lotteries without acknowledging that states themselves have often restored their finances through the considerable revenues generated by such practices. He explicitly recalls the goal of the *Loterie des Lingots d'or*: enabling five thousand individuals to pursue the dream of gold that defined those frenetic years. This context allows him to lament the abolition of the old Lottery «aux boutiques à vitres vertes» (Dumas fils, 1851), whose draw was conducted by «un éternel enfant costumé en Amour» (Dumas fils, 1851) who «tirait les numéros d'un geste plein de candeur» (Dumas fils, 1851).

What follows is arguably the most meaningful reflection of the entire pamphlet, one that reveals its deeper philosophical scope: «car tout est loterie dans ce monde» (Dumas fils, 1851, p. 6). Life itself - love, ambition, and the future - appears as a form of game, a lottery to which every individual is inevitably subjected, often without full awareness. To live is to gamble with death; to love is to risk one's heart; to dream requires constant negotiation with reason; and to bet on the future is to stake one's entire existence. In this sense, Dumas elevates the lottery from a social practice to a metaphor for the human condition itself.

### 3. California: The New Eldorado

References in Dumas's text also extend across the Atlantic to California, the so-called Golden State, which for the five thousand gold seekers - and, more broadly, for every French citizen dreaming of a better future - represented both a challenge and a gamble. California emerges as a space of projection, a distant land upon which hopes of renewal, enrichment, and social redemption are inscribed. As Michel Le Bris observes, «L'annonce de la découverte de l'or en Californie, dès le début de 1849, eut à Paris un retentissement extraordinaire» (Le Bris, 1999). The news of the gold discovery spread rapidly throughout the capital, igniting imaginations and reinforcing the belief that fortune could be seized through boldness and chance.

The year in which the *Loterie des Lingots d'or* was established holds strong symbolic value, as it coincides with a pivotal moment in the history of modern gambling and economic speculation. The birth of the State of California - known as the Golden State and officially incorporated into the United States in 1850 - developed in parallel with the emergence of modern forms of gambling. This period saw, in particular, the arrival of the first coin-operated gaming machines, the slot machines invented and patented precisely in those years by a

Bavarian immigrant, Charles August Fey. The convergence of territorial expansion, technological innovation, and the institutionalization of chance reveals a broader cultural transformation in which risk and speculation became defining features of modernity (Dotti, 2015).

As Marco Dotti recalls, on August 3<sup>rd</sup> of that same year Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte founded the *Société des lingots d'or* with multiple objectives. Among these was the removal of undesirable individuals from French territory, a strategy discreetly disguised as a promise of wealth and opportunity, ostensibly aimed at alleviating the public debt caused by imprudent political decisions. Acting as the astute politician he aspired to be, Louis-Napoléon effectively paved the way for an empire free of opposition, as potential adversaries were reduced to poverty or physically displaced. The journey to California was thus presented as a departure toward new horizons, far removed from the political transformations the future emperor was preparing to impose. It is estimated that nearly one third of the emigrants consisted of political suspects (Dotti, 2015).

This interpretation is further corroborated by contemporary historical analyses, as evidenced by the following observation:

The government wished to get rid of political suspects, men who had taken part in the revolution of 1848, and especially the former gardes mobiles and other volunteers who had been armed to overthrow Louis Blanc's socialist republicans. Many of these young men were frankly republicans and anti-Bonapartists; they had been demobilized but not yet compensated (Nasatir, 1954, pp. 125–142).

Emigration to California thus appears not merely as a spontaneous movement driven by economic ambition, but rather as a calculated political maneuver. The rhetoric of opportunity and enrichment concealed a strategy of social and ideological purification, aimed at neutralizing revolutionary forces that remained active after 1848.

It is therefore hardly coincidental that, on the eve of the coup d'état of 1851, *La République* published an article casting doubt on the identity of Langlois, suspected of being a pseudonym for a trusted associate of the future emperor—or even for Louis-Napoléon himself (Dotti, 2015). Such suspicions underscore the climate of political intrigue surrounding the lottery and reinforce the perception of its instrumentalization by those in power.

It is also worth recalling that the lottery in question did not, in fact, meet the legal requirements established by French law governing lotteries (*La République Française*, Loi 21 mai 1836 portant prohibition des loteries). This irregularity fueled widespread speculation that the lottery was rigged, possibly at the direct behest of Louis Bonaparte. According to this hypothesis, the true winner of the enterprise was the State itself, which transformed the lottery into a large-scale commercial speculation. This interpretation appears all the more plausible when one considers the broader historical context of that year, marked by a decisive event that stood in stark opposition to the achievements of 1848.

