

A STUDY OF THE HEROES OF FOUR
HISTORICAL DRAMAS OF ALEXANDER DUMAS PERE

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INTRODUCTION

It is as a novelist that Alexander Dumas père is best known today; yet with his historical drama he made one of the greatest contributions to the French theater of his age. There have been many studies of the man's life and of his works in general, but it is the purpose of this investigation to examine some of the men whose lives appealed him as suitable material for the stage.

In making this study, care has been taken to select plays written during eight of the author's most productive years in the theater, to see what difference, if any, the character portrayals of the more mature Dumas present. The works therefore will be treated in their chronological order. Among the dramas chosen there are two great successes, one of which, Henri III et Sa Cour, was the first historical romantic drama presented on a French stage. There are also two which failed. These dramatic works represent the fifteenth, sixteenth, the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, and the heroes are taken from Corsica, England, and France. The dramatist did not select his heroes from any single class of society; thus, the plays chosen depict some of the types of people that appealed to his dramatic sense: an actor, a member of a king's court, a king, and a soldier who became an emperor.

In studying Dumas' treatment of his historical heroes,

I first discuss the author's importance in the theater of his day. Then follows an examination of the plays and their heroes, noting what history tells us about the hero, where Dumas found his information, how he portrays each hero, what part of each portrayal is historically true and how much is a result of the author's creative imagination. This investigation will also try to show what there was in the life of each character that attracted the dramatist. From these observations it is hoped that one will be able to judge the excellence of Dumas' dramatic ability.

CHAPTER I

ALEXANDER DUMAS AND THE ROMANTIC THEATER

It was at Villers-Cotterets, a little city of the department of Aisne, France, that Alexander Dumas was born, July 24, 1802. He was the son of Marie Labouret, a tavern keeper's daughter, and Thomas-Alexander Dumas, General of the Hercules Guards of the Republican army of Napoleon Bonaparte. His father having died when Alexander was only four years old, the influence of his early years was mainly that of his mother whose every thought was for the welfare of her son.

Early in life Alexander developed a taste for books, showing a decided preference for the works of Schiller, Byron, Sir Walter Scott, and James Fenimore Cooper, all of whom captivated his young imagination. This interest in reading having stimulated in him a desire for foreign languages, he learned Italian and German while yet quite a youth. His love for reading had still a greater effect upon him: it aroused in him the ambition to be a great writer. Thus he decided to visit Paris where greater opportunities were available.¹

¹ Gorman, The Incredible Marquis, New York, 1929, p. 52.

This trip was to be remembered for a long time by the youth. While in Paris he saw Sylla¹ played by Talma, the greatest French actor of that time, and what was more important to him, he was admitted to the dressing room of the famous actor who baptized the young man a poet.² This visit caused him to decide that his future was in Paris. In 1832 he returned to the great city where with the aid of General Foy, a former friend of his father, he found employment as a clerk in the office of the Duc d'Orléans. He did not forget his life's ambition, as he spent all of his leisure time in reading and writing.

The time thus spent was not wasted, for on September 22, 1825, La Chasse et l'Amour, a vaudeville that Dumas had written in collaboration with two of his friends, was produced at the Ambigu-Comique theater to the manifest delight of the audience as well as that of the young writer. This seemed to encourage him, for with the assistance of collaborators he produced several other farces which aided him in his financial struggle, but put him in disfavor at the offices of the Duc d'Orléans.³

While Dumas was becoming popular because of his successful attempts at play writing, great changes which had been slowly forming in the literary field of France, were

¹ A drama by Victor de Jouy, French author born at Jouy-en-Josas, near Versailles, in 1764. He died in 1846.

² Dumas, Mes Mémoires, Paris, 1890, I, pp. 49-67.

³ Ibid., IV, pp. 237-264.

at last beginning to take definite shape. In the theater, the classic tragedy which had found its subjects in the Greek and Roman literature was being attacked by a group of young writers who were to be known as Romanticists. The Revolution and the régime instituted by it seemed to awaken a greater interest in the past life of the nation and in literary ideas and theories of other countries. The historical novels of Walter Scott having become very popular, it was natural that the public should desire to see upon the stage the scenes which had pleased it in the novel.¹

In 1825 Stendhal, literary critic and novelist, suggested historical events of France as subjects for the theater, some of which were: La Mort de Henri III, Les Etats de Blois, L'Assassinat du Duc de Bourgogne, Le Massacre de la Sainte-Parthélemy, and Le Retour de l'Ile d'Elbe. As a result several authors, among whom were Roederer, Rémusat, Mérimée, Cavé and Vitet, wrote dramas to be read treating the history of France.

This interest in history was extended to the history of England and several plays were written based upon the life of Cromwell. Villeman (1817), Balzac (1819-20), and Mérimée (1824) had published dramatic works on Cromwell's life, and in 1827 Victor Hugo published his long and complicated drama Cromwell which, like the others, was not written

¹ Abry, Audic, Crouzet, Histoire Illustrée de la littérature française, Paris, 1912, p. 532.

to be presented, but was very important because of its "Preface" that became the manifesto of the new School of French literature.

Shakespeare's works also influenced the romantic theater. Several translations and adaptations of his plays had been made and productions attempted before the end of the eighteenth century, and in 1821 Guizot's appeared. One year later, Penley, an English actor brought a troupe to Paris with the idea of presenting Shakespeare to the French capital, but the actors were mediocre and the productions did not appeal to the Parisian public. Greater success, however, was attained by another group of English actors who came to Paris in 1827, and who, although jeered by the Classicists with "A bas Shakespeare! C'est un aide de camp de Wellington!" were welcomed by the Romanticists with "Shakespeare est un dieu et Racine un polisson!"¹

Alexander Dumas saw the presentations and was greatly impressed by these actors, who had so clearly revealed to him Shakespeare in his boldness and truth. He was grateful to them--to Macready, Kean, Young, and Miss Smithson--for forgetting that they were actors and presenting life as it really is.² Dumas, like the majority of the spectators, did not understand the English; however, this was not too great a handicap, for these artists were the best of translators. They were able to make themselves so well understood by

¹ Le Breton, Le Théâtre Romantique, Paris, p. 4.

² Parigot, Alexandre Dumas Père, Paris, 1899, p. 18.

their actions as to touch their audiences.¹

The same year that Dumas had been so impressed by the presentations of Shakespeare, he wrote Christine, his first historical drama. The play was accepted by the Théâtre-Français, but because more influential writers were treating the same subject, the presentation of Dumas' work was postponed. In the meantime he wrote and presented (1829) his Henri III et sa Cour, a drama of sixteenth century France. This very successful play was the first romantic drama ever to be presented in a French theater, thus restoring romance to the Parisian stage.²

Alexander Dumas was the first, therefore, to prove the attraction that the history of France could have for the public, and the first to exploit the vast "recueils" of chronicles and "Mémoires" that Guizot and others had just published. He saw no reason why he should not make French history as interesting as Shakespeare and Scott had made that of England, and he had no superstitious respect for history to make him afraid to take liberties with it when he thought that in so doing he could make it more interesting.³ Thus in Charles VII. Chez ses Grands Vassaux he describes, in his manner, the divorce scene between Napoleon and Josephine, and in Henri III et sa Cour he gives to Saint-Mégrin the dramatic death of Bussy d'Amboise.

¹ Le Breton, op. cit., p. 4.

² Dumas, Short Stories, New York, 1927, Introduction.

³ Gribble, Dumas: Father and Son, New York, 1930, p. 51.

To Dumas, history was only "un clou pour accrocher ses tableaux".¹ In this connection he gives us his idea of how history serves the dramatic author:

J'ai toujours constaté l'admirable complaisance de l'histoire à cet endroit. Jamais elle ne laisse le poète dans l'embarras. Ainsi ma manière de procéder vis-à-vis de l'histoire est étrange. Je commence par combiner une fable; je tâche de la faire romanesque, tendre, dramatique, et, lorsque la part du coeur et de l'imagination est trouvée, je cherche dans l'histoire un cadre où la mettre, et jamais il ne m'est arrivé que l'histoire ne m'ait fourni ce cadre, si exact et si bien approprié au sujet, qu'il semble que ce soit non le cadre qui ait été fait pour le tableau, mais le tableau pour le cadre.²

The use of history is seen in a more or less pronounced degree in many of the works of Alexander Dumas whose theatrical production consists of sixty-seven plays, published in twenty-five volumes.³ In a study of this sort, all of the works of such a prolific writer could not be discussed; therefore, only a few of the most outstanding which help to show his contribution to the romantic theater, will be mentioned.

In 1830 his Christine which had been written three years earlier and had been revised with the aid of his friends, Victor Hugo and Alfred de Vigny, was acclaimed a success. This was followed the next year by three works:

¹ Pelissier, Le Mouvement Littéraire au XIXe Siècle, Paris, 1928, p. 189.

² Dumas, Mes Mémoires, Paris, 1863, VIII, p. 199.

³ Gribble, op. cit., p. 65.

Napoléon Bonaparte, which he admits was almost a failure;¹ Antony, his first complete break with the classic tradition, and his most successful drama;² and Charles VII chez ses Grands Vaisseaux, in which he adheres very closely to the old classic tradition.

As in the writing of his early vaudevilles and farces, Dumas, in his latter works, had many collaborators, whose names have been probably forgotten although some of them were doubtless men of talent.³ In 1832, after the triumph of La Tour de Nesle, a melodrama with historical interest, he was sued by a young man, Gaillardet who claimed that Dumas had purloined his work. This gave his enemies who regretted the success of the "Nobody" from Villers-Cotterets, a new weapon with which to attack him.⁴ Victor Hugo who had been his friend but who seemed jealous of the success of the young writer, joined his enemies.⁵

Hugo produced Marie Tudor which, it was said, was inspired by Christine, and Lucrèce Borgia which bore a strong

¹ Dumas, Mes Mémoires, Paris, 1863, VIII, p. 89. Cf. p. 38 of this thesis.

² Gorman, op. cit., p. 231.

³ Dumas, Short Stories, Introduction.

⁴ Gorman, op. cit., p. 249.

