THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO

Alexandre Dumas was born in 1802 at Villers-Cotterêts. His father, the illegitimate son of a marquis, was a general in the Revolutionary armies, but died when Dumas was only four. He was brought up in straitened circumstances and received very little education. He joined the household of the future king, Louis-Philippe, and began reading voraciously. Later he entered the *cénacle* of Charles Nodier and started writing. In 1829 the production of his play, *Henri III et sa cour*, heralded twenty years of successful playwriting. In 1839 he turned his attention to writing historical novels, often using collaborators such as Auguste Maquet to suggest plots or historical background. His most successful novels are *The Count of Monte Cristo*, which appeared during 1844–5, and *The Three Musketeers*, published in 1844. Other novels deal with the wars of religion and the Revolution. Dumas wrote many of these for the newspapers, often in daily instalments, marshalling his formidable energies to produce ever more in order to pay off his debts. In addition, he wrote travel books, children's stories and his *Mémoires* which describe most amusingly his early life, his entry into Parisian literary circles and the 1830 Revolution. He died in 1870.

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The Count of Monte Cristo

Alexandre Dumas

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Chronology

1802 Alexandre Dumas is born at Villers-Cotterêts, the third child of Thomas-Alexandre Dumas. His father, himself the illegitimate son of a marquis and a slave girl of San Domingo, Marie-Cessette Dumas, had had a remarkable career as a general in the Republican, then in the Napoleonic Army.

1806 General Dumas dies. Alexandre and his mother, Elisabeth Labouret, are left virtually penniless.

1822 Dumas takes a post as a clerk, then in 1823 is granted a sinecure on the staff of the Duke of Orléans. He meets the actor Talma and starts to mix in artistic and literary circles, writing sketches for the popular theatre.

1824 Dumas' son, Alexandre, future author of *La Dame aux camélias*, is born as the result of an affair with a seamstress, Catherine Lebay.

1829 Dumas' historical drama, *Henri III et sa cour*, is produced at the Comédie-Française. It is an immediate success, marking Dumas out as a leading figure in the Romantic movement.

1830 Victor Hugo's drama *Hernani* becomes the focus of the struggle between the Romantics and the traditionalists in literature. In July, the Bourbon monarchy is overthrown and replaced by a new regime under the Orléanist King Louis-Philippe. Dumas actively supports the insurrection.

1831 Dumas' melodrama *Antony*, with its archetypal Romantic hero, triumphs at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin.

1832 Dumas makes a journey to Switzerland which will form the basis of his first travel book, published the following year.

1835 Dumas travels to Naples with Ida Ferrier (whom he will later marry), has a passionate affair in Naples with Caroline Ungher and falls in love with Italy and the Mediterranean.

1836 Triumph of Dumas' play *Kean*, based on the personality of the English actor whom Dumas had seen performing in Shakespeare in 1828.

1839 *Mademoiselle de Belle-Isle.* Dumas' greatest success in the theatre.

1840 Dumas marries Ida Ferrier. He travels down the Rhine with Gérard de Nerval and they collaborate on the drama *Léo Burckart.* Nerval introduces Dumas to Auguste Maquet who will become his collaborator on many of his subsequent works.

1841 Spends a year in Florence.

1844 The year of Dumas' two greatest novels: *The Three Musketeers* starts to appear in serial form in March and the first episodes of *The Count of Monte Cristo* follow in August. Dumas starts to build his Château de Monte-Cristo at St-Germain-en-Laye. He separates from Ida Ferrier.

1845 *Twenty Years After*, the first sequel to *The Three Musketeers*, appears at the beginning of the year. In February, Dumas wins a libel action against the author of a book accusing him of plagiarism. Publishes *La Reine Margot.*

1846 Dumas travels in Spain and North Africa. Publishes *La Dame de Monsoreau*, *Les Deux Diane* and *Joseph Balsamo.*

1847 Dumas' theatre, the Théâtre Historique, opens. It will show several adaptations of his novels, including *The Three Musketeers* and *La Reine Margot.* Serialization of *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*, the final episode of the *The Three Musketeers.*

1848 A revolution in February deposes Louis-Philippe and brings in the Second Republic. Dumas stands unsuccessfully for Parliament and supports Louis-Napoléon, nephew of Napoleon I, who becomes President of the Republic.

1849 Dumas publishes *The Queen's Necklace.*

1850 Dumas is declared bankrupt and has to sell the Château de Monte-Cristo and the Théâtre Historique. Publishes *The Black Tulip*.

1851 In December, Louis-Napoléon seizes power in a coup d'état, effectively abolishing the Republic. A year later, the Second Empire will be proclaimed. Victor Hugo goes into exile in Belgium where Dumas, partly to escape his creditors, joins him.

1852 Publishes his memoirs.

1853 In November, returns to Paris and founds a newspaper, *Le Mousquetaire*. Publishes *Ange Pitou*.

1858 Founds the literary weekly, *Le Monte-Cristo*. Sets out on a nine-month journey to Russia.

1860 Meets Garibaldi and actively supports the Italian struggle against Austria. Founds *L'Independente*, a periodical in Italian and French. Garibaldi is godfather to Dumas' daughter by Emilie Cordier.

1861–1870 Dumas continues to travel throughout Europe and to write, though his output is somewhat reduced. None the less in the final decade of his life, he published some six plays, thirteen novels, several shorter fictions, a historical work on the Bourbons in Naples and a good deal of journalism. He had a last love affair, with an American, Adah Menken, and indulged his lifelong passions for drama, travel and cookery.

1870 Alexandre Dumas dies on 5 December in Dieppe.

Introduction

'Ah, a children's novel,' a Russian film-maker remarked when I told her that I was translating *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The comment was not intended to be disparaging, merely descriptive; and many people, in different cultures, would tend to agree with the categorization. Most will derive their idea of the novel, not from having read it, but because a kind of abstract of the storyline exists as part of the common culture: innocent man imprisoned, meets fellow-prisoner who directs him to a buried fortune, escapes and plots revenge. It has been adapted for film, television and the theatre, as well as being translated, abridged and imitated in print. It has supplied material for cartoons and comedy: the Irish comedian Dave Allen used to do a series of sketches around the theme of a young man (Dantès) breaking through a dungeon wall and encountering an old, bearded prisoner (Abbé Faria). Some events in the story are so well-known that they exist apart from the novel, like Robinson Crusoe's discovery of Man Friday's footprint, or incidents and characters from *Treasure Island* and *Frankenstein*. *The Count of Monte Cristo* is one of the great popular novels of all time and, like other popular novels, it has suffered the fate of being treated as not fully 'adult' fiction; like children's fiction, it seems to inhabit a realm outside its creator's biography and the period when it was written.

On the other hand, there are not many children's books, even in our own time, that involve a female serial poisoner, two cases of infanticide, a stabbing and three suicides; an extended scene of torture and execution; drug-induced sexual fantasies, illegitimacy, transvestism and lesbianism; a display of the author's classical learning, and his knowledge of modern European history, the customs and diet of the Italians, the effects of hashish, and so on; the length would, in any case, immediately disqualify it from inclusion in any modern series of books for children. Most important of all, perhaps, is the fact that the author himself

never thought of this as 'a children's novel'. Yet already in the earliest translations into English, with their omission or subtle alteration of material that might be considered indelicate by Victorian readers, and of some passages (for example, references to classical literature) that might be thought to hold up the story, one can see the start of a process of transformation, from 'novel' to 'genre novel' – which means, ultimately, almost any kind of genre novel: 'adventure', 'romance', 'thriller' and, if you like, 'children's novel'. This is the usual fate of books that fail to meet the criteria for serious, 'literary' fiction.

Dumas himself must bear some of the responsibility. During his most productive decade, from 1841 to 1850, he wrote forty-one novels, twenty-three plays, seven historical works and half a dozen travel books. The nineteenth century was an age of mass production, which is precisely why Art felt the need to distinguish itself by its individuality and craftsmanship: 'Alexandre Dumas and Co., novel factory', was the contemptuous title given to one critical pamphlet, published at the same time as this novel, in 1845. Moreover it was known that Dumas wrote for money, at so much a line, and that he used at least one collaborator, Auguste Maquet, who would make chapter outlines for him and do research. There was a vast difference between this industrial labour and the monastic devotion to the cause of art that kept Gustave Flaubert at his desk for seven hours a day as he wrote and rewrote *Madame Bovary* (1857). In the history of the novel, Dumas and Flaubert stand near the head of divergent streams.

Alexandre Dumas was born on 24 July 1802; or, rather, since the Republican Calendar was still in force, on 5th Thermidor, Year x, in the little town of Villers-Cotterêts, near Soissons. His father was a general in the revolutionary armies, himself the illegitimate son of a marquis, Antoine-Alexandre Davy de la Paillerie, and a black slave from the island of Santo Domingo, Marie Dumas. In 1806, General Dumas died, leaving his family virtually without resources. The child had little education, enough however to allow him to read *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Arabian Nights*, and to cultivate his handwriting. In 1823, thanks to the second of these, he found employment in Paris, copying documents for Louis-Philippe, Duke of Orléans.

The 1820s were a marvellous time for an aspiring young writer in Paris. The two rival literary ideologies, of Classicism and Romanticism, were engaged in a mock-heroic combat for the soul of French literature. Classicism stood for universal themes, refinement, purity of language,

clear division of literary genres and (despite its debt to the literature of the classical world) the peculiarly French ethos of the dramatist Racine. Romanticism meant energy, modern subject-matter, mixing genres and openness to foreign influences, particularly that of Shakespeare, the Romantic dramatist *par excellence*. It was in the theatre that the confrontation would chiefly take place.

Racine had based his plays on stories from classical Greece or on biblical history, both of which offered 'universal' events and characters. Shakespeare, like the German playwright Schiller, had dealt with subjects from modern history, which were national and particular rather than universal. In France, especially, the period that followed the great upheavals of the Revolution, the Empire and the Restoration was one which had an urgent need to make sense of the past. Shakespeare's history plays – and, still more, the historical novels of Walter Scott – were models of how this could be done, drawing on the imagination as well as on scholarship. In 1828, Dumas, who had already tried his hand at a couple of plays and some short stories, submitted a historical drama to the Comédie Française entitled *Henri III et sa cour*. It was a typically Romantic work, ignoring the 'unities' of time, place and action, and written in prose, rather than the conventional medium of verse. It underwent the usual ritual of a public reading and, at its first night on 10 February 1829, scored a triumphant success and was warmly applauded by the author's employer, Louis-Philippe. In the following year, Louis-Philippe became king, after a liberal revolution that was supposed to bring in a constitutional monarchy. Dumas welcomed it; so did the former ultra-monarchist, Victor Hugo.