Those achievements had fostered widespread illusions: the promise of freedom, the abolition of privileges reinstated under the July Monarchy, and the hope of attaining a more just political

order devoted to the common good. The manipulation of the lottery and the orchestration of emigration to California thus signal a profound reversal of these aspirations. Under the guise of chance, opportunity, and individual advancement, the mechanisms of power reasserted themselves, subordinating collective ideals to political expediency and economic calculation. In this sense, California as the “new Eldorado” functions less as a land of genuine emancipation than as a powerful myth, mobilized to serve the interests of an emerging authoritarian regime.

#### 4. Dumas and the *Loterie*: Love at First Sight

From this perspective, Dumas’s explicit support for the *Loterie des Lingots d’or* appears as an attempt to exalt an ideal according to which fortune, chance—*hasard*—not only can but should offer an opportunity to the poor and the socially disenfranchised. The lottery is presented as a mechanism capable of opening a breach in an otherwise rigid social order, allowing individuals without prospects to imagine a sudden reversal of destiny. The gold ingot itself, functioning almost as a totem of the age, crystallizes these aspirations. Yet, significantly, it is never actually won. Contemporary accounts report that the lottery was rigged and that the same number was frequently assigned to multiple players, thereby undermining the very premise of fair chance. Nor can it be established that the French emigrants truly found fortune overseas: the numerous hardships endured during the crossings and the scarcity of resources available upon arrival invite a far from flattering assessment of the entire enterprise.

Dumas nonetheless adopts a nuanced position, warning the reader that «comme toutes les choses humaines, la Loterie a eu sa bonne comme sa mauvaise fortune» (Dumas fils, 1851, p. 9). Chance, he argues, cannot be reduced to a science, nor should it be understood as a scientific law. It produces fantastic and unpredictable combinations in which even the most acute intellect would vainly seek rational coherence. In this respect, Dumas positions himself at the opposite end of the spectrum from Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord’s conception of gambling. For Talleyrand, «La nature a destiné les hommes au travail, puisqu’en les soumettant à des besoins toujours renaissans, elle n’a voulu leur accorder que ce seul moyen d’y pourvoir entièrement» (Talleyrand, 1789). Writing in the century of reason and revolution, Talleyrand could hardly have expressed a different view. To base one’s fortune on chance was inconceivable to an Enlightenment thinker, whose task was precisely to dismantle the illusory supports offered by lotteries - considered social scourges responsible for injustice and immorality, with bankruptcy, suicide, and crime as their direct consequences. In his economic philosophy, moreover, «La richesse d’un état s’identifie sous tous ses rapports avec celle des citoyens» (Talleyrand, 1789).

Dumas, by contrast, is captivated by what he presents as the virtuous effects of gambling. He enumerates episodes intended to demonstrate how the very attempt to win may produce surprising and even decisive outcomes. In doing so, he implicitly refutes Talleyrand’s condemnation of gambling as a mere illusion of unattainable profit and as a source of despair once failure becomes apparent. For Dumas, the act of playing itself possesses an intrinsic value: it mobilizes hope, desire, and projection into the future, even when success remains uncertain.

This discursive strategy continues as Dumas emphasizes the extraordinary success of the lottery tickets, coveted throughout Europe. The expression “regrettable exportation” reveals the author’s unmistakable promotional intent, betraying his concern that the prize might be awarded outside the national territory. The metaphor of the «petite pluie d’or qui les féconde et les vivifie» (Dumas fils, 1851, p. 13) is particularly revealing: the purchase of tickets is imagined as a fertilizing rain, capable of revitalizing the lives of the fortunate winners. The metaphor extends beyond individual benefit to encompass the entire economic ecosystem generated by the lottery. Even the merchants responsible for distributing the tickets stand to increase their income, since ticket sales—an activity as old as the world—produce a clear multiplier effect. Dumas illustrates this with the vivid example of the tobacconist, who reaps substantial profits simply because customers, when requesting lottery tickets, are tempted to purchase additional goods (Dumas fils, 1851, p. 13). The metaphor of rain persists as the author evokes the countless banknotes swirling like droplets on the long-awaited day of the draw, all made possible by the purchase of a single ticket.