⁵ Ibid., p. 261.

resemblance to La Tour de Nesle.¹ Trying to divert from himself the suspicion of plagiarism, Hugo was responsible for an attack against Dumas which appeared in the Journal des Débats a few days before the presentation of Marie Tudor. The article, written by one Granier de Cassagnac, accused the playwright-historian of plagiarizing Goethe, Schiller, Walter Scott, Lope de Vega, and of borrowing ideas even from Hugo's Hernani.² This, however, was not favorably received, and Hugo, seeing that his attack through the pen of Granier de Cassagnac did not bring the desired results, tried to intimate that the article had been printed by mistake. The most of the Romanticists were against him; Sainte-Beuve, his ardent friend, deplored it; as did Alfred de Vigny, always a friend to Dumas and who, like the majority of the young writers, was emphatic in his disapproval of Hugo's actions. Nevertheless, the damage had been done, and the smirch of plagiarism was not

¹ Ibid., p. 262. Parigot, in his Le Drame d'Alexandre Dumas Père, page 144, says: "Lucrece Borgia parut le 2 fevrier 1833. Le 29 mai 1832 Dumas avait donné la Tour de Nesle. L'analogie des deux pièces ne nous saurait échapper: Marguerite et Lucrece, l'inceste et la mère, la mère et l'inceste; festins, orgies à la Tour et chez la Negroni, les Cadavres de la Seine et du Tibre;..." He says of Marie Tudor and Christine: "Marie Tudor est du 6 novembre 1833 et Christine du 30 mars 1830. L'imitation est flagrante au point que les personnages se font vis-à-vis..." p. 145.

² Gorman, op. cit., pp. 262-3

lifted from Dumas' work during his lifetime. His method of collaboration had been misrepresented, his originality of temperament denied, and his vitality and magic touch ignored.¹

This attack seemed to awaken Dumas and, although ^{he was} busy with the writing of novels and travel accounts, the remaining years of the reign of Romanticism were full of his dramatic productions. In 1834 his Catherine Howard was very successful, and two years later, after an absence of two years from Paris, he presented Kean, a great success which was to hold the stage for many years.

All of his plays were not successful; in 1838 he witnessed the failure of his Paul Jones, a drama hastily made from Le Capitaine Paul, a sequel that he had arranged to James Fenimore Cooper's The Pilot. Nevertheless, he continued to write vigorously, although only one of his productions, Mademoiselle de Belle Isle (1839) equalled his former successes.

It was about this time that Romanticism in the French theater began waning; the public seemed to grow tired of the type of drama it had applauded for the past fifteen years. Les Burgraves of Victor Hugo, presented in 1843, was the last vigorous attempt in defense of the Romantic Movement that he had proclaimed sixteen years earlier in the preface to his Cromwells. In spite of the excellent acting

¹ Ibid

Les Burgraves was an absolute failure; it was hissed from the beginning to the end. Dumas had escaped the current of defeat by producing light comedies, bright and sparkling with glittering dialogue when he knew that the public was tired of the more serious and often much involved romantic drama. Thus, when Les Demoiselles de Saint Cyr was presented during the same year, it scored a complete triumph and took its place as a regular addition to the repertory of the Théâtre-Français.¹

Dumas' remaining years were crowded with the writing and publication of the majority of his ninety-two romances, the type of writing in which he gained his greatest and most lasting renown. However, he did produce a few other plays, the majority of which were adaptations of several of the novels. Among the best known are: Les Mousquetaires (1845), a dramatic version of Vingt Ans Après; and Le Comte de Monte-Cristo from the novel of the same name that had held Paris enthralled since 1844.² The first two parts of this long work were presented at the Théâtre-Historique in 1848, the "premières" of which seemed to please the audiences.³ In 1851 he produced, at the Ambigu-Comique, the third and fourth parts of Le Comte de Monte-Cristo, entitled Le Comte

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., pp. 316, 347.

³ Ibid., p. 347.

de Morcerf and Villefort respectively. The audiences had forgotten the first presentations and the latter did not attain the success of the first.¹

In spite of his many successful works in the theater and in other literary "genres", the last years of Alexander Dumas would have been spent in poverty had it not been for his son, Alexander Dumas, fils, who was already the famous author of La Dame aux Camélias. His admiration and love for his father were climaxed by his unceasing devotion and care which lasted until the death of the prolific writer December 5, 1870.

Alexander Dumas père was a born genius. Denied the privileges of education^{al} advantages with which other writers of his time had been favored; he took his place beside them and in some instances surpassed them in their literary accomplishments. Going to Paris as a country youth, he lost no time in taking advantage of all opportunities offered him to learn both literary people and tendencies.

The romantic theater owed much to him. With his Henri III et sa Cour, he launched the romantic historical drama, thereby introducing to the French stage a profusion of local color and pathos. Although all of his theatrical works are not historical, the majority of them, by means of the setting, do portray historical interest. With his Antony he was the inventor of the modern drama of passion, a form that lived longer than the Romantic Movement itself. He

¹ Ibid., p. 355

gave to the romantic theater his La Tour de Nesle, which has been declared the father of all melodrama¹ and the most popular melodrama of the nineteenth century.² Dumas won renown as a writer of comedy. Near the end of the romantic reign, he gave to the stage Mademoiselle de Belle Isle which established him as a writer of comedy and which is probably his only play that is still known.

His works were applauded even after the end of the romantic theater. This was due probably to the fact that his object was mainly to entertain. He had no theories concerning the contrast of the sublime and the grotesque as did Victor Hugo.³ He distinguished only between the tedious and the amusing; when he saw that the more serious type of production was ceasing to please the public fancy, he did not hesitate to change to lighter comedies which suited the public taste. Hugo, in a letter to Alexander Dumas, fils, after the death of the latter's father says concerning the author's style and work:

"...Alexandre Dumas séduit, fascine, intéresse, amuse, enseigne...."

"Toutes les émotions les plus pathétiques en drame, toutes les ironies et toutes les profondeurs de la comédie, toutes les analyses du

1 Smith, Main Currents of Modern French Drama, New York, 1925, p. 39.

2 Bergerhoff, Nineteenth Century French Plays, New York, 1931, p. 116.

3 Parigot, Le Drame d'Alexandre Dumas, Paris, 1899, p. 56.

roman, toutes les institutions de l'histoire, sont dans l'oeuvre surprenante construite par ce vaste et agile architecte."¹

This tribute paid to Dumas is all the more significant when one realizes that it comes from a man who was not liked by the son of the deceased, and that the writer was noticeably omitted from the list of friends who had been notified of the death and invited to the funeral of the elder Dumas. It was, therefore, not an ordinary eulogy as would be expected from a friend, but an unsolicited and sincere expression from one who recognized the man's ability.

Alexander Dumas proved himself to be a born storyteller with an instinctive perception of what would be effective on the stage and sufficiently a play-goer to have grasped the secrets of theatrical technique. He displays this technique in his alert dialogue and in his well woven intrigue which leads to a logical dénouement.

He was indeed modest when he said:

"Je ne me déclarerai pas fondateur d'un genre, parce que, effectivement, je n'ai rien fondé. MM. Victor Hugo, Mérimée, Vitet, Loeve-Weimars, Cavé et Dittmars ont fondé avant moi, et mieux que moi; je les en remercie; ils m'ont fait ce que je suis."²

Mérimée, Hugo, and Vigny did launch manifestos for the declaration of war on the classic theater; they had indeed set forth theories which promised great changes;

¹ Hugo, Oeuvres Complètes, Paris, Actes et Paroles, III, pp. 255-258.

² Dumas, Théâtre Complet, Paris, 1883, I, p.

but it was Alexander Dumas who introduced to the stage-loving public, the new theater.

CHAPTER II
HENRI III ET SA COUR

The first historical drama presented by Alexander Dumas was Henri III et sa Cour. This play, produced February 11, 1829, affords an excellent opportunity for a study of character in the author's treatment of the hero, Saint-Mégrin. In examining thoroughly this drama, it is interesting to see what the young writer does with this person so little known in history. His source of material and his method of arranging the information gained are also of interest in a study of this sort.

By 1828 the young clerk from the office of the Duc d'Orléans had become a frequent visitor at the Arsenal, the salon of Charles Nodier, where he had met most of the young writers of the day who were to become his friends and associates in his literary life. Among them were Victor Hugo, already a celebrity, Alfred de Musset, Alfred de Vigny, and Alphonse de Lamartine. He gained much information by his contact with these young men with whom he discussed literary movements and theories.

One morning at his work at the office of the Duc d'Orléans, Dumas saw on a desk an opened volume of Anquetil's¹ Esprit de la Ligue. Still exhilarated by the last evening's

¹ Anquetil was a French historian of the XVIIIth century.

conversation at the Arsenal, and in no hurry to return to his copying, he glanced at the pages.¹ The first paragraph told of the love of Paul Estuert, Comte de Saint-Mégrin, an enemy of the Duc de Guise, and Catherine de Clèves, the Duchesse de Guise. The duc, deciding to punish this indiscretion by a joke, entered her apartment one morning holding a dagger in one hand and a potion in the other. Forced to choose one of them as a means of death, she chose the potion, discovering later that what she thought was poison was an excellent consommé.²

This historical event with its melodramatic possibilities seemed to appeal to Dumas' young romantic mind, for immediately he began searching for more information concerning it. Looking through the Biographie Universelle, he was referred to the Mémoires de l'Estoile where he discovered that Saint-Mégrin, a favorite of King Henri III, had been mortally wounded on the night of July 21, 1578, by a group of men led by the Duc de Mayenne, brother of the Duc de Guise.³

Loving adventure as he did, he was sufficiently interested by what he had just read to want to discover more about the happenings of the court of Henri III. In the next paragraph he read of the death of Bussy d'Amboise, a

¹ Gorman, op. cit., p. 144

² Dumas, Mes Mémoires, Paris, 1927, pp. 127-129.

³ Ibid.

famous duelist during this reign, who was slain by the Comte de Monsoreau. Leaving a rendez-vous with the wife of Monsoreau he was surprised by ten or twelve men who assassinated him.¹ These two paragraphs inspired Dumas to write his drama. Probably he thought of his earlier attempts at romance with Adèle Dalvin, and in his imagination had fashioned such a dramatic dénouement instead of the one that had happened.

For details concerning the manners and customs of the court of Henri III, he searched La Confession de Sancey and other works concerning the period.² He spent almost the entire night seeking dramatic situations, recalling his five years' immersion in Scott, Schiller, and Lope de Vega, and building up a romantic scaffolding of action. Two months later the work was completed,³ and on September 17, 1828 the play was read and received by acclamation at the Théâtre-Français.⁴

Henri III et sa Cour contains an historical tableau and a drama of passion. The "pièce" is built around the love of Saint-Mégrin and the Duchesse de Guise. Saint-Mégrin has great influence over the king, Henri III. Catherine de Médicis, the king's mother wishes to get rid of

¹ Ibid.