During the next twenty years, Dumas was (with Hugo and Alfred de Vigny) the leading dramatist of the new movement – and, of the three, easily the most prolific. Perhaps too much so: overnight, after the first performance of *Christine* in 1830, while Dumas was asleep, Hugo and Vigny rewrote the play, reducing it to a more manageable size. Despite this, Dumas' play *Antony* (1831) is an essential work of the Romantic period, as representative as Hugo's *Hernani* or Vigny's *Chatterton*, and more successful with its audiences than either. But the theatre is the very opposite of a monastic cell or an ivory tower. Collaboration is not only the norm, but inevitable, feedback from the public is instantaneous, work has to be produced to satisfy demand, and there is an immediate relationship between the author's output and what comes in through the box office. In the theatre, Dumas learned the rudiments of literary

production.

On one occasion, Charles-Jean Harel, director of the Odéon theatre, is supposed to have locked Dumas into a room, away from his mistress, for a week, until he had completed the manuscript of *Napoléon* (1831). The huge growth in the periodical press during the 1820s saw the invention of the *feuilleton* – not in the sense of a regular column by one writer, but of a novel published in instalments; Dumas claimed to have invented the *roman feuilleton* with *La Comtesse de Salisbury*, published in *La Presse* in 1836. By the early 1840s he was writing more novels than plays, mainly (but by no means exclusively) historical fiction which, as I have already mentioned, was one of the most popular genres; it was also taken seriously as a means of exploring the past. He did, incidentally, write a book for children at this time: *Le Capitaine Pamphile* (1839).

Travel, to which he was addicted, helped to stave off boredom, providing the material for travel books, while translation filled in the remaining gaps in the working day. Like Balzac, he was a man of huge appetites: food, sex, work, sleep, pleasure, leisure, movement, excitement. In Italy, he found love, opera, colour and the Mediterranean: he visited Naples and Palermo in 1835, stayed a year in Florence in 1841 and returned in 1843 for a visit that included Sicily. The following year saw the publication of his first great historical novel, *Les Trois Mousquetaires/The Three Musketeers*, and on 28 August 1844 *Le Journal des Débats* began publication of *The Count of Monte Cristo.* It was an immediate success, translated, adapted, pirated ... in short, a popular novel.

It was also, very clearly, a work of its time. The plot was inspired by the true-life story of François Picaud, which Dumas found in Jacques Peuchet's *Police dévoilée: Mémoires historiques tirés des archives de Paris* ... (1838), a collection of anecdotes from the Parisian police archives.[1]

Briefly, the story is this: Picaud, a young man from the south of France, was imprisoned in 1807, having been denounced by a group of friends as an English spy, shortly after he had become engaged to a young woman called Marguerite. The denunciation was inspired by a café owner, Mathieu Loupian, who was jealous of Picaud's relationship with Marguerite.

Picaud was eventually moved to a form of house-arrest in Piedmont and shut up in the castle of Fenestrelle, where he acted as servant to a rich Italian cleric. When the man died, abandoned by his family, he

left his money to Picaud, whom he had come to treat as a son, also informing him of the whereabouts of a hidden treasure. With the fall of Napoleon in 1814, Picaud, now called Joseph Lucher, was released; in the following year, after collecting the hidden treasure, he returned to Paris.

Here he discovered that Marguerite had married Loupian. Disguising himself, and offering a valuable diamond to Allut, the one man in the group who had been unwilling to collaborate in the denunciation, he learned the identity of his enemies. He then set about eliminating them, stabbing the first with a dagger on which were printed the words: 'Number One', and burning down Loupian's café. He managed to find employment in Loupian's house, disguised as a servant called Prosper. However, while this was going on, Allut had fallen out with the merchant to whom he had resold the diamond, had murdered him and had been imprisoned. On coming out of jail, he started to blackmail Picaud. Picaud poisoned another of the conspirators, lured Loupian's son into crime and his daughter into prostitution, then finally stabbed Loupian himself. But he quarrelled with Allut over the blackmail payments and Allut killed him, confessing the whole story on his deathbed in 1828.

It is obvious both how directly Dumas was inspired by Peuchet's account of this extraordinary tale, and how radically he transformed it; incidentally, he used another chapter of Peuchet's book as the basis for the story of Mme de Villefort. One important step in the transformation from 'true crime' to fiction was to shift the opening of the tale from Paris to Marseille, giving the novel its Mediterranean dimension. Though most of the action still takes place in Paris (apart from a few excursions elsewhere, all the novel between Chapters XXXIX and CIV is set in Paris), the sea is always present as a figure for escape and freedom, while the novel uses the southern origins of its characters as a means to evoke that exotic world of the Mediterranean littoral that had so fascinated French writers and artists since the 1820s. The Mediterranean is the point where the cultures of Europe meet those of the Orient, and the region had been in the forefront of people's minds since the 1820s, because of the Greek struggle for independence and the French conquest of Algeria.

Both of these are directly present in the novel: one of its young characters is a soldier who has just returned from Algeria, another sets off to fight in the colony. As for Greece, which rebelled against the Turks in the 1820s, it inspired much fervour among European Romantics,

most famously Lord Byron. The story of Ali (1741–1822), Pasha of Janina (Jannina) in Albania, plays a direct part in the novel and also takes us into the Oriental world that fascinated the French Romantics. 'The Orient,' Victor Hugo wrote in the preface to his early collection of poems, *Les Orientales* (1829), 'both as an image and as an idea, has become a sort of general preoccupation for people's minds as much as for their imaginations, to which the author has perhaps unwittingly succumbed. As if of their own accord, Oriental colours have come to stamp their mark on all his thoughts and reveries . . . ' – as they also marked the paintings of Ingres and Delacroix. When we meet Haydée in Chapter XLIX, she is lying on a heap of cushions, wearing her native Albanian costume, smoking a hookah and framed in a doorway, 'like a charming painting'.

Italy was another Mediterranean land that held a powerful appeal for the Romantics, and in particular for Dumas. All the components of this appeal are in the novel: the classical world (the night visit to the Colosseum), the excitement of travel (Chapter XXXIII, 'Roman Bandits'), the cruel justice of the Papal states (Chapter XXXV, 'La Mazzolata'), colourful spectacle (Chapter XXXVI, 'The Carnival in Rome'), the Christian past (Chapter XXXVII, 'The Catacombs of Saint Sebastian'). The story of Luigi Vampa could have come directly from one of Stendhal's *Italian Chronicles*, the description of the Colosseum at night from one of Byron's or Shelley's letters. There is also a good deal of wit – and the fruit of personal experience – in Dumas' portrayal of the modern Romans and the day-by-day experience of the Grand Tour. Like all the most skilled popular writers, he offers his readers a mixture of the unfamiliar and the expected: references to places, people and events that will conjure up a whole complex of images and ideas – we have here the notion of Italy as it was perceived in France in the 1840s, through literature and art – combined with those intimate touches that allow readers to experience the sensations of being there. Reading Dumas, we know how it felt to be swept up in the crowd at the Carnival, to travel in a carriage through the Roman streets, to stay in a *pensione*. We can easily recognize the proud bandit, the bustling hotelier, the alluring woman in the Carnival crowd.

All these are described with as much economy as possible in order to avoid holding up the narrative. This is one reason why the popular novel tends to reinforce rather than to challenge prejudices – although, in one case, Dumas' novel reversed a prejudice, namely that Marseille

was, in the words of Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in France* (1847), 'a busy and flourishing city ... [but one that] has few fine public buildings or sights for strangers'. *The Count of Monte Cristo*, on the contrary, with its intimate topography of the area around the old port and its dramatization of Marseille as the focus of mercantile activity, the meeting-place of Mediterranean cultures and the gateway to the Arab Maghreb, is a good deal more flattering than Murray's *Handbook*. Dumas was allegedly thanked by a Marseillais cab-driver for promoting the city.

Apart from this novel depiction of France's major sea-port, however, Dumas offers his readers a Rome, and an Orient, that are very much what they would expect: the first colourful, tuneful, proud and cruel, the second decadent and opulent. But he adds those little details that compel belief in what he is describing: the precise information about Carnival etiquette, the street-by-street itinerary of a drive round the walls of Rome, the horrifying description of a Roman execution, sketches of character or scenery that he has culled from his own memories of staying at Signor Pastrini's hotel when he visited Rome in 1835. His passages on sailing ships spare us none of the technicalities of sails and masts; his descriptions of the effects of opium convince us that he had experienced them. And, in much the same way, he adds touches of erudition: a quotation from Horace, a reference to *Hamlet* – all of which are meant to reassure us that we are in reliable hands. At times he even allows himself the luxury of a longer purple passage (perhaps a sunset over the Mediterranean) to show that he can do that, too.

All this helps to justify his claim that he has transformed Peuchet's material into something infinitely more valuable. Peuchet's account of the Picaud case, he wrote, was 'simply ridiculous ... [but] inside this oyster, there was a pearl. A rough, shapeless pearl, of no value, waiting for its jeweller.' And, of course, the essential transformation that the jeweller makes to Peuchet's story lies in the character of the Count.

To begin with, we have Edmond Dantès, a man who could well be first cousin to the shoemaker, François Picaud. Betrayed by a jealous rival and an ambitious colleague, sent to the fortress prison of If by a magistrate who cannot afford to let the facts come out, Dantès goes through a kind of burial and resurrection. Educated by Abbé Faria and possessor of a limitless fortune, he can re-emerge into the world, not as the cobbler Picaud, content to stab or poison those responsible for his misfortune, but as an instrument of divine justice. Dumas' first,

vital departure from Peuchet is to make Monte Cristo only indirectly the avenger: his 'victims' are all, in reality, destroyed by their own past misdeeds which Monte Cristo uncovers.

As the man who brings the truth to light and uses the discovery to punish the wrongdoer, Monte Cristo is the forerunner of the detective, that central figure in modern popular fiction. In fact, there is more than one reference in the novel to deductive methods that resemble those pioneered by Edgar Allan Poe ('A Manuscript Found in a Bottle', 'The Gold Bug', 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue') – for example, in the way in which Abbé Faria deciphers the will showing where the treasure was hidden, Dantès' own analysis of where exactly it is concealed on the island and, earlier, Faria's explanation of Dantès' imprisonment. Note that, like the intellectual exercises of Monte Cristo's opium-taking successor later in the century, Sherlock Holmes,[2] these deductions at first amaze those who have not been able to follow the logic behind them or who do not have the expertise to know, for example, when something has been written with the left hand by a right-handed person. But, of course, Faria is not really a Holmesian detective: the stereotype in Dumas' mind is that of the eighteenth-century *philosophe*, a believer in the power of reason and a student of human nature. What Faria lacks (ironically, since everyone around thinks him mad, insanely obsessed with his fictitious treasure) is the Holmesian neuroses: the brooding violin and the opium stupor. These come from a different fictional archetype.