For the more hesitant readers, those still harboring doubts, Dumas introduces the reassuring discourse of the Minister of the Interior, who, alongside the assurances of the Administration, offers solid guarantees regarding the soundness of the investment each French citizen is invited to make. Dumas characterizes the lottery project as *patriotique*, emphasizing that its benefits extend to the entire French community. The man who has rendered immense services to the nation, he suggests, will not disappoint those who await tangible advantages for France as a whole. The *encomiastic portrayal* of Monsieur Langlois, the inventor of the lottery, is woven with concrete references to projected revenue percentages designed to cover operational expenses. Dumas takes care to specify that «La Loterie des Lingots d’or n’enrichira donc que les favoris du hasard et ne fera pas la fortune de son fondateur» (Dumas fils, 1851, p. 15). This assertion seeks to neutralize accusations of personal profiteering and to reinforce the image of a collective, altruistic endeavour.

A particularly revealing aspect of Dumas’s rhetoric concerns the role assigned to women, who are described as especially sensitive to play and to the unforeseen. The potential value of lottery tickets increases their monetary and symbolic worth. Offering tickets to a woman may elicit eternal gratitude, and «qui sait que peut devenir la reconnaissance éternelle d’une femme» (Dumas fils, 1851, p. 16). Here, gallantry, seduction, and economic speculation intersect, further expanding the lottery’s field of influence into the realm of affective relations.

The blindfolded goddess of fortune thus becomes an explicit invitation to purchase multiple tickets, each one holding the promise of overturning an individual’s destiny. As a conclusion to his argument, Dumas offers a wordplay that functions simultaneously as an invitation and a wish addressed to both himself and the reader: «car si ce n’est moi, j’aime autant que ce soit vous» (Dumas fils 1851, p. 16). This statement places the author’s *moi* on the same level as the reader’s *vous*, as if excluding all other players and imagining the game as unfolding solely between the two of them. By establishing this quasi-intimate, egalitarian relationship, the act of playing becomes natural and spontaneous. The transition from potentiality to action is shortened; fortune is set in motion, and victory appears within reach—intangible, yet tantalizingly close.

An author as widely admired and appreciated in his time as Alexandre Dumas fils thus chooses to exalt the virtues of gambling, ostensibly for its financial rewards, yet more profoundly for the speculative logic it embodies. By foregrounding expectation, risk, and the suspension between hope and loss, Dumas anticipates Stéphane Mallarmé's well-known meditation on contingency: «Un coup de dés n'abolira jamais le hasard» (A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance; Mallarmé 1897, 1914).

The convergence between the two authors, however, exceeds a mere thematic coincidence. In Mallarmé's poetic project, the "coup de dés" functions not only as metaphor but as a structural principle: chance is enacted through the spatial arrangement of text on the page, where typographic fragmentation dismantles conventional versification (Mallarmé 1914; see also Roger Pearson's analysis of Mallarmé's prosody).

In Dumas, by contrast, the coup de dés does not dissolve signification into abstraction; it precipitates a concrete reconfiguration of social and individual trajectories. The lottery dramatizes the sudden intrusion of the unforeseen into the regulated order of bourgeois society, transforming economic speculation into an allegory of existential precariousness. Yet this difference of register — symbolic and formal in Mallarmé, social and narrative in Dumas — should not obscure their deeper affinity: both writers articulate a modern consciousness structured by uncertainty, where stability, merit, and rational calculation prove insufficient guarantees against the disruptive force of contingency.

Read in this light, the reference to Mallarmé may be developed as a unifying hermeneutic thread. Dumas's assertion that «tout est loterie dans ce monde» encapsulates not merely a cynical observation about fortune but a broader philosophical stance: existence itself is governed by aleatory principles that elude definitive control. Mallarmé radicalizes this insight by situating chance at the core of poetic creation, while Dumas translates it into the socio-economic realities of his time. The former interrogates the limits of language; the latter exposes the fragility of social determinism.

In both cases, the coup de dés becomes emblematic of a modern epistemology grounded in the recognition that neither discourse nor destiny can abolish hasard. Modern criticism has underscored this dynamic, linking Mallarmé's experiment with chance to wider developments in symbolic and avant-garde poetics (Okamoto MacPhail, 2009; Pearson, 1996) and connecting the poet's typographic innovations with evolving ideas of contingency and meaning.