² Nicolas Harlay de Sancy^e (1546-1629) was a French historian.

³ Gorman, op. cit., p. 146

⁴ Dumas, Mes Mémoires, Paris, 1883, V, p. 86.

him and at the same time rid herself of her enemy, Henri, Duc de Guise. She has discovered, we know not how, that the Duchesse and Saint-Mégrin are in love, and with the help of Ruggieri, the court astrologer, she contrives a meeting of the lovers.

Dumas portrays Saint-Mégrin as a heroic and romantic lover. He goes with his friends, Joyeuse and d'Epéron to visit Ruggieri that they may have their horoscopes read. When Ruggieri suggests to Saint-Mégrin that he, too, should see what the future holds, the young man immediately shows his lack of interest and says:

"Je ne suis pas ambitieux, mon père; que pourriez-vous me promettre?"¹

But when Ruggieri speaks to him of a love affair, he says:

"Que dites-vous, mon père! Parlez bas!"²

He has become decidedly interested in the astrologer's art that he but recently doubted and scorned. He is willing to give up everything for the love of the duchesse, and is anxious for Ruggieri to help him gain that love. He tells Ruggieri:

"...Oh! faites....faites qu'elle m'aime!
On dit que votre art a des ressources incon-
nues et certaines, des breuvages, des philtres!
Quels que soient vos moyens, je les accepte,
dussent-ils compromettre ma vie en ce monde et
mon salut dans l'autre....Je suis riche. Tout
ce que j'ai est à vous. De l'or, des bijoux;

¹ Dumas, Henri III et sa Cour, Act I, sc. 3.

² Ibid.

Ah! votre science peut-être méprise ces trésors du monde! Eh bien, écoutez-moi, mon père! On dit que les magiciens quelquefois ont besoin, pour leurs expériences cabalistiques, du sang d'un homme vivant encore....Tenez, mon pèreEngagez-vous seulement à me faire aimer d'elle...."¹

In the fifth scene of the first act Ruggieri arranges the meeting of the lovers. The Duchesse de Guise tells Saint-Mégrin that she loves him, but that she knows it to be wrong to do so. The Duc de Guise has already been warned that there is an affair between his wife and Saint-Mégrin, who, firmly believing that the duc alone stands between him and happiness, wishes to challenge him. He expresses the desire that the duke's suspicions might be true:

"M. de Guise!....mille damnations!....
M. de Guise, votre seigneur et maître....Oh!
puisse-t-il ne pas vous soupçonner à tort....
et que tout son sang....tout le mien...."²

So intense is his hatred for the Duc de Guise that the very mention of the name makes him furious.

"Guise!....toujours Guise!....Vive Dieu!
....que l'occasion s'en présente, et, de par
Saint Paul de Bordeaux! je veux hacher tous
ces petits princes lorrains comme ce gant."³

And a little later,

"...Je donnerais mon titre de Comte pour
sentir, cinq minutes seulement, son épée con-
tre la mienne....Cela viendra peut-être...."⁴

1 Ibid, Act I, sc. 4.

2 Ibid, Act I, sc. 5.

3 Ibid, Act II, sc. 1.

4 Ibid.

This hatred pushes him so far that he at last insults the duke knowing that a duel must follow. As in the beginning he is willing to stake everything on the hope that he may get rid of his rival, the only obstacle in gaining the love of the duchess. He wants to fight as long as there is life in either of them, or as long as the blade of his sword is not broken from the hilt.¹

This romantic lover does not think that he is probably being lured into a trap when he receives the note from the duchesse inviting him to her apartment. Arthur, the page who brings the letter, tells him that she was pale and trembling when she gave it to him. Without a word or thought as to the reason for her apparent emotion, he walks right into the snare set by the duke. Love predominates; his mistress has invited him to a rendez-vous. Neither the warnings of Ruggieri,² nor his impending duel with the duke can deter him. When, his rendez-vous kept, the duchesse implores him:

"....Fuyez! fuyez!....il y va de la vie!"³

Saint-Mégrin declares his willingness to die if she does not love him. But, when she admits she loves him, he wants to live; he is willing to brave the swords of all the assassins waiting for him beneath the window. It is not because of fear of death that he tries to escape. In a few hours he

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., Act IV, sc. 3.

³ Ibid., Act V, sc. 2.

is going to meet his enemy, his sword in his hand, and it is agreed that one of the two must fall. He is not a lover who flees before danger, but an adversary who runs to the rendez-vous of honor where he is expected.

Dumas paints Saint-Mégrin also as a person of great sagacity and courage. In the first scene of the drama, we are told that he has been made one of the king's favorites, and that he has a great influence over the weak ruler. Catherine de Médicis voices this new threat to her power:

"...Ce jeune gentilhomme bordelais m'inquiète. Plus instruit, moins frivole surtout que Joyeuse et d'Épernon, il a pris sur l'esprit de Henri un ascendant qui m'effraye... Mon père, il en ferait un roi." ¹

It is this which frightens Catherine because she desires to have all the power for herself.

In the fourth act after Henri III has named himself the head of the Sainte-Union, he thinks that Saint-Mégrin will be glad of the fallen hopes of the Duc de Guise who had desired that honor for himself; but his favorite tells him:

"Puissiez-vous ne pas vous ^{en} repentir, Sire! mais cette idée n'est pas de vous. J'y ai reconnu... la politique cauteleuse de votre mère... Quant à vous, sire, c'est à regret que je vous ai vu signer cet acte. Vous étiez roi; vous n'êtes plus qu'un chef de parti." ²

¹ Ibid., Act I, sc. 1.

² Ibid., Act IV, sc 7.

When asked by the king what he should do, Saint-Mégrin advises him:

"Repousser la politique florentine et agir franchement." ¹

The Duc de Guise has been accused of beginning a rebellion against the king. Saint-Mégrin tells the king that if he has the proof, he should have the duc tried and, if guilty, sentenced. He gives this as a better and more just procedure than that offered by the king's mother. In spite of the fact that the duc is his enemy, Saint-Mégrin asks for fairness for him.

Thus, Dumas shows Saint-Mégrin as an heroic and romantic lover, full of courage, and as a lord of great sagacity; an energetic counsellor who would make a real king out of the weak and rather effeminate Henri III. In this drama, the author has remained rather close to historical facts. It is true that Saint-Mégrin was a favorite of the king; it is also true that he was in love with the Duchesse de Guise. But the death of Saint-Mégrin was, according to history, not as romantic, or as full of dramatic interest as Dumas would have desired it; thus he substituted the death of Bussy d'Amboise which possessed the glamor which Saint-Mégrin's death lacked. However, Bussy d'Amboise remains in the drama, in fact, he was to have been the second to Saint-Mégrin in his duel with the duc. History pro-

¹ Ibid., Act IV, sc. 7.

trays Saint-Mégrin merely as a thoughtless, good-hearted favorite of the king. Dumas changes him into a romantic hero and a wise counsellor.

Such was the first important work of this young writer. The drama, as we see, has an historical background, and the author in the majority of instances adheres to historical facts, even to the position of the court astrologer, and the important place he held in the plots and intrigues instigated by Catherine de Médicis. But, as in the case of substituting the death of Bussy d'Amboise for that of Saint-Mégrin, Dumas does not hesitate to change history when his imagination inspires him with something more melodramatic.

He could not allow his hero to remain as light and frivolous as Anquetil had drawn him; so he gives him more firmness of character and makes him more thoughtful than he perhaps was in actual life. Saint-Mégrin does not hold an important place in history, but Dumas makes a great character of him, and gives to him a position greater than that of the king for whom the drama is named. Probably the author does not give to the drama the name of the hero because of his relative unimportance in life, thinking that it would be more favorably received having the title of a person who was better known. Thus does Dumas show his creative genius in his first historical drama.

CHAPTER III

NAPOLÉON BONAPARTE

Napoléon Bonaparte, a drama in prose in six acts and twenty-three tableaux, was written by Alexander Dumas in 1830, and presented January 10, 1831, at the Odéon.¹ This work, although not affording much of an opportunity to study the creative genius of Dumas in portraying his heroes does show his ability to paint fairly a character to whom many writers, under similar circumstances, might have been unjust.

When the play was written, Napoleon Bonaparte had been dead for nine years. He had done much for his country; he had reorganized secondary instruction, directed the drawing up of the "Code Civil" which established a system of uniform laws, instituted the Legion of Honor, and built roads, bridges, and lasting monuments.² He had won his way into the heart of the French and had been made Emperor; but his ambition had ruined him and his country. His love of glory and his pride would not allow him to stop; even when he dominated all of western Europe, he wanted to extend his powers eastward.³ His latter wars had disastrous results for France. By the Treaty of Paris (1815) she lost the conquest he had

¹ Dumas, Théâtre Complet, Paris, 1883, II, p. 1.

² Malet, Histoire de France, New York, 1927, pp. 307-313.

³ Guérard, Reflections on the Napoleonic Legend, New York, 1924, p. 110.

made, those of the Revolution, and even some of her territory that she had possessed prior to 1789.¹ The unfavorable attitude of many influential Frenchmen towards Napoleon, when Dumas wrote his drama is reflected in the fact that at the abdication of Charles X (1830) the Bonapartists were unsuccessful in their attempt to reestablish the empire with the son of Napoleon at its head.²

Napoleon was a popular figure in literature, however. After his death writers turned towards Napoleonism which reached its zenith between 1827 and 1840.³ With the return of the tricolor in 1830, the movement gained importance. Several stages offered Napoleonic plays.⁴ Musset, Gautier, Dumas, Hugo, Quinet--the younger generation of Romanticists were all Napoleon worshippers as were other writers not Romanticists, like Béranger, Stendhal and Thiers.⁵ Chateau-

¹ Lavisse, Histoire de France, New York, 1923, p. 244.

² Ibid, p. 254

³ Guérard, op. cit., p. 185

⁴ Dumas, op. cit., In his preface to Napoléon Bonaparte, Dumas says: "...Six théâtres firent passer leur Napoléon." p. 6. In the same connection Guérard says: "Every stage in Paris offered a Napoleonic play...after the return of the tricolor in 1830." p. 197.