So does Monte Cristo, even though he is not averse at times to applying Faria's deductive logic (and shares Holmes's talent for disguise). Having emerged in 1829 from his entombment, found his treasure, discovered the fate of his father and Mercédès, and repaid his debt to Morrel, Dantès then disappears for another nine years, about which the reader is told virtually nothing. This second period of latency is not strictly a remaking but an effacement: the character who re-emerges in the novel as the Count of Monte Cristo is shrouded in mystery; we only assume, at first, that he is identical to Edmond Dantès on the slender evidence of their using the same pseudonym: 'Sinbad the Sailor'. He is a dark, brooding figure, pale-faced, with an aversion to food and apparently devoid of some human feelings: he takes an evil delight in terrifying his young friends, Albert and Franz, with the spectacle of an execution. He is also, as they learn later, on good terms with the bandit, Luigi Vampa.

The appearance of this deathly-white apparition in a box at the Roman opera immediately evokes two other personalities who played a major role in popular mythology in France in the Romantic era. The first is Lord Byron, a real-life character who very early was confused with his fictional creations, Childe Harold, Manfred and Don Juan – all the more so in France, where the poetry might be known only in translation. The image was that of a young but world-weary hero, tormented by nameless despairs. The second figure was that of the vampire, associated with the first through the story *Lord Ruthwen, or The Vampire*, which was attributed to Byron (though in fact written by his companion, Polidori). This was not by any means the only vampire to be found in France at the time: the theatre, notably during the 1820s, was haunted by the Undead: English vampires, comic vampires, female vampires ... The nature of the vampire was perhaps not so precisely codified as it was to be later, especially by Bram Stoker in that tale of another mysterious count: garlic, stakes, crosses, Transylvania, the vampire's native soil in the coffin which he keeps in the basement, these are not yet firmly established in the mythology. But the figure is there, and elements of the legend are specifically ascribed to the Byronic figure of Monte Cristo.

What I would like to suggest is that Dumas' novel stands at a crucial point in the development of modern popular fiction, drawing into the genre elements from Romantic literature, popular theatre, history and actuality, and wrapping them up in a narrative carefully enough constructed and dramatic enough to hold the attention of a growing reading public with a great appetite for fiction. They would satisfy it not only with books, but also with the newspaper serials which had brought fame and fortune to Dumas' precursor in the genre, Eugène Sue.

Monte Cristo owes its existence directly to Sue's *Mystères de Paris* (1842–3): it was precisely the success of Sue's tales that made Dumas' publishers demand a novel, rather than the historical guide to Paris that they had originally commissioned. Sue's appeal to the public was the ability to suggest the existence of a sinister underworld of crime and intrigue behind the façade of a Paris that was familiar to most of his readers. The growth of the nineteenth-century metropolis led to a whole literature of the urban life, later exploited on film, in which the city is no longer seen as a place of civilized, 'urbane' living and safety from attack, but as a menacing sub-world, in which human beings prey

on one another or suffer fearful bouts of loneliness, alienation and ennui. A machine devised to supply every need of civilized humanity in one place has become a monster enclosing every form of vice and depravity. Only in England did murder continue to take place in country houses.

As noted earlier, Paris is the setting for the greater part of the book, but the episodes in Marseille and Rome enrich it enormously. We do have, at the very centre, a very Parisian murder story, joined to a rather trite Parisian romance, and Dumas locates every event precisely on the city map, so that all the addresses are real; but the overall impression left by the novel is of something far larger in scope than a tale of Parisian wrongdoing and revenge. The episodes in Marseille and Rome may have been added after the book was begun – it was Dumas' collaborator, Maquet, who suggested actually recounting Dantès' arrest and imprisonment, instead of starting the novel in Rome and then transferring the action rapidly to Paris; yet the first section proves absolutely crucial. Where the count, in himself, descends at times to the level of a melodramatic stage avenger, Dantès is a compelling character, and it is the figure of Edmond Dantès (whom we feel obscurely present in his later incarnation) which gives the latter depth and weight.

The re-emergence of the other characters after the latency period of Dantès' imprisonment is more of a problem. Caderousse is essentially unchanged, Danglars more or less unrecognizable. Fernand offers the least plausible transformation of all, from the brave and honest Spaniard with a sharp sense of honour, whom we meet in the early chapters, to the Parisian aristocrat whose life seems to have been dedicated to a series of betrayals. Fernand/Morcerf seems to confirm a criticism of Dumas and of popular novels in general, namely that they tend to sacrifice character to plot.

In some respects, though, in Dumas' novel the reverse is true: Dumas' novel is dictated by character. But it is character viewed more as an imaginative construct than as a psychological novelist would conceive it. The count himself is a poetic character, a creature of the imagination who draws on elements from myth as much as from everyday psychological observation. And, while Madame de Villefort, Valentine, Morrel and some others in Dumas' huge cast may be 'flat' characters, performing a largely functional role in the development of the story, there are several secondary figures to whom this does not apply, notably Eugénie Danglars and Albert de Morcerf. In many ways, Eugénie is Valentine's twin. Both women are heiresses to large fortunes, both are presented

with the alternatives of subjecting themselves to their father's will and marrying men whom they do not love or being confined to a convent. But where Valentine is willing to submit, Eugénie is not. Her lesbianism may be a trait of personality, but it is also an expression of her desire for independence.

There is far more to *The Count of Monte Cristo* than merely a tale of adventure and revenge. None the less, it is a book that many people first encounter and enjoy during their teens. Not long after Dumas' death, Victor Hugo wrote a letter to his friend's son, Alexandre Dumas *fils*, in which he praised Dumas as a writer of universal appeal and added 'He creates a thirst for reading.' After more than 150 years, *The Count of Monte Cristo* remains one of the most popular and widely read novels in world literature; its longevity singles it out as almost unique among 'popular' novels. For many of its readers, despite its length, it seems all too short; we want to spend more time with the count and the other characters in the book, more time in its bustling world of drama and passion. Creating that thirst for more is among Dumas' great contributions to literature.

Notes

1. Peuchet's text is reprinted in the edition of the novel by Claude Schopp (Robert Laffont, Paris, 1993).

2. The link with Conan Doyle is actually strengthened by the more obvious similarities in the field of historical fiction (for example, between Doyle's *The White Company* and Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*). Conan Doyle may have consciously followed Dumas in his historical novels and unconsciously in creating Holmes.

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A Note on the Text

The Count of Monte Cristo began publication in parts, in the *Journal des Débats*, in August 1844; this continued until January 1846, by which time the first, 18-volume edition had been published by Pétion (1845–6). The second, third and fourth editions appeared in 1846, and there were several pirate editions in the 1840s. The book continued to be re-published throughout the century, the last edition in Dumas' lifetime being that published by Michel Lévy in 1865.

The novel was rapidly translated into English (in England, in *Ainsworth's Magazine*, 1845, and by Emma Hardy, 1846; and in America in 1846); and into: Danish (1845–6); Swedish (1846); Italian (by Oreste Ferrario, 1847); Spanish (1858); Norwegian (1881–2); and German (1902). The first stage adaptation was the one made by Dumas and Maquet themselves (in 1848, in two parts; in 1851, in two parts; finally shown as one single performance, in five acts and 12 tableaux, in 1862). Long before this, however, there had been a stage parody by Deforges and Claireville, *Le Comte de Monte-Fiasco* (1847) – a further tribute to the notoriety of the work.

The most recent stage version was a new adaptation performed in England in 1994. There have been condensed editions, children's editions and a comic-book version. There were film adaptations in 1908 (USA), 1913 (USA), 1914 (France), 1934 (USA), 1942 (France), 1953 (France), 1961 (France), 1975 (USA) and 2001 (USA), as well as television versions. The strength of the story is enough to explain why the novel has proved so adaptable to other media, despite its length: the central themes of betrayal, wrongful imprisonment and revenge are clear enough to allow many of the sub-plots to be discarded for reasons of time or space.

Inevitably, something will be lost: there is simply so much there; and, from the earliest days, the process undergone by Dumas' novel was one of reduction, as if the original was too vast to stand by itself. There is

also the matter of the historical moment at which *The Count of Monte Cristo* appeared.

The mid-nineteenth century saw a continuing struggle to establish the credentials of the literary novel, by giving it the dual aims that Stendhal had helped to pioneer, which were those of exploring the enduring features of human psychology and analysing a particular state of human society. In contrast to such enterprises, fiction which involved larger-than-life characters and implausible situations, Gothic horrors, melodramatic incidents and so on appeared mere entertainment. The gradual emergence of realism in the European novel was not altogether to the advantage of Dumas, whose image was less that of the austere priest than the jolly friar, and whose novels poured out of a factory, the purpose of which was to create entertainment and sell it for money.

This explains why, though Thackeray admitted finding the book impossible to put down, English novelists like George Eliot considered that 'the French' – Dumas, Hugo and Balzac – were mistakenly tempted to deal with the exception rather than the rule: to look for melodramatic situations and characters, when they should be exploring the everyday life that revealed what is enduring in human nature. It is not hard, anyway, to guess that the author of *Middlemarch* and *The Mill on the Floss* would not find much to please her in *The Three Musketeers* or *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

There is also the question of Dumas' style, which is usually unremarkable; and the fact that he wrote his great novels in collaboration with Maquet, which does not accord with the idea of the author as sole creator. No wonder people have thought they could treat *Monte Cristo* as a treasure-trove rather than a sacred text, or that the many adaptations, abbreviations and reworkings of it have been done with a good deal less reverence (and consequently, more often than not, a good deal more success) than, say, Claude Chabrol brought to his film version of *Madame Bovary*. In the main, its fate has been that of most nineteenth-century 'adventure' novels: it has been treated as mere entertainment for adults or literature for the young.

The truth is that, more because of the subject-matter than because of its length, the novel has had to be tampered with before it can be offered to young readers; or, as one may conjecture, to readers in mid-Victorian England. And, because this is merely a 'popular' novel, as well as one which represents a huge amount of work for a translator, there has been little enthusiasm in the English-speaking world for re-translating it.

Claude Schopp's edition (Robert Laffont, 1993), which lists the main foreign translations, records nothing into English since 1910. The most readily available edition in Britain at the moment reproduces the anonymous translation first published by Chapman & Hall in 1846. Its editor for the Oxford World's Classics series (1990), David Coward, writes that 'with one or two exceptions, the small number of "new" translations since made have drawn heavily upon ... this classic version'.