It is precisely this shared meditation on contingency that allows the connection between Dumas and Mallarmé to function not as a peripheral allusion, but as a conceptual axis capable of unifying the broader argument, and underscores why a robust bibliography — including both primary texts and critical studies — is indispensable to your paper.

## 5. Conclusions

The analysis of *Histoire de la Loterie depuis la première jusqu'à la dernière* reveals that Alexandre Dumas fils's engagement with the *Loterie des Lingots d'or* cannot be reduced to mere opportunism or to a simple act of propaganda. Rather, the pamphlet emerges as a complex

discursive space in which economic necessity, political calculation, literary strategy, and philosophical reflection intersect (Lefebvre, 1998; Quéré 2001). While Dumas openly supports the lottery and contributes to its public legitimation, his text simultaneously exposes the ambiguities, contradictions, and symbolic power inherent in the notion of chance itself (Dumas fils, 1854).

Throughout the work, the lottery is presented not only as a concrete historical enterprise but also as a metaphorical structure capable of articulating the anxieties and aspirations of mid-nineteenth-century society. In a France marked by political instability, social disillusionment after 1848, and the impending consolidation of the Second Empire (Pilbeam, 1995; Popkin, 1993), the lottery functions as both an instrument of control and a repository of collective hope. The promise of sudden wealth, embodied in the gold ingot elevated to the status of a modern totem, mirrors the broader triumph of money as the dominant value of the age. In this sense, the *Loterie des Lingots d'or* anticipates the symbolic economy of modern capitalism, where risk, speculation, and illusion play a central role (Lefebvre, 1998).

Dumas's insistence on the ancient and universal nature of the lottery serves to naturalize chance and to detach it from purely moral or juridical condemnation. By mobilizing examples drawn from biblical tradition, classical antiquity, Roman festivities, pirate narratives, and republican Genoa, he constructs a genealogy of *hasard* that transcends historical periods and cultural contexts (Dumas fils, 1854; Quéré 2001). This strategy allows him to counter Enlightenment critiques — exemplified by Talleyrand — according to which gambling represents a social pathology incompatible with labor, rationality, and moral order. Against such views, Dumas proposes an alternative logic in which chance is not an aberration but an intrinsic component of human existence.

At the discursive level, the pamphlet operates through a sophisticated rhetoric that blends persuasion, metaphor, and affective appeal. The recurring imagery of rain, fertility, and circulation underscores the productive dimension of the lottery, extending its effects beyond individual winners to merchants, institutions, and the nation as a whole. The text thus transforms the act of purchasing a ticket into a patriotic, almost civic gesture, aligning private desire with collective benefit. Even the emphasis on women as privileged recipients of lottery tickets reveals the extent to which the logic of chance infiltrates social and emotional relations, further expanding its symbolic reach (Lefebvre, 1998).

At the same time, the historical reality surrounding the lottery — its legal irregularities, the suspicion of manipulation, the instrumentalization of emigration to California, and the likely use of the enterprise to neutralize political opposition — casts a shadow over Dumas's enthusiastic defense (Quéré 2001). The gap between discourse and practice, between the idealized promise of fortune and the concrete experience of hardship and failure, remains unresolved. Yet it is precisely this tension that gives the text its critical value. Rather than offering a naïve celebration of gambling, Dumas's pamphlet exposes the mechanisms through which hope is manufactured, circulated, and exploited in modern societies (Lefebvre, 1998).

Ultimately, Dumas's most radical claim — *«tout est loterie dans ce monde»* — extends the scope of the lottery beyond economics and politics to encompass the human condition itself.

Life, love, ambition, and the future are all conceived as forms of risk, governed by uncertainty and irreversibility. In this perspective, the *coup de dés* does not abolish chance but affirms its irreducible presence. Long before Mallarmé theorized *hasard* as an ontological principle (Mallarmé 1897/1914; Pearson, 1996), Dumas articulated a vision in which fortune is neither wholly obscure nor entirely rational, but perpetually poised to disrupt and redefine individual destinies.

In conclusion, *Histoire de la Loterie* stands as a revealing document of its time: a text that simultaneously participates in and reflects upon the ideological foundations of modernity (Lefebvre, 1998; Qué 2001). Through his engagement with the lottery, Dumas fils captures a decisive historical moment in which money, chance, and power converge, offering not only a defense of gambling but a broader meditation on the fragile equilibrium between hope and illusion that continues to shape modern experience.

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