⁵ Guérard, op. cit., pp. 197-202.

briand, Lammenais, Lamartine, Vigny, Michelet--the leaders of Romanticism whose minds had reached the adult stage by 1815, were not in accord with the younger group. It was during this time that Harel, the director of the Odéon asked Dumas to write a play based on the life of Napoleon. Dumas says,

"Celui de tous les directeurs de théâtre qui eut le premier l'idée de tirer quelque chose du grand homme qui nous avait tant coûté, ce fut Harel, ou plutôt Mademoiselle Georges..."¹

Alexander Dumas did not want to undertake this work, for, remembering the wrong that Bonaparte had done to his family he was afraid lest he be unjust toward him. His father and Bonaparte had been friends when they were both generals in the French army; in fact, the future emperor had promised to be the godfather of General Dumas' son.² This promise was not kept, however, for before the birth of Alexander, General Dumas had fallen into disfavor with Napoleon because he dared to differ with the latter's imperialistic ideas. He openly opposed Bonaparte and tendered his resignation.

Napoleon was not to forget this opposition to his will; thus, when he became emperor and Dumas was in declining health and needed aid, he not only denied the general help as an ex-brother in arms, but also refused to pay him his

¹ Dumas, Mes Mémoires, Paris, 1884, VII, p. 64.

² Ibid, II, p. 38.

back salary. After the death of General Dumas in 1806, his widow tried to get the pension due her, but received only the reply that pensions were granted exclusively to widows of soldiers who had died in action, or from wounds within six months after receiving them.¹ Bonaparte's spite did not stop there but may be seen in Alexander's being refused admission to all colleges for sons of superior officers and being denied a scholarship which would permit him to attend an imperial lycée.²

Dumas could not forget the effect of Napoleon's wrath. It was for this reason that he doubted his ability to be fair to Bonaparte in a play. Nevertheless, Uarel wanted the drama and wanted Dumas to write it; and each new presentation of a Napoléon at other theaters was making their chances of success more doubtful.³ The director of the Odéon was determined, therefore, that Dumas should write the play at once. With the help of Mademoiselle Georges, he invited the young writer to be his guest during a "première" at the theater and at a supper afterwards. During the evening no mention was made of the Napoléon, but after the supper Mademoiselle Georges showed him a room where he was to be imprisoned until he had finished his drama.⁴ He offered all kinds of ex-

1 Gorman, op. cit., p. 26.

2 Dumas, op. cit., I, p. 276

3 Dumas, Théâtre Complet, Paris, 1883, II, pp. 5-6.

4 Dumas, Mes Mémoires, Paris, 1884, VII, pp. 161-165.

cuses, such as the fear that his son and his mistress would be worried as to his whereabouts; but all of that had been foreseen. They had both been notified in advance. A present had even been sent to his mistress by the thoughtful Mademoiselle Georges, and his son had been invited to come there to dine with his father. All arrangements had been made for his comfort; all books and other necessary material had been provided. There was nothing for Dumas to do but to begin work.¹ That same night he began his plot. He created the role of the spy, and his plans were thus nearly complete, because history had given him the divisions of the drama.² At the end of eight days the play was finished; it was ready for the copyist on the ninth.³

In giving Dumas directions for the drama, Harel had ordered that it should portray the life of Napoleon from the battle of Toulon(1793) until his death at St. Helena(1821).⁴ The author, following the instructions began the play when Napoleon was "le général-en-chef, et le représentant du peuple".⁵ Here, he is described as a soldier of great military ability and a leader of men who is able to inspire others with the bravery that is a part of him.

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 165.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Dumas, Napoléon Bonaparte, Act I, sc. 2.

In the drama, just before the battle of Toulon, the soldiers seemed tired of war; a favorable response was not received from the call to men. Bonaparte ordered one of his sergeants to write in large letters, "Batterie des hommes sans peur."¹ The suggestion was successful and Napoleon shows he understands men when he knowingly remarks:

"Mets cet écriteau en avant de la batterie, tout le monde, maintenant, voudra en être." ²

In the position of General-in-Chief, Napoleon time and time again gives evidence of his understanding of human psychology. He bolsters the morale of his soldiers, instilling in them faith in him and in themselves. Dumas shows him going among his men in their camps inquiring as to their welfare, praising them, commending their loyalty, and complimenting them on their past victories, thereby cheering them and inspiring them to do greater things for him.³

Dumas reveals Napoleon's superior military ability in his plans to capture Toulon. Orders had been sent from Paris to seize the city; Fréron, a representative of the people, wishes to burn the entire city in order to destroy a building in which the enemy ammunition is stored. Napoleon rebukes Fréron caustically:

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid., Act I, sc. 3.

3 Ibid., Act III, tableau 6, sc. 4.

"Est-ce à moi qui suis Corse de te rappeler que Toulon est français?"¹

He then shows the uselessness of such a procedure and explains his method: the taking of "le Petit Gibraltar", the fort which protects the city, will permit the city to be taken without any trouble.² His military genius is revealed in such a striking manner, that in Act I, sc. 5, Gasparin, a representative of the people declares to him:

"Sais-tu que tu me parais le seul ici qui entende quelque chose à un siège?"

His glowing victories on the field of battle, products of his military prowess, endear him more and more to the people, who, show their appreciation by electing him First Consul.³

Dumas uses another means to portray the cleverness and subtlety of Napoleon. An English spy who has been caught trying to get through the French lines, is brought to him. The spy poses as a French soldier en route to Marseille to assist in the fight there; but Bonaparte, becoming suspicious on noting that the man is wearing gloves and acts peculiarly, orders him searched. A portfolio is found containing one sheet of paper that appears to be blank, but which in reality contains a report, written in invisible ink, from the head of the English forces.

¹ Ibid., Act I, sc. 3.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., Act I, sc. 4.

The spy is condemned to be shot, but he shows no fear of his imminent death. Napoleon reflects that such courage and fortitude will be beneficial to the French cause. He stops the firing squad:

"Arme au bras!...Allez...Viens ici. Ta mort me serait inutile, et j'ai besoin de ta vie. Tu es brave..." 1

He later points out,

"Tu es brave.--Ta vie touchait par un mot à l'éternité! Je n'ai pas laissé ^{on} prononcer ce mot; tu me dois donc les jours qui te restent, le ciel que tu vois, l'air que tu respirez....Tous cela m'appartient. Me consacres-tu tout cela?" 2

Napoleon then uses the spy to discover the plans of the enemy and to set fire to the ammunition store at Toulon.

As in real life, Napoleon Bonaparte in this drama has an unquenchable thirst for power. He is a lover of renown and glory, hence his need for war. Charles, one of his secretaries, tells him that his plans for empire will be in vain because the kings of Europe will not respect him as their superior. Bonaparte replies simply:

"Eh bien, je les détrônerai tous, et alors je serai leur aîné." 3

Then he threatens:

"Quand je serai maître de tous les ports de la Méditerranée et de l'Océan; quand, sous peine de désobéir à ma volonté, on ne pourra y recevoir une

1 Ibid, Act I, sc. 4.

2 Ibid,

3 Ibid, Act II, tableau 3, sc. 4.

voile anglaise, nous verrons!..." 1

When he is offered the title of emperor he hesitates, uncertain whether he will be doing the wisest thing to accept this honor; but he succumbs to his love of fame and greed for power.²

As this lust for power grows with each success, he seems to become more certain of himself. He thinks that fortune will always be with him. Josephine does not share his optimism as to his future as Emperor, but he assures her:

"...Eh! serai-je jamais autre chose que le soldat de Toulon, le général d'Arcole ou le consul de Marengo? Ma fortune m'a toujours suivi; pourquoi veux-tu qu'elle s'arrête quand je vais toucher le but? Pourquoi l'étoile de Bonaparte, ne serait-elle pas celle de Napoléon?"³

He feels that he is destined to this position of power and honor, and that it is for the best interests of France.

"Crois-tu que ce soit une vaine ambition qui me fasse désirer un nouveau titre? Crois-tu que je ne m'estime pas ce que je vau, et que le manteau impérial ou la main de justice ne donneront, à moi, une plus haute opinion de moi? L'Europe est vieille, et ma mission est de la régénérer: il faut que je l'accomplisse. Je ne voudrais pas être empereur, que le peuple m'élèveront malgré moi sur le pavois impérial. Mais je veux l'être, parce que, de même que, seul, je pouvais sauver la France, seul je puis la consolider..." 4

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., Act II, tableau 3, sc. 5.

4 Ibid.

Self confident and ambitious as he is, he cannot conceive that his plans might fail. When he is intent upon his domination, Caulaincourt, one of his officers, tries to convince him of the disastrous results that will be met by any army that attempts to conquer Russia during the severe winter season when all is mud and ice.¹ Furthermore, Caulaincourt tells him that even if he should conquer all Europe, France would be left without a leader or an army to defend it. Napoleon has so much confidence in himself that he thinks his name alone can inspire fear in the enemies of France. When asked who would defend France, he boastfully replies:

"Ma renommée. J'y laisse mon nom et la crainte qu'inspire une nation armée." 2

He even feels he no longer needs the support of Prussia who has had an alliance with France for at least five years.

"He suis-je pas assuré de sa tranquillité par l'impossibilité où je l'ai mise de remuer, même dans le cas d'une défaite? Oubliez-vous que je tiens dans ma main sa police civile et militaire? D'ailleurs, ne puis-je pas compter sur sept rois qui me doivent leur nouveaux titres?...Eh bien, qu'ai-je besoin d'eux? Quand je les soutiens, je me fais tort à moi-même dans l'esprit du peuple; car que suis-je, moi? Le roi du tiers état; n'étant pas né sur le trône, il faut que je m'y soutiens comme j'y suis monté,--par la gloire..." 3

1 Ibid., Act III, tableau 6, sc. 2.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., Act III, tableau 5, sc. 9.

And so Napoleon goes from battle to battle and for a while from victory to victory. Having won his throne by wars, it is necessary that he keep it in the same way, there- by making war a means of sustaining his ambition.

It is seldom that he stops to think of the cost of maintaining his power and glory. He refuses to renounce the attempt against Moscow although he knows that the toll in human lives must be great. However, at times during his career, he seems to suffer from remorse because of the blood he has caused to be shed, and the homes he has saddened in his endeavor to make France and himself powerful. So it is at a moment when his soldiers are asleep, and all is quiet that his conscience saddens him.