Anyone who has read *The Count of Monte Cristo* only in this 'classic version' has never read Dumas' novel. For a start, the translation is occasionally inaccurate and is written in a nineteenth-century English that now sounds far more antiquated than the French of the original does to a modern French reader: to mention one small point in this connection, Dumas uses a good deal of dialogue (he wrote by the line), and the constant inversions of 'said he' and 'cried he' are both irritating and antiquated. There are some real oddities, like the attempt to convey popular speech (which does not correspond to anything in Dumas), when the sailor in Chapter XXV says: 'that's one of them nabob gentlemen from Ingy [*sic*], no doubt ...' Even aside from that, most of the dialogues in this nineteenth-century translation, in which the characters utter sentences like: 'I will join you ere long', 'I confess he asked me none' and 'When will all this cease?', have the authentic creak of the Victorian stage boards and the gaslit melodrama.

It can be argued that this language accurately conveys an aspect of Dumas' work, but not even his worst detractors would pretend that there is nothing more to it than that. Still less acceptable, however, than the language of this Victorian translation is the huge number of omissions and bowdlerizations of Dumas' text. The latter include part of Franz's opium dream at the end of Chapter XXXI, some of the dialogue between Villefort and Madame Danglars in Chapter LXVII, and several parts of Chapter XCVII, on Eugénie and Louise's flight to Belgium. In some cases the changes are so slight as to be quite hard to detect. In the description of Eugénie at the opera (Chapter LIII) for example, Dumas remarks that, if one could reproach her with anything, it was that, both in her upbringing and her appearance, 'she seemed rather to belong to another sex'. The English translator renders this: 'As for her attainments, the only fault to be found with them was ... that they were somewhat too erudite and masculine for so young a person' (p. 542)! At the end of Chapter XCVII, the translation (p. 950) simply omits the few lines of dialogue where Dumas has Eugénie

say that '*le rapt est bel et bien consommê*' – where the word *rapt* ('abduction') has a rather too overtly sexual connotation. Similarly, earlier in the same chapter, where Eugénie jokes that anyone would think she was 'abducting' (*enlève*) Louise – another word used almost exclusively of a man with a woman – the translator prefers the more neutral phrase 'carrying me off' and omits altogether Louise's remark that Eugénie is 'a real Amazon'. Another anonymous translation (Dent, 1894) refers to 'the escape' rather than 'the abduction' – which makes nonsense of Louise's reply that it is not a true abduction since it has been accomplished without violence.

What may be more surprising than these concessions to the prudery of the age is that the Victorian translators left in as much as they did. And the omissions are by no means all to do with sexual matters. At the start of Chapter XXXIV, for example, the translator decides to spare us the description of the route taken through Rome by Albert and Franz on their way to the Colosseum (though the 1894 translator restores it). A whole paragraph analysing the character of M. de Villefort at the start of Chapter XLVIII is cut out; almost a whole page of dialogue between Albert and Monte Cristo, on horses, in Chapter LXXXV is cavalierly omitted (part was restored by the translator of 1894); and so on. This is only a tiny sample of what is, in reality, a vast number of phrases omitted, and occasionally mistranslated.

What we see here, interestingly enough, is a stage in the process of transforming Dumas' text into something simpler, less complex, less rich in allusions, but more concentrated in plot and action. The 1846 translator already has an idea of what kind of novel this is, and that dictates what he, or she, can afford to omit: travelogue, classical references, sexual and psychological analysis, and so on. None of these is essential to the plot of a thriller, and if some of them will embarrass English readers, then why leave them in? The only problem is that, nearly 150 years later, we do not have quite the same idea of what is and what is not important. It was high time to go back to Dumas, entire and unexpurgated.

As the basis for my translation, I have used the edition by Schopp, quoted above, and the three-volume edition in the *Livre de Poche* (1973). Both of these use an arrangement of chapters which differs slightly from that in the nineteenth-century English translations. I have followed the *Livre de Poche* in not changing Dumas' 'errors' of chronology etc. in the text as Schopp does; instead I have pointed out the more important

ones in the notes. I owe a debt to Schopp and to Coward's edition in the World's Classics series for some of the information in the notes.

On the broader question of translation, I have tried above all to produce a version that is accurate and readable. A great deal of nonsense is written about translation, particularly by academics who approach it either as a terrain for theoretical debate or, worse still, as a moral issue: 'the translator must always be faithful to his original,' Leonard Tancock wrote, oddly assuming that translation is a masculine activity, even though on this occasion he was prefacing Nancy Mitford's translation of *La Princesse de Clèves* (Penguin, 1978). ' ... he has no right whatever to take liberties with it ... Nor has he any right to try to smooth the reader's path by the omission of "dull" bits, short-circuitings, explanatory additions, radical transferences or changes of order.' Why? And who says? Is it the reader who is demanding this perfection, this absence of explanatory additions, and so on?

Such academic theorists insist that a translation must read like a translation – it is somehow immoral to conceal the process that has gone into making it. 'Ordinary' readers usually demand the opposite, and reviewers in quite respectable papers sometimes show little appreciation of what the process means and involves: 'Not all of this material works in translation,' said one serious review of a book by Umberto Eco; and another: ' ... the stories [of Viktoria Tokareva] are well served by their translator, who hardly ever gets in the way'.

In philosophical terms I am quite willing to admit the impossibility of translation, while still having in practical terms to engage in it and to believe that everything must, to some extent, be translatable. I feel no obligation to avoid smoothing the reader's path and none, on the other hand, to 'getting in the way' from time to time. Above all, I want to convey some of the pleasure of reading Dumas to those who cannot do so in the original language and, through my one, particular version (since no translation can ever be definitive), to reveal aspects of his work that are not to be found in any of the other existing versions. This is a new translation and consequently a new interpretation of a great – and great popular – novel. If nothing else, most people would surely agree that it is long overdue.

The Count of Monte Cristo

Part 1

I
MARSEILLE – ARRIVAL

On February 24, 1815, the lookout at Notre-Dame de la Garde signalled the arrival of the three-master *Pharaon*, coming from Smyrna, Trieste and Naples. As usual, a coastal pilot immediately left the port, sailed hard by the Château d'If, and boarded the ship between the Cap de Morgiou and the island of Riou.

At once (as was also customary) the terrace of Fort Saint-Jean[1] was thronged with onlookers, because the arrival of a ship is always a great event in Marseille, particularly when the vessel, like the *Pharaon*, has been built, fitted out and laded in the shipyards of the old port and belongs to an owner from the town.

Meanwhile the ship was drawing near, and had successfully negotiated the narrows created by some volcanic upheaval between the islands of Calseraigne and Jarre; it had rounded Pomègue and was proceeding under its three topsails, its outer jib and its spanker, but so slowly and with such melancholy progress that the bystanders, instinctively sensing some misfortune, wondered what accident could have occurred on board. Nevertheless, those who were experts in nautical matters acknowledged that, if there had been such an accident, it could not have affected the vessel itself, for its progress gave every indication of a ship under perfect control: the anchor was ready to drop and the bowsprit shrouds loosed. Next to the pilot, who was preparing to guide the *Pharaon* through the narrow entrance to the port of Marseille, stood a young man, alert and sharp-eyed, supervising every movement of the ship and repeating each of the pilot's commands.

One of the spectators on the terrace of Fort Saint-Jean had been particularly affected by the vague sense of unease that hovered among them, so much so that he could not wait for the vessel to come to land; he leapt into a small boat and ordered it to be rowed out to the *Pharaon*, coming alongside opposite the cove of La Réserve. When he saw the man approaching, the young sailor left his place beside the pilot and, hat in hand, came and leant on the bulwarks of the ship.

He was a young man of between eighteen and twenty, tall, slim, with fine dark eyes and ebony-black hair. His whole demeanour possessed the calm and resolve peculiar to men who have been accustomed from childhood to wrestle with danger.

'Ah, it's you, Dantès!' the man in the boat cried. 'What has happened,

and why is there this air of dejection about all on board?'

'A great misfortune, Monsieur Morrel!' the young man replied. 'A great misfortune, especially for me: while off Civita Vecchia, we lost our good Captain Leclère.'

'And the cargo?' the ship owner asked brusquely.

'It has come safe to port, Monsieur Morrel, and I think you will be content on that score. But poor Captain Leclère . . . '

'What happened to him, then?' the shipowner asked, visibly relieved. 'So what happened to the good captain?'

'He is dead.'

'Lost overboard?'

'No, Monsieur, he died of an apoplectic fever, in terrible agony.' Then, turning back to his crew, he said: 'Look lively, there! Every man to his station to drop anchor!'

The crew obeyed. As one man, the eight or ten sailors of which it was composed leapt, some to the sheets, others to the braces, others to the halyards, others to the jib, and still others to the brails. The young sailor glanced casually at the start of this operation and, seeing that his orders were being carried out, prepared to resume the conversation.

'But how did this misfortune occur?' the shipowner continued, picking it up where the young man had left off.

'By heaven, Monsieur, in the most unexpected way imaginable: after a long conversation with the commander of the port, Captain Leclère left Naples in a state of great agitation. Twenty-four hours later, he was seized with fever and, three days after that, he was dead . . . We gave him the customary funeral and he now rests, decently wrapped in a hammock, with a thirty-six-pound cannonball at his feet and another at his head, off the island of Giglio. We've brought his medal and his sword back for his widow. Much good it did him,' the young man continued, with a melancholy smile, 'to fight the war against the English for ten years – only to die at last, like anyone else, in his bed.'

'Dammit, Monsieur Edmond, what do you expect?' said the shipowner, who appeared to be finding more and more to console him in his grief. 'We are all mortal. The old must give way to the young, or else there would be no progress or promotion. As long as you can assure me that the cargo . . . '

'All is well with it, Monsieur Morrel, I guarantee you. If you take my advice, you will not discount this trip for a profit of 25,000 francs.'

Then, as they had just sailed past the Round Tower, the young sailor

cried: 'Furl the topmast sails, the jib and the spanker! Look lively!'

The order was obeyed with almost as much dispatch as on a man-o'-war.

'Let go and brail all!'

At this last command, all the sails were lowered and the progress of the ship became almost imperceptible, driven only by the impetus of its forward motion.

'And now, if you would like to come aboard, Monsieur Morrel,' Dantès said, observing the owner's impatience, 'I see your supercargo,[2] Monsieur Danglars, coming out of his cabin. He will give you all the information that you desire. As for me, I must see to the mooring and put the ship in mourning.'

The owner did not need asking twice. He grasped hold of a line that Dantès threw to him and, with an agility that would have done credit to a seaman, climbed the rungs nailed to the bulging side of the ship, while Dantès went back to his post and left the conversation to the man he had introduced as Danglars: the latter was indeed emerging from his cabin and coming across to the shipowner.

This new arrival was a man, twenty-five to twenty-six years old, somewhat sombre in appearance, obsequious towards his superiors and insolent to his subordinates; hence, even apart from the label of supercargo, which always in itself causes aversion among sailors, he was generally as much disliked by the crew as Dantès was loved by them.

'Well, Monsieur Morrel,' said Danglars, 'you have heard the bad news, I suppose?'

