

Adaptation examines moral context of period piece

Brock student production presents 1855 play with modern-day commentary

By CHRISTOPHER WATERS
Standard Staff

Students at Brock's department of dramatic arts are unveiling a period piece which has been painstakingly adapted to show the despair and cruelty lurking behind the comedy of manners.

The student production is an adaptation of Alexandre Dumas' *The Demi Monde*, which shows the original play and includes commentary about the values that underpin that world view.

"Domestic drama makes many assumptions about moral values," explained Gyllian Raby, the Brock drama professor who adapted the script. "That's true whether you look at our soaps today or this early version of a sensational soap opera.

"Where they got their values from are never discussed and never questioned. They simply are and the characters are forced to operate according to them."

Raby said the script changed throughout the rehearsal process as she and the student actors clarified the narrative and characters, while working in the new thread of commentary about the play. What would have been a five-hour performance has been whittled down to a more manageable hour and 45 minutes.

"We have Dumas' play in the middle. On one side we are trying to put this analytical commentary and on the other we are trying to expose the cruelty inherent in those moral divisions that shut people out from society," Raby said.

The *Demi Monde* opens tonight at the Sean O'Sullivan Theatre and runs until Saturday. Curtain is at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$10 adults and \$7 students and seniors. Call 905-688-5550, ext. 3257.



Actors Jennifer Graham and Sean Engemann (as the translator) in a scene from the Brock University student production, *The Demi Monde*. The play opens tonight and runs through Saturday at the Sean O'Sullivan Theatre.

STAFF PHOTO BY BOB TYMCZYSZYN

Thirteen actors are featured in the production, which brings together students from the second, third and fourth years of instruction. The production features sets and costumes by William Schmuck, who teaches design for the department of dramatic arts at Brock and is head of design at the Shaw Festival.

Dumas is the son of the writer of *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers*. One of the leading dramatists of his day, he rose to fame thanks to *Lady of the Camellias*, which first appeared as a novel and then in a dramatic version.

Raby said the play, written in 1855, is the tale of a woman plotting to raise her rank in society through marriage.

"Dumas wanted to make it clear that he very much disapproved of courtesans and any women who were shady or not virtu-

ous," she explained.

"He wrote the *Demi Monde* to expose the scheming women who try to entrap honest men into marriage. The thing that intrigued me about this play was that, from a modern perspective, the women he created all seemed to be perfectly honourable. They were all neat, independent characters who were simply trying to survive in a difficult environment."



WHAT: The *Demi Monde*, adapted from Alexandre Dumas, directed by Gyllian Raby

WHERE: Sean O'Sullivan Theatre, Brock University, St. Catharines

WHEN: tonight until Saturday at 8 p.m.; tickets \$10 adults, \$7 students and seniors

CALL: 905-688-5550, ext. 3257