"...Oh! dormez, enfants! rêvez de vos mères et de votre patrie: demain, des milliers de vous seront douchés encore, mais sur une terre froide et sanglanteQue c'est une bizarre fortune que la mienne! homme obscur comme eux, et qui traîne à ma suite des milliers d'hommes! Oh! il y a des moments où, quand je suis seul, face à face avec mon génie, je frissonne, car je doute! Si ce que je crois mon étoile n'était que de l'audace et mon génie du hasard! Quelle affreuse responsabilité que celle de la vie de tant de milliers d'hommes qui se lèveraient un jour sanglants et mutilés pour m'accuser devant Dieu,---devant Dieu qui me dirait:"Tu n'as point reçu mission de faire ce que tu as fait; donc, que les pleurs et le sang retombent sur ta tête..."¹

Napoleon is remorseful also when he is forced to realize that although victorious in his undertakings with men, he can not conquer the forces of nature. Rather than be subdued by him, the inhabitants of Moscow set fire to

¹ Ibid., Act III, tableau 6, sc. 4.

their city. He becomes angry with the Russians for matching their wits against his and disrupting his plans to spend the winter in the Russian city. Forgetting everything but his fury at their attempt to thwart his plans, he tells his soldiers,

"Faites faire feu dessus, tuez-les comme des bêtes féroces!..."¹

Dumas makes of Napoleon a typical romantic hero, and gives to him that emotional nature that is shown by the Romanticist in face of defeat. Fate has favored him, carrying him to great things, and now for the first time he finds himself beaten; he cannot control the forces of nature and he becomes remorseful.

"Oh! c'est une mer du feu!---Faiblesse humaine! le scuffle de Dieu seul pourrait éteindre cet incendie! O Napoléon! tu te crois plus qu'un homme, parce que tu couvres la moitié de la terre de tes tentes et de tes soldats; parce qu'un mot de toi renverse des rois et déplace des trônes. Eh bien, te voilà faible, sans pouvoir en face de l'incendie. Chaque pied de terrain qu'il gagne te dévore un empire, Napoléon, Napoléon!...Eh bien, essaye ta puissance, ordonne à ce feu de s'éteindre, à cet incendie de reculer, et s'ils obéissent, tu es plus qu'un homme, tu es presque un dieu.--Oh! mes plus belles provinces, pour Moscou, Rome, Naples, Florence, mon Italie tout entière, je pourrai la reprendre; mais, Moscou, Moscou, jamais!"²

Napoleon Bonaparte was by natural instinct an enemy of France. In 1768, one year before his birth, the French had purchased Corsica, his native island from Genoa. He

¹ Ibid., Act III, tableau 7, sc. 2.

² Ibid., Act II, tableau 7, sc. 9.

detested France and his one thought was to gain someday the independence of his native isle. The Revolution changed his sentiment and he became a patriotic Frenchman.¹ His dream was to see her prosperous and powerful, at the head of all nations in glory and art. He shows his ideas and wishes for the prosperity of France when he says,

"...Dieu aidant, j'espère que dans dix ans, la France sera traversée en tous sens par trente canaux navigables..."²

He desires that the greatness of the nation exist after he will no longer be there to direct it. It is his wish that,

"...L'école polytechnique recevra désormais une organisation toute militaire. Les élèves porteront des uniformes, et seront assujettis à la discipline de casernes. J'en veux faire une pépinière de grands hommes. Ce seront des généraux pour mon successeur..."³

His love for France is seen also in his speech to his soldiers on the eve of his exile to Elba. He thanks them for their faithfulness and bravery, and exhorts them to serve their country always.⁴ While in exile at Elba, the spy brings him news from the Bonapartists concerning the unrest in France. There is much sentiment in his favor.⁵

¹ Malet, op. cit., p. 299.

² Dumas, Napoléon Bonaparte, Act III, tableau 7, sc. 27.

³ Ibid., Act II, tableau 3, sc. 4.

⁴ Ibid., Act IV, tableau 15, sc. 1.

⁵ Ibid., Act V, tableau 17, sc. 8.

Napoleon believes that his country and its people need him and want him to return to direct their interests. France calls him, thus he makes his escape from Elba in order that he may relieve her from the reign of the Bourbons.¹

It is true that Napoleon has a personal interest in the development of France. He is at the head of the nation and as she gains in importance, he becomes great with her, and attaches his name definitely to her grandeur. He wants France to stand as a monument to his glory. Perhaps one of his greatest sorrows during his rise to fame was that he had no son to whom he could leave his throne, and in whom his name and glory would still exist. He divorces Josephine because she has borne him no children. Marie-Louise, his second wife, daughter of the emperor of Austria, bears him a son in whom he sees the incarnation of his fame. When he thinks he is going to lose everything for which he has struggled, he laments,

"...Mon enfant! mon pauvre enfant! lui
pour qui j'amassais des couronnes!..."²

When he discovers that his throne is going to be taken from him, he wants to die; not because he is a coward afraid of defeat, but because he thinks that in so doing

¹ Ibid., Act V, tableau 17, sc. 9.

² Ibid., Act IV, tableau 14, sc. 3.

he can save the empire for his son.

"...Moi mort, mon fils est le légitime héritier de mon empire. Du fond de mon tombeau, je ne suis plus à craindre. Les souverains auraient honte de dépouiller l'orphelin... Que je suis heureux d'avoir conservé le poison du cabanis!..."¹

In the drama, Dumas has his hero continue his policy of trying to maintain his authority by military rule, even after his return from Elba. Fate favors him for a short time, but she soon turns against him again. He is defeated at Waterloo and banished to the island of St. Helena where, as in real life, he dies broken-hearted, thinking of his successful battles of Marengo, Austerlitz, Jena, and regretting his defeat as well as the loss of the empire that he thought he was building for his son.²

Napoléon Bonaparte obtained only a fair success. It had very little literary value and Dumas knew it. He says concerning the play,

"Elle n'était pas bonne, il s'en faut; mais le titre de l'ouvrage assurait le succès de circonstance, tandis que le rôle de l'espion suffisait au succès littéraire,"³

and

"...Puis avait eu lieu la représentation de mon Napoléon Bonaparte, ouvrage dont avec épouvante, j'avais reconnu le peu de valeur,

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., Act II, tableau 23.

³ Dumas, Mes Mémoires, Paris, 1884, VII, p. 165.

malgré le fanatique enthousiasme qu'il avait excité à la lecture..."¹

Frédéric Lemaître as the emperor played a remarkable role,² and, no doubt can be raised that he helped to prevent the play from becoming a failure.

In this drama, Alexander Dumas has remained very close to historical facts in the life, work, and character of Napoleon Bonaparte. He portrayed his superior military ability, his insatiable thirst for war and his desire for monuments to his fame. What Napoleon loved above everything else was renown, heroic show, and authority; hence his need for war, his thirst for glory.

As in life, as long as he represented the popular interests of France, he was invincible. But when he deemed himself strong enough to stand alone, he forgot all interests except his own. He divorced Josephine, a representative of the people, and married the daughter of the emperor of Austria, thereby allying himself with the powers; but he was still successful. He built up an empire reviving the Roman World of Augustus and the Frankish Empire of Charlemagne.³ Fate was with him. Later another of his great desires was granted: an heir was born. Not knowing that this was the last

¹ Ibid., VIII, p. 89.

² Gorman, op. cit., p. 223.

³ Dumas, Short Stories, New York, 1927, Reverses p. 999.

favor that fortune was to bestow upon him, he thought that his name and fame would live for at least another generation. There was nothing but success ahead of him. Friends tried to stop him, but his desire for glory and the memory of his past conquests urged him on.

According to history and Dumas' drama, the French army entered Moscow led by the ambitious Napoleon. He had planned to spend the winter there, but the patriotic Russians burned the city.¹ Forced to make his first retreat during an exceptionally cold winter, he seemed to realize that this was to be the beginning of his fall from power.²

Dumas' chief creation in this drama is the role of the English spy which adds to the dramatic effect. In spite of the fact that this "pièce" was written more than a year after the presentation of the author's first historical drama, Henri III et sa Cour, one can not say that he shows improvement in his art as a dramatist. On the other hand, his reputation established by Henri III et Sa Cour was probably shaken by this mediocre work. It must be remembered, however, that Dumas was at a disadvantage. The circumstances under which he was forced to write the play were not conducive to the best results. Knowing that he would not be released until the work was finished, he seemed

¹ Malet, op. cit., p. 237.

Ibid.

more concerned with completing the drama than with the quality of the finished product. Too, Bonaparte did not like the author's father, and the son was made to feel this dislike very keenly; yet no biographer nor dramatist could be more favorable in painting the life of the Emperor than this young writer.

Probably it was the romantic aspect of the man which appealed to Dumas, himself a great Romanticist. Here was a man whom Fate had first favored and then had forgotten. Like the majority of the romantic heroes, he had risen from an obscure birth, and in his case, had become the best known military leader. The ordinary public had been swept off its feet by his achievements. There was a movement to have his body brought to Paris. This was excellent material for the romantic writer; and had not he himself experienced a similar rise to fame? Was this not the type of man that every young Romanticist would admire?

In his short story The Real Bonaparte, Dumas says that the work of the historian, novelist, or dramatic author is not to interpret, but to sum up impartially the facts and leave the conclusions to be drawn by the readers.¹ In his drama Napoléon Bonaparte, Dumas could afford to be impersonal in portraying his hero. Before his death, Napoleon

¹ Dumas, Short Stories, New York, 1927, p. 157.

had been sufficiently punished by the loss of his empire and his fallen hopes. His son was not to ascend the throne that he had built for him. Napoléon was to die as he had caused many people before him to die, in exile, away from the France that he had learned to love so well. Was this not punishment enough for him? The author could well afford to be just: to give mere facts, leaving the conclusions to be drawn by the readers. That is what he has done in his drama Napoléon Bonaparte.

CHAPTER IV

CHARLES VII CHEZ SES GRANDS VASSAUX

During the same year that Dumas presented his Napoléon Bonaparte, he gave to the French stage Charles VII chez Ses Grands Vassaux, a drama which portrays the life and character of another figure in the history of France. As with Henri III et Sa Cour, the writing of this play was inspired partly by an evening spent at the Arsenal.