'Yes, yes, poor Captain Leclère! He was a fine and upright man!'

'And above all an excellent sailor, weathered between the sea and the heavens, as was proper in a man responsible for looking after the interests of so important a firm as Morrel and Son,' Danglars replied.

'Even so,' the shipowner replied, watching Dantès while he searched for his mooring. 'Even so, I think one need not be a seaman of such long experience as you say, Danglars, to know the business: there is our friend Edmond going about his, it seems to me, like a man who has no need to ask advice of anybody.'

'Indeed,' said Danglars, casting a sidelong glance at Dantès with a flash of hatred in his eyes. 'Yes, indeed, he is young and full of self-confidence. The captain was hardly dead before he had taken command without asking anyone, and made us lose a day and a half on the island of Elba, instead of returning directly to Marseille.'

'As far as taking command of the ship is concerned,' said the owner, 'that was his duty as first mate. As for losing a day and a half at Elba, he was in the wrong, unless there was some damage to the ship that needed repairing.'

'The ship was in as good shape as I am, and as good as I hope you are, Monsieur Morrel. That day and a half was lost on a whim, for nothing other than the pleasure of going ashore.'

'Dantès,' the owner said, turning towards the young man. 'Would you come here.'

'Your pardon, Monsieur,' Dantès said. 'I shall be with you in an instant.' Then, to the crew, he called: 'Drop anchor!'

The anchor was immediately lowered and the chain ran out noisily. Dantès stayed at his post, even though the pilot was there, until the last operation had been carried out, then ordered: 'Lower the pennant and the flag to half-mast, unbrace the yards!'

'You see,' Danglars said. 'I do believe he thinks himself captain already.'

'So he is, in effect,' said the owner.

'Yes, apart from your signature and that of your partner, Monsieur Morrel.'

'By gad, why shouldn't we leave him in the job?' said the owner. 'He is young, I grant you, but he seems made for it and very experienced in his work.'

A cloud passed across Danglars' brow.

'Excuse me, Monsieur Morrel,' Dantès said as he came over. 'Now that the ship is moored, I am entirely at your disposal: I think you called me?'

Danglars took a step back.

'I wanted to ask why you stopped on the island of Elba.'

'I don't know, Monsieur. It was to carry out a last order from Captain Leclère, who gave me, on his deathbed, a packet for Marshal Bertrand.'[3]

'Did you see him, Edmond?'

'Whom?'

'The Grand Marshal.'

'Yes.'

Morrel looked about him and drew Dantès aside.

'And how is the emperor?' he asked, earnestly.

'He is well, as far as I can judge by my own eyes.'

'So you saw the emperor, too, did you?'

'He came to visit the marshal while I was there.'

'And did you speak to him?'

'It was he, Monsieur, who spoke to me,' Dantès said, smiling.

'And what did he say?'

'He asked me about the ship, the time of its departure for Marseille, the route it had taken and the cargo we were carrying. I think that, had it been empty and I the master of it, he intended to buy it; but I told him that I was only the first mate and that the ship belonged to the firm of Morrel and Son. "Ah, yes!" he said. "I know them. The Morrels have been shipowners from father to son, and there was Morrel who served in the same regiment as I did, when I was garrisoned at Valence." '

'By heaven, that's a fact!' the shipowner cried, with delight. 'It was Policar Morrel, my uncle, who later made captain. Dantès, tell my uncle that the emperor remembered him, and you will bring tears to the old trooper's eyes. Come, come, now,' he went on, putting a friendly arm across the young man's shoulders, 'you did well to follow Captain Leclère's instructions and stop on Elba; even though, if it were known that you gave a packet to the marshal and spoke to the emperor, you might be compromised.'

'How could it compromise me, Monsieur?' said Dantès. 'I don't even know what I was carrying, and the emperor only asked me the same questions that he would have put to anyone else. But please excuse me,' he continued. 'The health authorities and the Customs are coming on board. With your permission?'

'Of course, of course, my dear Dantès, carry on.'

The young man went off and, as he did so, Danglars returned.

'So,' he asked, 'it appears that he gave you good reason for stopping off at Porto Ferrajo?'

'Excellent reason, my dear Danglars.'

'I am pleased to hear it,' the other replied. 'It is always distressing to see a comrade fail in his duty.'

'Dantès did his duty,' the shipowner answered, 'and there is no more to be said. It was Captain Leclère who ordered him to put into port.'

'Speaking of Captain Leclère, did he not give you a letter from him?'

'Who?'

'Dantès.'

'Not to me! Was there one?'

'I believe that, apart from the packet, Captain Leclère entrusted him

with a letter.'

'Which packet are you referring to, Danglars?'

'The same that Dantès delivered when we stopped at Porto Ferrajo.'

'And how did you know that he had a packet to deliver at Porto Ferrajo?'

Danglars blushed. 'I was passing by the door of the captain's cabin, which was partly open, and I saw him handing the packet and a letter to Dantès.'

'He did not mention it,' said the owner. 'But if he has such a letter, he will give it to me.'

Danglars thought for a moment.

'In that case, Monsieur Morrel,' he said, 'I beg you to say nothing about it to Dantès. I must have been mistaken.'

At that moment the young man came back and Danglars left them.

'Now, my dear Dantès, are you free?' the owner asked.

'Yes, Monsieur.'

'It did not take long.'

'No, I gave the Customs a list of our cargo; as for the port authorities, they sent a man with the coastal pilot, and I handed our papers over to him.'

'So you have nothing more to do here?'

Dantès cast a rapid glance about him. 'No, everything is in order,' he said.

'Then you can come and take dinner with us?'

'Please, Monsieur Morrel, I beg you to excuse me, but the first thing I must do is to visit my father. Nonetheless, I am most grateful for the honour you do me.'

'That's proper, Dantès, very proper. I know that you are a good son.'

'And . . . ' Dantès asked, somewhat hesitantly, 'as far as you know, he's in good health, my father?'

'I do believe so, my dear Edmond, though I have not seen him.'

'Yes, he stays shut up in his little room.'

'Which at least proves that he lacked nothing while you were away.'

Dantès smiled.

'My father is a proud man, Monsieur, and even if he were short of everything, I doubt if he would have asked for help from anyone in the world, except God.'

'Now, when you have done that, we can count on your company.'

'I must beg you once more to excuse me, Monsieur Morrel, but after

that first visit, there is another that is no less important to me.'

'Ah, Dantès, that's true; I was forgetting that there is someone in Les Catalans who must be expecting you with no less impatience than your father – the lovely Mercédès.'

Dantès smiled.

'Ah, ha,' said the owner, 'now I understand why she came three times to ask me for news of the *Pharaon*. Dash it, Edmond! You're a lucky fellow, to have such a pretty mistress.'

'She is not my mistress, Monsieur,' the young sailor said gravely. 'She is my fiancée.'

'It sometimes amounts to the same thing,' the owner said, with a chuckle.

'Not for us, Monsieur,' Dantès replied.

'Come, come, my dear Edmond,' the other continued. 'Don't let me detain you. You have looked after my business well enough for me to give you every opportunity to look after your own. Do you need any money?'

'No, Monsieur, I have all my salary from the trip – that is, nearly three months' pay.'

'You manage your affairs well, my boy.'

'You might add that my father is a poor man, Monsieur Morrel.'

'Yes, indeed, I know you are a good son to him. So: go and see your father. I, too, have a son and I should bear a grudge against the man who kept him away from me, after a three-month voyage.'

'May I take my leave, then?' the young man said, with a bow.

'Yes, if you have nothing more to say to me.'

'No.'

'When Captain Leclère was dying, he did not give you a letter for me?'

'It would have been impossible for him to write one, Monsieur. But that reminds me: I wanted to ask you for a fortnight's leave.'

'To get married?'

'Firstly, then to go to Paris.'

'Very well! Have as much time as you want, Dantès. It will take us a good six weeks to unload the vessel and we shall hardly be ready to put to sea again within three months ... In three months' time, however, you must be there. The *Pharaon*,' the shipowner continued, putting a hand across the young sailor's shoulders, 'cannot set sail without its captain.'

'Without its captain!' Dantès cried, his eyes lighting up with joy. 'Be very careful what you are saying, Monsieur, because you have just touched on the most secret of my heart's desires. Can it be that you intend to appoint me captain of the *Pharaon*?'

'If it was up to me alone, I should grasp your hand, my dear Dantès, and say to you: "the matter is settled!" But I have a partner, and you know the Italian proverb: *chi ha compagno, ha padrone*.[4] But, at least, we are half-way there, since you already have one of the two votes you need. Leave it to me to get you the other, and I shall do my best.'

'Oh, Monsieur Morrel!' the young sailor cried, with tears in his eyes, grasping the shipowner's hands. 'Monsieur Morrel, I thank you, on behalf of my father and of Mercédès.'

'Fine, Edmond, fine! There is a God in heaven who looks after honest folk. Go and see your father, go and see Mercédès, then when that's done, come and see me.'

'But don't you want me to accompany you back to land?'

'No, thank you. I shall stay here to settle my accounts with Danglars. Were you happy with him during the voyage?'

'It depends on what you understand by that question, Monsieur. If you mean, as a good companion, no, because I think that he has not liked me since the day when I had the folly, after a trifling dispute between us, to suggest that we should stop for ten minutes on the isle of Monte Cristo to settle the matter. It was wrong of me to propose that, and he was right to refuse. If you are asking me about him as a supercargo, I think there is nothing to say, and that you will be satisfied with the manner in which his duties have been carried out.'

'Come now, Dantès,' the shipowner asked, 'if you were captain of the *Pharaon*, would you be pleased to keep Danglars?'

'Whether as captain or as first mate, Monsieur Morrel,' Dantès replied, 'I shall always have the highest regard for those who enjoy the confidence of my owners.'

'Well, well, Dantès, you are clearly a fine lad, in every respect. Let me detain you no longer, for I can see that you are on tenterhooks.'

'I may take my leave?' asked Dantès.

'Go on, I'm telling you.'

'Will you permit me to use your boat?'

'Take it.'

'Au revoir, Monsieur Morrel, and thank you a thousand times.'

'Au revoir, dear Edmond, and good luck!'

The young sailor leapt into the boat, seated himself in the stern and gave the order to row across to the Canebière. Two sailors immediately bent over their oars and the vessel proceeded as fast as it could, among the thousand small boats that obstruct the sort of narrow alleyway leading, between two lines of ships, from the harbour entrance to the Quai d'Orléans.

The shipowner looked after him, smiling, until the boat touched land and he saw him leap on to the cobbled quay, where he was instantly lost in the variegated crowd that, from five in the morning until nine in the evening, throngs the famous street known as La Canebière: the modern inhabitants of this old Phocean colony are so proud of it that they proclaim, with all the seriousness in the world, in that accent which gives such savour to everything they say: 'If Paris had the Canebière, Paris would be a little Marseille.'

Turning, the shipowner saw Danglars standing behind him, apparently awaiting orders but in reality, like him, watching the young sailor's departure. Yet there were very different expressions in these two pairs of eyes following the one man.

II
FATHER AND SON

We shall leave Danglars, gripped by the demon of hatred, trying to poison the shipowner's ear with some malicious libel against his comrade, and follow Dantès who, after walking along the Canebière, took the Rue de Noailles, entered a small house on the left side of the Allées de Meilhan and hastened up the four flights of a dark stairway. There, holding the banister with one hand, while the other repressed the beating of his heart, he stopped before a half-open door through which he could see to the back of a small room.

In this room lived Dantès' father.

News of the arrival of the *Pharaon* had not yet reached the old man who was standing on a chair, engaged with trembling hands in pinning up some nasturtiums and clematis that climbed across the trellis outside his window. Suddenly, he felt himself grasped around the waist and a well-known voice exclaim behind him: 'Father! My dear father!'

The old man cried out and turned around; then, seeing his son, fell into his arms, pale and trembling.

'What is it, father?' the young man exclaimed, with concern. 'Are you unwell?'

'No, no, dear Edmond, my son, my child. No, but I was not expecting you – and the joy, the shock of seeing you like this, unexpectedly ... Oh, heavens! It is too much for me!'

'Now, then, father, calm yourself! I am really here! They always say that joy cannot harm you, which is why I came in without warning. Come now, smile; don't look at me like that, with those wild eyes. I am back and there is happiness in store for us.'

'I'm pleased to hear it, my boy,' the old man continued. 'But what happiness? Are you going to stay with me from now on? Come, tell me about your good fortune!'

'God forgive me,' the young man said, 'for rejoicing at good fortune which has brought grief to the family of another. But, God knows, I never wished for it; it has happened, and I do not have the heart to grieve at it. Our good Captain Leclère is dead, father, and it seems likely that, thanks to Monsieur Morrel's support, I shall have his command. Do you understand, father? A captain at twenty! With a salary of a hundred *louis*[1] and a share in the profits! Isn't that better than a poor sailor like myself could expect?'

'Yes, my son, yes,' said the old man. 'This is indeed a stroke of luck.'

'So I want you to have a little house, with the first money I earn, and a garden to grow your clematis, your nasturtiums and your honeysuckle ... But what's wrong, father? You look ill!'

'An instant, don't worry! It is nothing.' And, his strength failing him, he leant back.

'Father!' cried the young man. 'Come, have a glass of wine; it will revive you. Where do you keep your wine?'

'No, thank you, don't bother to look for it; there is no need,' he replied, trying to restrain his son.

'Yes, indeed there is, father. Show me it.' He opened one or two cupboards.

'It's a waste of time ...' the old man said. 'There is no wine left.'

'What! No wine!' Dantès said, paling in turn as he looked from the old man's sunken and livid cheeks to the empty cupboards. 'What! You have no wine left? Have you been short of money, father?'

'I am short of nothing, now that you are here,' said the old man.

'But I left you two hundred francs,' Dantès stammered, wiping the sweat from his brow, 'two months ago, as I was leaving.'

'Yes, yes, Edmond, so you did; but when you left you forgot a small debt to my neighbour Caderousse. He reminded me of it and said that if I did not settle it on your behalf, he would go and reclaim it from Monsieur Morrel. So, you understand, I was afraid that it might do you some harm.'

'And?'

'And I paid it.'

'But,' Dantès exclaimed, 'I owed Caderousse a hundred and forty francs!'

'Yes,' the old man mumbled.

'And you paid them out of the two hundred francs that I left you?'

His father nodded.

'Which means that you lived for three months on sixty francs!' the young man exclaimed.

'You know how small my needs are.'

'Oh, heaven, heaven, forgive me!' Edmond cried, falling on his knees in front of the old man.

'What are you doing?'

'Ah! You have broken my heart!'

'Pah! You are here,' the old man said, with a smile. 'All is forgotten, because all is well.'

'Yes, here I am,' said the young man. 'Here I am with a fine future and a little money. Here, father,' he said, 'take it, take it and send out for something immediately.'

He emptied the contents of his pockets on the table: a dozen gold coins, five or six five-franc pieces and some small change.

Old Dantès' face lit up.

'Whose is that?' he asked.

'Mine! Thine! Ours, of course! Take it, buy some food and enjoy yourself. There will be more tomorrow.'

'Gently, gently,' the old man said, smiling. 'If you don't mind, I shall go easy on your money: if people see me buying too many things at once, they will think that I had to wait for you to come back before I went shopping.'

'Do as you think best, but first of all, father, get yourself a housemaid: I don't want you to live on your own from now on. I have some contraband coffee and some excellent tobacco in a little chest in the hold. You will have it tomorrow. But, hush! Someone is coming.'

'That will be Caderousse, who has learned of your arrival and is no

doubt coming to welcome you back.'

'There's a fellow who says one thing and thinks another,' Edmond muttered. 'No matter. He is a neighbour who has helped us in the past, so let him come in.'

Just as Edmond finished saying this under his breath, the black, bearded head of Caderousse appeared on the landing, framed in the outer door. A man of twenty-five or twenty-six years of age, he was holding a piece of cloth which, being a tailor, he was about to fashion into the lining of a jacket.

'You're back again, then, Edmond?' he said, with a thick Marseille accent and a broad smile, revealing teeth as white as ivory.

'As you can see, neighbour, and entirely at your service,' Dantès replied, this polite formula barely disguising his coldness towards the man.

'Thank you, thank you. Fortunately, I need nothing; in fact, it is sometimes others who need me.' Dantès bridled. 'I am not saying that for you, my boy. I lent you money and you returned it. That's how things are done between good neighbours, and we're quits.'

'We are never quits towards those who have done us a favour,' said Dantès. 'Even when one ceases to owe them money, one owes them gratitude.'

'There is no sense in speaking of that: what's past is past. Let's talk about your happy return, young man. I just happened to go down to the harbour to fetch some brown cloth, when I met our friend Danglars. "You're in Marseille?" I exclaimed. "Yes, as you see." "I thought you were in Smyrna." "It could well be, because I have just come back from there." "And where is young Edmond, then?" "At his father's, I suppose," Danglars told me. So I came at once,' Caderousse concluded, 'to have the pleasure of shaking the hand of a friend.'

'Dear Caderousse,' the old man said. 'He is so fond of us.'

'Indeed, I am, and I hold you in all the greater esteem, since honest people are so rare! But it seems you have come into money, my boy?' the tailor went on, glancing at the handful of gold and silver that Dantès had emptied on to the table.

The young man observed a flash of greed light up his neighbour's dark eyes. 'Heavens, no!' he said casually. 'That money is not mine. I was just telling my father that I was afraid he might have wanted for something while I was away and, to reassure me, he emptied his purse on the table. Come, father,' he continued. 'Put that money back in

your pocket – unless, of course, our neighbour needs some for himself, in which case it is at his disposal.'

'Indeed not, my boy,' said Caderousse. 'I need nothing and, thank God, my business holds body and soul together. Keep your money, keep it; one can never have too much. Still, I am obliged for your offer, as much as if I had taken advantage of it.'

'It was well meant,' said Dantès.

'I don't doubt that it was. So, I learn that you are on good terms with Monsieur Morrel, sly one that you are?'

'Monsieur Morrel has always been very good to me,' Dantès answered.

'In that case, you were wrong to refuse dinner with him.'

'What do you mean: refuse dinner?' Old Dantès asked. 'Did he invite you to dinner?'

'Yes, father,' said Edmond, smiling at his father's astonishment on learning of this high honour.

'So why did you refuse, son?' the old man asked.

'So that I could come straight back here, father,' the young man answered. 'I was anxious to see you.'

'He must have been put out by it, that good Monsieur Morrel,' Caderousse remarked. 'When one hopes to be made captain, it is a mistake to get on the wrong side of one's owner.'

'I explained the reason for my refusal and I hope he understood it.'

'Even so, to be promoted to captain, one must flatter one's bosses a little.'

'I expect to become captain without that,' Dantès retorted.

'So much the better! All your old friends will be pleased for you and I know someone over there, behind the Citadelle de Saint-Nicholas, who will not be unhappy about it, either.'

'Mercédès?' the old man said.

'Yes, father,' Dantès resumed. 'And, with your permission, now that I've seen you, now that I know you are well and that you have all you need, I would like to ask your leave to go and visit Les Catalans.'

'Go, child,' Old Dantès said. 'And may God bless you as much in your wife as He has blessed me in my son.'

'His wife!' said Caderousse. 'Hold on, old man, hold on! As far as I know, she's not that yet!'

'No,' Edmond replied, 'but in all probability she soon will be.'

'Never mind,' said Caderousse, 'never mind. You have done well to hurry back, my boy.'

'Why?'

'Because Mercédès is a beautiful girl, and beautiful girls are never short of admirers, especially that one: there are dozens of them after her.'

'Really?' Edmond said with a smile, not entirely concealing a hint of unease.

'Oh, yes,' Caderousse continued, 'and some with good prospects, too. But, of course, you are going to be a captain, so she'll be sure not to refuse you.'

'By which you mean,' Dantès said, smiling, but barely concealing his anxiety, 'that if I were not a captain . . . '

'Ah! Ah!' said Caderousse.

'Come, now,' the young man said. 'I have a better opinion than you of women in general, and Mercédès in particular, and I am persuaded that, whether I were a captain or not, she would remain faithful to me.'

'So much the better! When one is going to get married, it is always a good thing to have faith. But enough of that. Take my advice, lad: don't waste any time in telling her of your return and letting her know about your aspirations.'

'I am going at once,' said Edmond.

He embraced his father, nodded to Caderousse and left.

Caderousse stayed a moment longer, then, taking his leave of the elder Dantès, followed the young man down and went to find Danglars who was waiting for him on the corner of the Rue Senac.

'Well?' Danglars asked. 'Did you see him?'

'I have just left them,' said Caderousse.

'And did he talk about his hope of being made captain?'

'He spoke of it as though he had already been appointed.'

'Patience!' Danglars said. 'It seems to me that he is in rather too much of a hurry.'

'Why, it seems Monsieur Morrel has given him his word.'

'So he is pleased?'

'He is even insolent about it. He has already offered me his services, like some superior personage; he wanted to lend me money, like some banker or other.'

'You refused?'

'Indeed I did, though I could well have accepted, since I am the one who gave him the first silver coins he ever had in his hands. But now Monsieur Dantès has no need of anyone: he is going to be a captain.'

'Huh!' said Danglars. 'He's not one yet.'

'My God, it would be a fine thing indeed if he wasn't,' said Caderousse. 'Otherwise there will be no talking to him.'