At this particular "soirée", Alfred de Musset, then a young unknown poet read an entire volume of his verse that had just been published. Among the selections there was a comedy entitled Les Marrons de Feu which contained scenes very much like Andromaque by Racine.¹ For more than a year Dumas had been planning to use this same plot for a drama and it is probable that the reading of this comedy reawakened the thought in his mind.² During the same time he had read Quentin Durward by Walter Scott and was so impressed by the character of Mograbin and the oriental poetry, that he made notes of them for future use.³

¹ Dumas, Mes Mémoires, Paris, 1863, VIII, pp. 189-192.

² Ibid., p. 195.

³ Ibid., p. 199.

Harel wanted another drama by Dumas for his theater, the Odéon. The Napoléon Bonaparte that he had produced earlier in the year had been a near failure; the theater Porte Sainte-Martin was presenting Dumas' Antony which was to run for one hundred and thirty nights, an almost inconceivable success in the eighteen thirties.¹ With his ideas gained from the evening at the Arsenal, Quentin Durward and Andromaque, Dumas decided to write a play built around the love of an Arab slave for a young noblewoman.² Desirous of placing his story in the middle ages, he began studying the Chronicles of the fifteenth century for a suitable "cadre"³

In the Chronique Du Roi Charles VII by Alain Chartier, he found an account of a conflict between Charles de Savoisy, one of the vassals of Charles VII, king of France, and a group of University students. The quarrel which began when the chevalier's horse bespattered one of the students with mud, became of such import that Charles was banished from France and excommunicated by the Pope. He was later absolved and sent to fight the Sarrasins. Returning to Paris, he brought with him many Sarrasins as slaves, and had them rebuild his

¹ Gorman, op. cit., p. 231

² Dumas, op. cit. p. 199.

³ Ibid.

castle which had been destroyed in the contention with the students.¹

This incident from the Chronicle furnished the setting for Dumas' drama. He tells us,

"L'histoire avait tout prévu, et me fournissait un cadre qui depuis quatre cents ans, attendait son tableau."²

He does not fail to acknowledge his debt to history in the work. He had found the framework of the drama in Charles de Savoisy, his wife Bérengère, and Yaqoub, an Arab slave; or as he says,

"Mon drame ayant pour ainsi dire, sa tête, son coeur et ses jambes, il fallut trouver les bras, les muscles, les chairs, et le reste de son anatomie. Ce fut, alors, la besogne de l'histoire; l'histoire tenait en réserve Charles VII, Agnès, Dunois;--et toute cette grande lutte de la France contre l'Angleterre vint tourner autour de l'amour d'un Arabe pour la femme de l'homme qui l'avait fait prisonnier et transporté d'Afrique en France."³

Charles VII Chez ses Grands Vassaux contains two themes: a drama of love, which seems to be inspired directly by Andromaque, and an episode in the history of France told in Dumas' own style. In this treatment of the author's historical heroes it is the second theme of the "pièce" with which this study is mainly concerned.

Charles VII, generally known as "le petit roi de Bourges", visits his vassal Charles the comte de Sa-

¹ Ibid., pp. 199-200

² Ibid., p. 200 Cf. p. 6 of this thesis also.

³ Ibid.

voisy who tries to show him the true condition of France invaded by the English. The little king responds that he has come to hunt and not to discuss affairs of State. Just before the arrival of the king, the comte has signed the death warrant of Yaqoub, an Arab slave. Yaqoub is about to be led away to death, but the king stops the archers and decrees that the slave shall live. One might think that the king is moved because of pity for the slave or because of his love of humanity in general, but he tells us that he has no other reason for saving the man's life than this!

"...Il me prend rarement le désir d'être roi. Aujourd'hui, c'est mon jour. Mais, comme, avant cette heure, cet esclave mettrait le trouble en ta demeure, Comte, j'offre un moyen de tout concilier: Donne-le moi... Mon fou commence à m'ennuyer... et, pour t'indemniser, tu prendras dans ma chasse quelque faucon dressé, quelque cheval de race..."¹

Dumas portrays Charles VII as a frivolous thoughtless king. His country is at war with the English; many of his vassals have ceased to be faithful to him, while others are still trying to protect France. Unconcerned about the condition of his kingdom, he gives us an insight into the state of affairs when he compares himself with the comte.

"...Moi, vêtu de velours, et lui couvert d'acier!"²

The comte tries to impress upon him the fact

¹ Dumas, Charles VII Chez Ses Grands Vassaux, Act II, sc. 6.

² Ibid., Act II, sc. 6.

that it would be better for the State in its present condition if they should change costumes; that as king at a time when the country is being attacked and plundered, it is his place to lead the fight against the enemy. There is only one enemy, however, about whom the king is concerned and whom he wishes to flee. It is, as he tells the comte, "L'ennui." 1

Charles de Savoisy is very disappointed; he thinks that the king has come to his castle because of important reasons of State. Charles VII replies that he has come for the urgent business of "Chasser un daim dans tes forêts". 2

Unlike his ancestors Charles VII does not have a longing for glory or renown; he does not envy those who were famous because of their conquests. It is fitting that glowing tributes be paid to their past accomplishments and fame, but he prefers when dead, as expressed to Agnès,

"...Me coucher au tombeau,
Vers le soir d'un beau jour, les yeux sur mon étoile;
Avoir pour mon linceul le tissu qui te voile,
Et trouver quelque ami qui grave avec regrets
Sur ma pierre: "Ci-gît Charles, aimé d'Agnès". 3

He desires only to be happy; and to him happiness is not renown, nor is it "Ce chimérique honneur...Le bonheur c'est la joie..." 4

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., Act III, sc. 3.

4 Ibid

And as he tells Agnès Sorrel,

"C'est le son de ta voix quand elle dit:
Je t'aime!"¹

Different from his ancestors who were accustomed to lead their troops into battle, the king leaves this to his vassals. He is content to sleep in the arms of his mistress, and does not hear the cannons which call him to his country's defense.² The comte tries to convince him of the disastrous results that must follow his actions; he tells him that if he abandons or denies aid to his people now, they will think it only just to abandon him in his need.³ This fails to awaken the desired response from the king.

The comte reminds Charles VII that as a king he has done nothing of a constructive nature for France. He has not helped to increase the territory of his kingdom; instead he is content to see portions of it become lost to him. The carefree king is not at all moved to action by this censure of his behavior. He upholds his belief in the divine right of kings, saying,

"Pardieu!
Si je m'en souviens bien à mon tour, c'est de Dieu
Que je tiens cet Etat de France, seigneur Comte.
Ce n'est donc qu'à Dieu seul que j'en dois rendre
compte;

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., Act, sc. 4.

³ Ibid.

Et, s'il me plaît d'en faire un entier abandon,
Nul ne me jugera que Dieu". 1

This king who does not give a thought to his country, besieged by England, or to his people calling to him for help, is concerned only with his pleasures. England may take all of France, if she chooses; as long as she does not interfere with his immediate happiness, he will be perfectly satisfied.² Thus Charles de Savoisy sees that any appeal made to the thoughtless king who cares nothing about the welfare of his people, is useless. He appeals to Agnès Sorrel, the frivolous king's mistress who has a great influence over him. He impresses upon her the fact that the fate of a State and of its people depends upon her; and knowing the influence for good or bad that she has over the king, France will curse her if she does nothing to help her country. Agnès promises to restore the king to France.³

The indolent ruler is finally awakened to his duty by two forces: Jean d'Orléans comes to tell him that Narbonne, Vaintille, Douglas, and others of his best warriors have either been taken captive or killed; Agnès Sorrel tells him that she is no longer his mistress. Because of his indolence and thoughtlessness he has allowed his country to be taken from him and, now that he is no longer the real king, his mistress is going to leave

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

him. Immediately Charles VII asks for a horse and armor in order that he may lead his army into battle and regain his country from the hands of the English. He has been awakened to the condition of his people; he becomes brave and swears that he will be the last person to leave the battle field. He determines to regain not the France of Philippe-Auguste, nor that of Philippe de Valois, but the former empire of Charlemagne.

With his awakened ambition and determination Charles the indolent becomes Charles the victorious. He is still going to his chase, but this time it is not in his favorite forêt d'Auxerre, but it is on the field of battle where the English will be the game.¹

At this point in the drama, Dumas leaves his tableau of the history of France during the reign of Charles VII. The play was not a success. Dumas had tried to write a tragedy; he had observed the three unities. It was his best drama in verse², but tragedy is a work of logic where reason is sovereign, dominating subject, intrigues, characters and style. In this drama, it is the author's imagination that governs the action, the characters, and the happenings. Thus, it is a drama remarkable in its action, color, passion, movement, life; but not a tragedy.³ Dumas admits that the work was not original but,

"Une étude laborieusement faite et non pas

¹ Ibid., Act IV, sc. 4.

² Parigot, Le Drame d'Alexandre Dumas, Paris, 1899, p.212.

³ Roustan, La Littérature Française Par La Dissertation III Le XIXe Siècle, Paris, pp. 645-650

une oeuvre prime-sautière; un travail d'assimilation et non un drame original, qui m'a coûté infiniment plus de labeur qu'Antony..."¹

Dumas had suspected that the play would not be a success. Before the production he had displayed uncertainty about his verse, and had almost decided to rewrite the drama in prose. He had also returned Harel's thousand franc premium after he had read the work before a group of friends who received it coldly; but he was encouraged by the official reading at the Odéon which had been quite favorable, and decided to continue the presentation.²

Alexander Dumas fils, remembering the empty theater and the sad journey home from the Odéon with his father after the failure of the play, shows his admiration and loyalty to the work of his father when he recalls:

"Nous revînmes ensemble tout seul, toi me tenant par la main, moi trotinant à ton côté pour me mettre à l'unisson de tes grandes jambes. Tu ne parlais pas; je ne disais rien non plus: je sentais que tu étais triste et qu'il fallait se taire. Depuis ce jour, je n'ai jamais longé le vieux mur de la rue de Seine, près du guichet de l'Institut (où tu ne devais pas entrer) sans revoir nos silhouettes, sur cette muraille humide, l'échéé ce soir-là d'un grand rayon de lune. Je ne suis jamais non plus revenu d'une de mes premières représentations les plus bruyantes et les plus applaudies, sans me rappeler le froid de cette grande salle, notre marche silencieuse à travers les rues désertes, et sans me dire tout bas, pendant que mes amis me fé-

¹ Dumas, Mes Mémoires, Paris, 1863, VIII, p. 204

² Gorman, op. cit., p. 234.

licitaient: 'C'est possible; mais j'aimerais mieux avoir fait Charles VII, qui n'a pas réussi.'" ¹

History is often only plastic clay in the hands of the dramatist, and he molds it as best suits his fancy. It is interesting to see what Dumas has done in this instance. As long as he is portraying the character of Charles VII, gay, carefree, indolent, thinking only of his feasts, hunts, and his happiness with his mistress without giving a thought to the welfare of his country, and who is finally awakened to the call of his people, the author gives us the real history of the man and of his times. But this is a work of a dramatic author and not the historian, consequently one might expect some changes.

In history Charles VII was forced to see the condition of his people and to hear the call of his country by Jeanne d'Arc, a young shepherdess from the small village of Domremy and it was she who awakened French patriotism and led the French toward battle. It was Jeanne d'Arc who forced the English to surrender Orléans and saved her country. Jean d'Orléans, according to history fought with her in the attempt to save France. Dumas does not mention Jeanne d'Arc at all in his drama, but gives to Agnès Sorrel a part of the credit for having saved her country. The author reasoned, probably, that since the king was so much under the influence of his mistress the change in him would have a more dramatic effect if she were responsible for it. Probably the fact that the

¹ Dumas fils, Théâtre Complet, Paris, 1890, III, pp. 22-23

author was observing the three unities in the play might account for this deviation from historical facts, for the introduction of a character as important as Jeanne d'Arc would have prevented his adherence to the unities.

Dumas probably omitted any mention of Jeanne d'Arc because of the effect it would have upon the portrait of the character of his hero. History portrays a king under the influence of his favorites and unworthy advisers even after Jeanne d'Arc has been influential in saving her country. He easily forgets what she has done for him and does not attempt to save her from the English. It is only after her death that his character seems to change and he tries to remedy the evils of his country.¹ The dramatist has the king take a decisive stand for good before he goes into battle and his character would have been weakened and less effective, had he allowed her to be burned. His hero has made a definite change, or at least he has been awakened to duty; the dramatist could not let him forget so easily.

It is probably for this reason that the author ends his historical tableau with the king going into battle resolved to restore the France of Charlemagne. As with Napoléon, in this work it was a question of history; as with Saint-Mégrin, he changes this character slightly to suit his romantic imagination.

¹ Malet, op. cit., p. 99.

CHAPTER V

KEAN

Kean ou Désordre et Génie, a comedy in five acts in prose written by Alexander Dumas was produced at the Théâtre des Variétés on August 31, 1836. This play provides an opportunity for a close observation of a character, of a type different from the others in this study. As with Napoléon Bonaparte the author again brings his readers and audiences back to modern times in this drama based on the life of the English actor Edmond Kean, who had died just three years before the play was written, and whose blend of genius and debauchery seemed to Dumas "sublime in its independence of the social law".¹

Edmond Kean, an actor of doubtful parentage,² was born at London in 1787. He made his first stage appearance in the role of Cupid in Noverre's ballet of Symon, at the age of three years.³ His early life was very irregular and often he was found in low public houses giving recitations, songs, and imitations of famous actors.⁴ In 1794 benevolent persons sent him to school where he displayed unusual talent, but finding the restraint in-

¹ Wright, A History of French Literature, New York, 1925 p. 699.

² Baker, Our Old Actors, London, 1878, II, p. 165.

³ Ibid., p. 167.

⁴ Ibid.

tolerable, he shipped as a cabin boy to Portsmouth. Encountering there a more rigorous bondage, the youth counterfeited both lameness and deafness with histrionic mastery that deceived even the physicians at Madeira.

His uncle, Moses Kean, an entertainer at the Lyceum Theater, taught him Shakespeare and had him study dancing and fencing. At the death of his uncle he was taken under the care of Miss Tidwell, an actress who taught him the principles of acting and directed him in a systematic study of the principal Shakespearian characters in which he displayed the originality of his genius by interpretations different from those of others. After a few years, Nance Carey, a disreputable vagabond claimed him as her son, carrying him about reciting extracts from speeches and plays.¹

Very early the youth showed great talent for the stage; when only fourteen years old he played for twenty nights a leading rôle in the York Theater, appearing as Hamlet, Hastings, and Cato. Later, rumors of his abilities reached George III who commanded him to recite at Windsor.² At this early age, he was already given over to dissipation.

In 1808 Kean married a Miss Chambers, an actress eight years his senior, and the following year their son Charles, who was to become a great actor, was born. Dur-

¹ Ibid., p. 169.

² The Encyclopaedia Britannica, New York, 1911, XV, pp. 705-706

ing this same year he made a great triumph in Leo the Gypsy, the first play of the celebrated dramatist Sheridan Knowles, who had written the drama especially for Kean.¹ Life was not always full of successes, however, and during intervals he gave exhibitions of tight rope dancing and served as a sparring partner for a professional pugilist.²

Kean became famous in Shakespearian roles, mastering the whole range of tragic emotion. He spent three years at Dury-Lane Theater where he was well received.³ All men--poets, statesmen, nobles--crowded his dressing room and were eager to have him for their guest; but he evaded the invitations of his aristocratic friends as much as possible.⁴

The actor made his first American appearance in New York in 1820, where he was a great success as Richard III. He made a second visit to America in 1825 after he had fallen into disfavor in England because of an adverse decision received in a law suit which finally resulted in his being divorced from his wife. Returning to England he was received with his old favor, but the frequent use

¹ Baker, op. cit., p. 179.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 203.

⁴ Ibid., p. 202.

of stimulants caused the deterioration of his histrionic gifts.

In 1827 Kean went to Paris where the French stage was fettered with classical traditions. The Parisians did not fully appreciate his natural and impulsive style, but he was considered a great success.¹ Incessant drinking was destroying his constitution, but he was still a success at King's Theater as late as 1830.² His last appearance on the stage was at Covent Garden, March 25, 1833, where he played Othello to the Iago of his son Charles; during which performance the famous actor fell stricken into the arms of his son. He died two months later.

Dumas was strongly impressed by the acting of Kean in 1827, and wanted to make a dramatic work based upon his impressions of the artist.³ This work had been attempted by Théaulon, a minor author who sometimes collaborated with Dumas, but it was so feeble that Dumas was called in to rebuild it.⁴ Because of his great admiration for the actor, the famous dramatist was able to make a great success and a drama that was to hold the stage for a great many years. A part of the success may be attributed to the mimetic skill of Frédéric Lemaître,

¹ Ibid., p. 221.

² Ibid., p. 222.

³ Parigot, Alexandre Dumas Père, Paris, 1902, p. 81.

⁴ Lucas-Dubreton, The Fourth Musketeer, New York, 1928, p. 97.

who in this drama, achieved one of his greatest triumphs.¹ This work which attests Dumas' skill in dramaturgy proved its long vitality through Charles Cochran's adaptation of it, The Royal Box, a drama revived as recently as 1928 in New York.² Dumas built his comedy upon an imaginary event in the life of Kean. The action is centered around the actor's performances at Drury-Lane and his friendship with people of all classes. He is shown as a famous actor and a drunkard, who, because of his personality attracts people of all classes of society.

First, we see the effect that he has on the nobility in the fact that Elana, the Comtesse de Koefeld, is in love with him and is drawn to him mainly because of his artistic ability.³ To what extent the nobility esteems his friendship is seen also in his being invited by the Comte de Koefeld to a dinner at which the Prince of Wales is also to be a guest.⁴ The actor attracts equally members of the bourgeoisie. Anna Damby tells him that she had grown tired of life, a sense of melancholy seemed to have sapped all of her energy, until she was induced to attend his performances at Drury-Lane and,

"...C'est alors que j'entendis une voix...
Oh!....qui vibra jusqu'au fond de mon coeur...Tout
mon être tressaillit....Cette voix disait des vers

¹ Gorman, op. cit. p. 276.

² Ibid.

³ Dumas, Kean, Act I, sc. 2.

⁴ Ibid., Act I, sc. 3.

mélodieux comme jamais je n'en avais entendu....
 dos paroles d'amour comme je n'aurais jamais cru
 que des lèvres humaines pussent en prononcer....
 Mon âme tout entière passa dans mes yeux et dans
 mes oreilles..." 1

and,

"...Je languissais sans force, sans désir, sans espoir; mon sein était vide, mon âme en avait déjà fui, ou n'y était pas encore descendue, l'âme de l'acteur passa dans ma poitrine: je compris que je commençais seulement de ce jour à respirer, à sentir, à vivre!" 2

The actor is also worshipped by the people of the lowest type. Ketty the Blonde, a member of a troupe of which Kean was formerly a member has always loved and admired him, and had refused to marry anyone else because of her love for Kean.³ All of his former co-workers love him. When it is a question of finding a godfather for the daughter of 'le vieux Bob', someone suggests the Prince of Wales or the King of England, but Bob says,

"Mieux que ça: M. Kean!"⁴

In spite of his renown as an actor, Kean does not forget these former friends. When asked to be the godfather of the child, he consents gladly, and goes to the tavern, the "Trou de Charbon" where the event is to be celebrated. It is his desire that Ketty the Blonde be the godmother. His loyalty to his friends is shown in

¹ Ibid., Act III, sc. 12.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., Act III, sc. 5.

⁴ Ibid., Act II, sc. 2.

his giving a benefit performance for 'le vieux Bob' who has been hurt. Pistol, Bob's son, says of him,

"En voilà, un vrai et véritable ami, dans le bonheur comme dans le malheur" ¹

Kean's loyalty to these people may be further seen in the fact that at the time of the benefit performance for Bob, the actor has no money and is himself at the point of being dispossessed; he refuses, however, to use any of the proceeds for himself and says to Salomon who has tried to persuade him to borrow some of the funds,

"La recette est-elle à moi?....Elle est à ces braves gens, et tu veux que je leur fasse payer les services que je leur rends? Ceci est un conseil de laquais, Monsieur Salomon." ²

The actor remembers that these people are from the same class of society as he; he does not forget his origin. He wishes to challenge Lord Mewill for using his name to commit a cowardly action. Lord Mewill tells him that as a nobleman and a peer of England, he can not fight with a rope dancer or acrobat. The actor says to him,

"Oui, vous avez raison, il y a trop de distance entre nous. Lord Mewill est un homme honorable, tenant à l'une des premières familles d'Angleterre...Il est vrai que Lord Mewill a mangé la fortune de ses père en jeux de cartes et de dés, en paris de coq et en courses de chevaux;... son blason est terni de la vapeur de sa vie débauchée, et de ses basses actions...Tandis que le bateleur Kean est né sur le grabat du peuple, a été exposé sur la place publique et, ayant commencé sans nom et sans fortune, s'est fait un nom

¹ Ibid., Act III, sc. 6.