'If we really want,' said Danglars, 'he will stay as he is, and perhaps even become less than he is.'

'What do you mean?'

'Nothing, I was talking to myself. Is he still in love with the beautiful Catalan?'

'Madly. He has gone there now; but, unless I am gravely mistaken, he will not find things altogether to his liking.'

'Explain.'

'What does it matter?'

'This is more important than you may think. You don't like Dantès, do you?'

'I don't like arrogance.'

'Well, then: tell me what you know about the Catalan woman.'

'I have no positive proof, but I have seen things, as I said, that make me think the future captain will not be pleased with what he finds around the Chemin des Vieilles-Infirmeries.'

'What have you seen? Come on, tell me.'

'Well, I have observed that every time Mercédès comes into town, she is accompanied by a large Catalan lad, with black eyes, ruddy cheeks, very dark in colour and very passionate, whom she calls "my cousin".'

'Ah, indeed! And do you think this cousin is courting her?'

'I imagine so: what else does a fine lad of twenty-one do to a pretty girl of seventeen?'

'And you say that Dantès has gone to Les Catalans?'

'He left before me.'

'Suppose we were to go in the same direction, stop in the Réserve and, over a glass of La Malgue wine, learn what we can learn.'

'Who would tell us anything?'

'We shall be on the spot and we'll see what has happened from Dantès' face.'

'Let's go then,' said Caderousse. 'But you are paying?'

'Certainly,' Danglars replied.

The two of them set off at a brisk pace for the spot they had mentioned and, when they arrived, called for a bottle and two glasses.

Old Pamphile had seen Dantès go by less than two minutes before. Certain that he was in Les Catalans, they sat under the budding leaves

of the plane-trees and sycamores, in the branches of which a happy band of birds was serenading one of the first fine days of spring.

III
LES CATALANS

A hundred yards away from the place where the two friends, staring into the distance with their ears pricked, were enjoying the sparkling wine of La Malgue, lay the village of Les Catalans, behind a bare hillock ravaged by the sun and the mistral.

One day, a mysterious group of colonists set out from Spain and landed on this spit of land, where it still resides today. No one knew where they had come from or what language they spoke. One of the leaders, who understood Provençal, asked the commune of Marseille to give them this bare and arid promontory on to which, like the sailors of Antiquity, they had drawn up their boats. The request was granted and, three months later, a little village grew up around the twelve or fifteen boats that brought these gypsies of the sea.

The same village, built in a bizarre and picturesque manner that is partly Moorish and partly Spanish, is the one that can be seen today, inhabited by the descendants of those men, who speak the language of their forefathers. For three or four centuries they have remained faithful to the little promontory on which they first landed, clinging to it like a flock of seabirds, in no way mixing with the inhabitants of Marseille, marrying among themselves and retaining the habits and dress of their motherland, just as they have retained its tongue.

The reader must follow us along the only street of the little village and enter one of those houses, to the outside of which the sunlight has given that lovely colour of dead leaves which is peculiar to the buildings of the country; with, inside, a coat of whitewash, the only decoration of a Spanish *posada*.

A lovely young girl with jet-black hair and the velvet eyes of a gazelle, was standing, leaning against an inner wall, rubbing an innocent sprig of heather between slender fingers like those on a classical statue, and pulling off the flowers, the remains of which were already strewn across the floor. At the same time, her arms, naked to the elbow, arms that were tanned but otherwise seemed modelled on those of the Venus of Arles, trembled with a sort of feverish impatience, and she was

tapping the ground with her supple, well-made foot, revealing a leg that was shapely, bold and proud, but imprisoned in a red cotton stocking patterned in grey and blue lozenges.

A short distance away, a tall young man of between twenty and twenty-two was sitting on a chair, rocking it fitfully on two legs while supporting himself on his elbow against an old worm-eaten dresser and watching her with a look that combined anxiety with irritation. His eyes were questioning, but those of the young woman, firm and unwavering, dominated their conversation.

'Please, Mercédès,' the man said. 'Easter is coming round again; it's the time for weddings. Give me your answer!'

'You have had it a hundred times, Fernand, and you really must like torturing yourself, to ask me again.'

'Well, repeat it, I beg you, repeat it once more so that I can come to believe it. Tell me, for the hundredth time, that you reject my love, even though your mother approves of me. Convince me that you are prepared to trifle with my happiness and that my life and my death are nothing to you. My God, my God! To dream for ten years of being your husband, Mercédès, and then to lose that hope which was the sole aim of my existence!'

'I, at least, never encouraged you in that hope, Fernand,' Mercédès replied. 'You cannot accuse me of having, even once, flirted with you. I've said repeatedly: "I love you like a brother, but never demand anything more from me than this fraternal love, because my heart belongs to another." Isn't that what I have always told you, Fernand?'

'Yes, Mercédès, I know,' the young man replied. 'Yes, you have always been laudably, and cruelly, honest with me. But are you forgetting that it is a sacred law among the Catalans only to marry among themselves?'

'You are wrong, Fernand, it is not a law, but a custom, nothing more; and I advise you not to appeal to that custom on your behalf. You have been chosen for conscription, Fernand, and the freedom that you now enjoy is merely a temporary reprieve: at any moment you might be called up to serve in the army. Once you are a soldier, what will you do with me – I mean, with a poor orphan girl, sad and penniless, whose only possession is a hut, almost in ruins, in which hang a few worn nets, the paltry legacy that was left by my father to my mother, and by my mother to me? Consider, Fernand, that in the year since she died, I have virtually lived on charity! Sometimes you pretend that I am of some use to you, so that you can be justified in sharing your

catch with me. And I accept, Fernand, because you are the son of one of my father's brothers, because we grew up together and, beyond that, most of all, because it would hurt you too much if I were to refuse. But I know full well that the fish I take to the market, which bring me the money to buy the hemp that I spin – I know, full well, Fernand, that it is charity.'

'What does it matter, Mercédès, poor and alone as you are, when you suit me thus better than the daughter of the proudest shipowner or the richest banker in Marseille? What do people like us need? An honest wife and a good housekeeper. Where could I find better than you on either score?'

'Fernand,' Mercédès replied, shaking her head, 'one is not a good housekeeper and one cannot promise to remain an honest woman when one loves a man other than one's husband. Be satisfied with my friendship for, I repeat, that is all I can promise you and I only promise what I am sure of being able to give.'

'Yes, I understand,' said Fernand. 'You bear your own poverty patiently, but you are afraid of mine. Well, Mercédès, with your love, I would try to make my fortune; you would bring me luck and I should become rich. I can cast my fisherman's net wider, I can take a job as a clerk in a shop, I could even become a merchant myself!'

'You can't do any such thing, Fernand: you're a soldier and, if you stay here among the Catalans, it is because there is no war for you to fight. So remain a fisherman, don't dream of things that will make reality seem even more terrible to you – and be content with my friendship, because I cannot give you anything else.'

'You are right, Mercédès, I shall be a seaman; and, instead of the dress of our forefathers which you despise, I shall have a patent-leather hat, a striped shirt and a blue jacket with anchors on the buttons. That's how a man needs to dress, isn't it, if he wants to please you?'

'What do you mean?' Mercédès asked, with an imperious look. 'What do you mean? I don't understand you.'

'What I mean, Mercédès, is that you are only so hard-hearted and cruel towards me because you are waiting for someone who is dressed like that. But it may be that the one you await is fickle and, even if he isn't, the sea will be fickle for him.'

'Fernand!' Mercédès exclaimed. 'I thought you were kind, but I was mistaken. It is wicked of you to call on the wrath of God to satisfy your jealousy. Yes, I will not deny it: I am waiting for the man you describe,

I love him and if he does not return, instead of blaming the fickleness that it pleases you to speak of, I shall think that he died loving me.'

The young Catalan made an angry gesture.

'I understand what that means, Fernand: you want to blame him because I do not love you, and cross his dagger with your Catalan knife! What good would that do you? If you were defeated, you would lose my friendship; if you were the victor, you would see that friendship turn to hatred. Believe me, when a woman loves a man, you do not win her heart by crossing swords with him. No, Fernand, don't be carried away by evil thoughts. Since you cannot have me as your wife, be content to have me as a friend and a sister. In any case,' she added, her eyes anxious and filling with tears, 'stay, Fernand: you said, yourself, a moment ago that the sea is treacherous. It is already four months since he left, and I have counted a lot of storms in the past four months!'

Fernand remained impassive. He made no attempt to wipe the tears that were running down Mercédès cheeks, yet he would have given a glass of his own blood for each of those tears; but they were shed for another. He got up, walked round the hut and returned, stopping before Mercédès with a dark look in his eyes and clenched fists.

'Come now, Mercédès,' he said. 'Answer me once more: have you truly made up your mind?'

'I love Edmond Dantès,' the young woman said, coldly, 'and no one will be my husband except Edmond.'

'And you will love him for ever?'

'As long as I live.'

Fernand bent his head like a discouraged man, gave a sigh that was like a groan, then suddenly looked up with clenched teeth and nostrils flared.

'But suppose he is dead?'

'If he is dead, I shall die.'

'And if he forgets you?'

'Mercédès!' cried a happy voice outside the house. 'Mercédès!'

'Ah!' the girl exclaimed, reddening with joy and leaping up, filled with love. 'You see that he has not forgotten me: he is here!' And she ran to the door, and opened it, crying: 'Come to me, Edmond! I am here!'

Pale and trembling, Fernand stepped back as a traveller might do at the sight of a snake; and, stumbling against his chair, fell back into it.

Edmond and Mercédès were in each other's arms. The hot Marseille

sun, shining through the doorway, drenched them in a flood of light. At first, they saw nothing of what was around them. A vast wave of happiness cut them off from the world and they spoke only those half-formed words that are the outpourings of such intense joy that they resemble the expression of pain.

Suddenly, Edmond noticed the sombre figure of Fernand, pale and threatening in the darkness. With a gesture of which he was not even himself aware, the young Catalan had laid his hand on the knife at his belt.

'Oh, forgive me,' Dantès said, raising an eyebrow. 'I did not realize that we were not alone.'

Then, turning to Mercédès, he asked: 'Who is this gentleman?'

'He will be your best friend, Dantès, because he is my friend, my cousin and my brother: this is Fernand, which means he is the man whom, after you, I love most in the world. Don't you recognize him?'

'Ah! Yes, indeed,' said Edmond. And, without leaving Mercédès whose hand he held clasped in one of his own, he extended the other with a cordial gesture towards the Catalan. But Fernand, instead of responding to this sign of friendship, remained as silent and motionless as a statue. It was enough to make Edmond look enquiringly from Mercédès, who was trembling with emotion, to Fernand, sombre and threatening.

That one glance told him everything. His brow clouded with rage.

'I did not realize that I had hurried round to see you, Mercédès, only to find an enemy here.'

'An enemy!' Mercédès exclaimed, looking angrily in the direction of her cousin. 'An enemy, in my house, you say, Edmond! If I thought that, I should take your arm and go with you to Marseille, leaving this house, never to return.'

Fernand's eyes lit up with rage.

'And if any misfortune were to befall you, my dear Edmond,' she continued, with the same cool determination, proving to Fernand that she had read the sinister depths of his mind, 'if any misfortune should happen to you, I should climb up the Cap de Morgiou and throw myself headlong on to the rocks.'

The blood drained from Fernand's face.

'But you are wrong, Edmond,' she continued. 'You have no enemies here. The only person here is Fernand, my brother, who is going to shake your hand like a true friend.'

With these words, the girl turned her imperious face towards the Catalan and he, as if mesmerized by her look, slowly came across to Edmond and held out his hand. His hatred, like an impotent wave, had been broken against the ascendancy that the woman exercised over him. But no sooner had he touched Edmond's hand than he felt he had done all that it was possible for him to do, and rushed out of the house.

'Ah!' he cried, running along like a madman and burying his hands in his hair. 'Ah! Who will deliver me from this man? Wretch that I am, wretch that I am!'

'Hey, Catalan! Hey, Fernand! Where are you going?' a voice called to him.

The young man stopped dead, looked around and saw Caderousse at the table with Danglars under a leafy arbour.

'What now,' said Caderousse, 'why don't you join us? Are you in such a hurry that you don't have time to say hello to your friends?'

'Especially when they still have an almost full bottle in front of them,' Danglars added.

Fernand stared at the two men with a dazed look, and did not answer.

'He seems a bit down in the dumps,' Danglars said, nudging Caderousse with his knee. 'Could we be wrong? Contrary to what we thought, could it be that Dantès has got the upper hand?'

'Why! We'll just have to find out,' said Caderousse. And, turning back to the young man, he said: 'Well, Catalan, have you made up your mind?'

Fernand wiped the sweat from his brow and slowly made his way under the vault of leaves: its shade appeared to do something to calm his spirits and its coolness to bring a small measure of well-being back to his exhausted body.

'Good day,' he said. 'I think you called me?'

'I called you because you were running along like a madman and I was afraid you would go and throw yourself into the sea,' Caderousse said with a laugh. 'Devil take it, when one has friends, it is not only to offer them a glass of wine, but also to stop them drinking three or four pints of water.'

Fernand gave a groan that resembled a sob and let his head fall on to his wrists, which were crossed on the table.

'Well now, do you want me to tell you what, Fernand?' Caderousse continued, coming straight to the point with that crude brutality of the common man whose curiosity makes him forget any sense of tact. 'You

look to me like a man who has been crossed in love!' He accompanied this quip with a roar of laughter.

'Huh!' Danglars retorted. 'A lad built like that is not likely to be unhappy in love. You must be joking, Caderousse.'

'Not at all,' the other said. 'Just listen to him sigh. Come, Fernand, come now, lift your nose off the table and tell us: it is not very mannerly to refuse to answer your friends when they are asking after your health.'

'My health is fine,' said Fernand, clenching his fists and without looking up.

'Ah, Danglars, you see now,' Caderousse said, winking at his friend. 'This is how things are: Fernand here, who is a fine, brave Catalan, one of the best fishermen in Marseille, is in love with a beautiful girl called Mercédès; but it appears that, unfortunately, the girl herself is in love with the second mate of the *Pharaon*; and, as the *Pharaon* came into port this very day ... You follow me?'

'No, I don't,' said Danglars.

'Poor Fernand has got his marching orders,' Caderousse continued.

'So, what then?' said Fernand, lifting his head and looking at Caderousse, like a man anxious to find someone on whom to vent his wrath. 'Mercédès is her own woman, isn't she? She is free to love whomsoever she wants.'

'Oh, if that's how you take it,' said Caderousse, 'that's another matter. I thought you were a Catalan, and I have been told that the Catalans are not men to let themselves be pushed aside by a rival. They even said that Fernand, in particular, was fearsome in his vengeance.'

Fernand smiled pityingly. 'A lover is never fearsome,' he said.

'Poor boy!' Danglars continued, pretending to grieve for the young man from the bottom of his heart. 'What do you expect? He didn't imagine that Dantès would suddenly return like this; he may have thought him dead, or unfaithful. Who knows? Such things are all the more distressing when they happen to us suddenly.'

'In any event,' Caderousse said, drinking as he spoke and starting to show the effects of the heady wine of La Malgue, 'in any event, Fernand is not the only person to have been put out by Dantès' fortunate return, is he, Danglars?'

'No, what you say is true – and I might even add that it will bring him misfortune.'

'No matter,' Caderousse went on, pouring out some wine for Fernand and replenishing his own glass for the eighth or tenth time (though

Danglars had hardly touched the one in front of him). 'No matter. In the meantime he will marry Mercédès, the lovely Mercédès. He has come back for that, at least.'

While the other was speaking, Danglars directed a piercing look at the young man, on whose heart Caderousse's words were falling like molten lead.

'And when is the wedding?' he asked.

'Oh, it's not settled yet,' Fernand muttered.

'No, but it will be,' said Caderousse, 'just as surely as Dantès will be captain of the *Pharaon*, don't you think, Danglars?'

Danglars shuddered at this unexpected stab and turned towards Caderousse, studying his face now to see if the blow had been premeditated; but he saw nothing except covetousness on this face, already almost besotted with drink.

'Very well,' he said, filling the glasses. 'Then let's drink to Captain Edmond Dantès, husband of the beautiful Catalan!'

Caderousse lifted his glass to his lips with a sluggish hand and drained it in one gulp. Fernand took his and dashed it to the ground.

'Ha, ha!' said Caderousse. 'What can I see over there, on the crest of the hill, coming from the Catalan village? You look, Fernand, your eyesight is better than mine. I think I'm starting to see less clearly and, as you know, wine is a deceptive imp: it looks to me like two lovers walking along, side by side and hand in hand. Heaven forgive me! They don't realize that we can see them and, look at that, they're kissing each other!'

Danglars marked every single trait of the anguish that crossed Fernand's face, as its features changed before his eyes.

'Do you know who they are, Monsieur Fernand?' he asked.

'Yes,' the other replied dully. 'It's Monsieur Edmond and Mademoiselle Mercédès.'

'There! You see?' said Caderousse. 'I didn't recognize them. Hey, Dantès! Hey, there, pretty girl! Come down for a moment and let us know when the wedding is: Fernand here is so stubborn, he won't tell us.'

'Why don't you be quiet!' said Danglars, pretending to restrain Caderousse who, with drunken obstinacy, was leaning out of the arbour. 'Try to stay upright and let the lovers enjoy themselves in peace. Why, look at Monsieur Fernand: he's being sensible. Why not try and do the same?'

It may be that Fernand, driven to the limit and baited by Danglars like a bull by the banderilleros, would finally have leapt forward, for he had already stood up and appeared to be gathering strength to throw himself at his rival; but Mercédès, upright and laughing, threw back her lovely head and shot a glance from her clear eyes. At that moment, Fernand recalled her threat to die if Edmond should die, and slumped back, discouraged, on his chair.

Danglars looked at the two men, one besotted by drink, the other enslaved by love, and murmured: 'I shall get nothing out of these idiots: I fear I am sitting between a drunkard and a coward. On the one hand, I have a man eaten up by envy, drowning his sorrows in drink when he should be intoxicated with venom; on the other, a great simpleton whose mistress has just been snatched away from under his very nose, who does nothing except weep like a child and feel sorry for himself. And yet he has the blazing eyes of a Spaniard, a Sicilian or a Calabrian – those people who are such experts when it comes to revenge – and fists that would crush a bull's head as surely as a butcher's mallet. Fate is definitely on Edmond's side: he will marry the beautiful girl, become captain and laugh in our faces. Unless . . . ' (a pallid smile hovered on Danglars' lips) ' . . . unless I take a hand in it.'

Caderousse, half standing, with his fists on the table, was still shouting: 'Hello, there! Hello! Edmond! Can't you see your friends, or are you too proud to talk to them?'

'No, my dear Caderousse,' Edmond replied. 'I am not proud, but I am happy – and happiness, I believe, is even more dazzling than pride.'

'At last, all is explained,' said Caderousse. 'Ho! Good day to you, Madame Dantès.'

Mercédès bowed gravely and said: 'That is not yet my name, and in my country they say it is bad luck to call a young woman by the name of her betrothed before he has become her husband. So, please, call me Mercédès.'

'You must forgive my good neighbour, Caderousse,' Dantès said. 'He so seldom makes a mistake!'

'So, the wedding is to take place shortly, Monsieur Dantès?' Danglars said, greeting the two young people.

'As soon as possible, Monsieur Danglars. Today, everything is to be agreed at my father's house and tomorrow or, at the latest, the day after, we shall have the engagement dinner here at La Réserve. I hope that my friends will join us: you, of course, are invited, Monsieur

Danglars, and you, too, Caderousse.'

'And Fernand?' Caderousse asked, with a coarse laugh. 'Will Fernand be there as well?'

'My wife's brother is my brother,' Edmond said, 'and both Mercédès and I should regret it deeply if he were to be separated from us at such a time.'

Fernand opened his mouth to reply, but his voice caught in his throat and he could not utter a single word.

'The agreement today, the engagement tomorrow or the day after: by George! You're in a great hurry, Captain.'

'Danglars,' Edmond said with a smile, 'I shall say the same to you as Mercédès did a moment ago: don't give me a title that does not yet belong to me, it could bring me ill luck.'

'My apologies,' Danglars replied. 'I was merely saying that you seem in a great hurry. After all, we have plenty of time: the *Pharaon* will not set sail for a good three months.'

'One always hurries towards happiness, Monsieur Danglars, because when one has suffered much, one is at pains to believe in it. But I am not impelled by mere selfishness. I have to go to Paris.'

'Ah, indeed! To Paris. And will this be your first visit, Dantès?'

'Yes.'

'You have business there?'

'Not of my own, but a final request that I must carry out for our poor Captain Leclère. You understand, Danglars, the mission is sacred to me. In any event, don't worry. I shall be gone only as long as it takes to go there and return.'

'Yes, yes, I understand,' Danglars said aloud; then he added, under his breath: 'To Paris, no doubt to deliver the letter that the marshal gave him. By heaven! That letter has given me an idea – an excellent idea! Ah, Dantès, my friend, your name is not yet Number One on the register of the *Pharaon*.'

Then, turning back to Edmond who was leaving, he shouted: '*Bon voyage!*'

'Thank you,' Edmond replied, turning around and giving a friendly wave. Then the two lovers went on their way, calm and happy as two chosen souls heading for paradise.