² Ibid., Act IV, sc. 2.

égal au plus noble nom, et une fortune qui du jour où il voudra bien, peut rivaliser avec celle du prince royal... Cela n'empêche pas que Lord Mewill ne soit un homme honorable et Kean un bateleur!..." 1

However, Kean, in acknowledging his low and ordinary birth, shows that it is not the origin of a person that is important, but his actions, and the manner in which he lives with his fellow man.

"Il est vrai que Lord Mewill a voulu rétablir sa fortune au détriment de celle d'une jeune fille belle et sans défense;... Tandis que le saltimbanque Kean a offert protection à la fugitive qui est venue la lui demander... et qu'il l'en a laissée sortir pure, ainsi qu'elle y était entrée... quoiqu'elle fût belle, jeune et sans défense..." 2

The actor reminds Lord Mewill that although the latter is a nobleman proud of his name, when he wants to go among the common people he changes his name and uses that of the same rope dancer and Buffon^o with whom he has refused to fight, while this same rope dancer who has received no famous name from his ancestors is proud of the one that he has made for himself and does not try to hide it.³ He does not pretend to belong to the nobility, but he is not the toy of the aristocrats. He shows himself unafraid in exposing Lord Mewill who wishes to compromise the name of an honorable young woman!" 4

Dumas portrays the famous actor as possessing two

1 Ibid., Act III, tableau 3, sc. 14.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., Act III, tableau 3, sc. 12.

pure loves; the first is Eléna, Comtesse de Koefeld, wife of the Ambassador from Denmark. She is not his mistress, but his inspiration, his muse. To Kean this is very important, for as he tells the Prince of Wales,

"...Nous autres artistes, monseigneur, nous avons des amours bizarres, et qui ne ressemblent en rien à celles des autres hommes; car elles ne franchissent pas la rampe; eh bien, des amours n'en sont pas moins passionnées et jalouses. Parfois, il arrive qu'entre les femmes qui assistent habituellement à nos représentations, nous en choisissons une dont nous faisons l'ange inspirateur de notre génie; tout ce que nos rôles contiennent de tendre et de passionné, c'est à elle que nous l'adressons... c'est son âme que notre voix va chercher parmi toutes ces âmes...ce n'est plus pour la réputation, pour la gloire, pour l'avenir que nous jouons; c'est pour un scupir....pour un regard....pour une larme d'elle." 1

To the actor it is necessary that this muse of inspiration be a noble lady, for them this literary and mystic love may inspire nobility in his art equal to the nobility in her blood. This love means so much to him that when he suspects Eléna of being in love with the Prince of Wales, he becomes almost insane, addresses a long tirade against the Prince, and is unable to continue his performance of Romeo and Juliette.² However, when he is convinced that Eléna is no longer faithful to him he bestows his affection upon Anna Damby who has always loved him, and decides to marry the latter and accompany her to New York.³ Anna now is everything to him and he says to her

¹ Ibid., Act IV, tableau 4, sc. 6.

² Ibid., Act IV, tableau 5, sc. 2.

³ Ibid., Act V, tableau 6, sc. 11.

and to Salomon,

"Ah! Vous êtes mes deux seuls, mes deux vrais amis!" 1

Kean thinks that a great artist in spite of great achievements, brilliant glory, and numerous loves, is from time to time isolated from all other people. In this Dumas makes of him a typical romantic hero--alone, different, isolated because of his genius. He tells Salomon,

"G...Je ferai graver ton nom en lettres d'or sur ma tombe, et l'on saura que Kean n'a eu que deux amis, son lion et toi." 2

The actor believes that since he has known how to please his audiences day after day, he understands human nature thoroughly; he believes that he is a clever and subtle psychologist. When he sees that the idea of marrying Lord Mewill frightens Anna Damby, he thinks that he has immediately discovered the cause, and he says to her,

"Écoutez-moi, car je vais aller au devant de vos paroles....Je vais lever un coin du voile sous lequel vous cachez votre secret,...Habitué, comme nous le sommes, nous autres comédiens, à reproduire tous les sentiments humains, notre étude continuelle doit être d'aller les chercher au plus profond de la pensée....Eh bien, j'ai cru lire dans la vôtre.. pardon Miss, si je me trompe...que votre haine pour Lord Mewill...vient d'un sentiment tout opposé pour un autre." 3

But his insight stops there; he does not see that it is of him that Miss Damby is enamored, not even when she ad-

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., Act IVm tableau 3, sc. 13.

³ Ibid., Act III, tableau 3, sc. 11.

mits that she does love another, and that she is powerless because she has been dragged into it by a "strange fatality which no woman could resist."¹ Nor does he seem to realize why Anna is so anxious to leave for New York, "dans un seul but, et avec un seul espoir".² Probably his failure to detect Anna's affection for him is due to the fact that he is so much enamored of Eléna.

Kean firmly believes that disorder and genius go hand in hand, that there is no genius without disorder and that there is a necessary bond which unites the two. Therefore he tries to prove that his custom of frequenting questionable taverns can augment his gift of understanding and interpreting his roles.

"...Mais, que veux-tu! Je ne puis en changer! Il faut qu'un acteur connaisse toutes les passions pour les bien exprimer. Je les étudie sur moi-même. C'est le moyen de les savoir par coeur." ³

Salomon tries to convince him that he should have more system in the management of his affairs, that they lack order, but Kean replies,

"Avoir de l'ordre!...C'est cela, et le génie qu'est-ce qu'il deviendra pendant que j'aurai de l'ordre?...Oh! si Dieu m'avait donné cette honorable faculté, je serais à cette heure marchand de drap dans la Cité et non marchand de vers à Covent-Garden et à Drury-Lane." ⁴

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., Act V, tableau 6, sc. 5.

³ Ibid., Act II, sc. 2.

⁴ Ibid., Act IV, tableau 4, sc. 2.

Because of his artistic temperament and romantic nature Kean has strange ideas concerning critics; when they praise him, he thinks that they are being just. Any unfavorable criticism against him is due, he believes, to their inability to appreciate art.

"...Vous ne connaissez pas nos journalistes d'Angleterre, Miss...il en est qui ont compris leur mission du côté honorable, qui sont partisans de tout ce qui est noble, défenseurs de tout ce qui est beau, admirateurs de tout ce qui est grand... Ceux-là, c'est la gloire de la presse, ce sont des anges du jugement de la nation....Mais, il en est d'autres, Miss, que l'impuissance de produire a jetés dans la critique....Ceux-là sont jaloux, ils flétrissent ce qui est noble....ils ternissent ce qui est beau....ils abaissent ce qui est grand!..."¹

Dumas shows Kean the actor in many moods; he is portrayed as drunk after an evening with his rowdy friends at the "Trou du Charbon"; almost insane when he thinks that the Prince of Wales has replaced him in the affections of Eléna; sublime in saving the honor of a young girl; ironical when he attacks the false principles of the nobility; in fact he is shown in all the moods of an artistic temperament.

In this drama the author found little need to change the ideas of the biographers of his hero, yet being the dramatic artist that he was, it was necessary that he make some inventions. The actor, in real life, was not inspired by the love of a great lady, as Dumas makes his hero. At the time of Kean's performances at Drury Lane he was married. There was an affair in his life in which he was in-

¹ Baker, op. cit., p. 213-215.

volved, but the woman was not of the type that could give him much pure inspiration, nor was Kean really in love with her.¹ This was one of the saddest events in his life because of the unfavorable publicity of the papers and his divorce from his wife which resulted. Dumas gives to this liaison the viewpoint of the French and makes Kean's life resemble that of a French Romanticist.

The dramatist remains very close to the portrayal of the biographers when he shows Kean as an intimate friend of the nobility and the rabble. He is portrayed as a link between social extremes, a man carousing in the "Trou du Charbon" with questionable friends, then mingling with the aristocracy, defying Lord Merwill, making passionate love to the Comtesse de Koefeld and finally insulting the Prince of Wales from the stage of Drury Lane.

The intrigue and its dénouement^e are the inventions of the imagination of Dumas. Eléna has visited Kean in his dressing room, and while there has dropped a fan, a gift from the Prince of Wales. The fan is found there a few minutes later by the Comte de Koefeld who, along with the Prince, visits the actor. The action tends more to a tragic ending by Kean's tirade against the nobility represented by Lord Mewill and the Prince of Wales. To complicate matters further, Eléna comes to Kean's "loge"

¹ Baker, op. cit., p. 213-215.

the next day to tell him that she no longer loves him, and while she is there her enraged husband comes to challenge Kean to a duel. It was here that the author had to rely upon his creative imagination to save his comedy, and he does so with ingenuity. Everybody is expecting a tragedy, **The Comtesse** is hiding in a cabinet; the Comte comes to challenge Kean, officers come to arrest the latter. A lady's honor is about to be compromised, Kean will perhaps be killed in the duel with the Comte or imprisoned because of his denunciation of the nobility. The dramatist, however, after leading his audience to a high state of tenseness has a surprise in store. The Prince of Wales saves the situation by arranging an escape for Eléna whom he has seen enter the actor's dressing room, assuming the blame for the fan that he had seen the Comte pick up, and having Kean's sentence changed to banishment for one year. Kean is relieved when he knows that Eléna has been saved and he is free to marry Anna Danby and accompany her to America. The solution at first seems almost impossible, but it is the one that the dramatist gives to the situation and seemed to please because of its melodramatic surprise.

Dumas was attracted to Kean after seeing the actor play in Paris, but probably there was something in the life of the artist which interested the dramatist also. Dumas, himself, lived a somewhat disordered life, although not of the same type as that of Kean, and out

of this disorder genius seemed to grow. He has his hero say that disorder is necessary to acquaint the actor with the roles that he is to play and to give to them an interpretation more nearly perfect; Dumas found plots for some of his theatrical productions in his disordered life. There was another somewhat analagous circumstance in the lives of the two men. Kean was separated from his wife; and his son whom he loved dearly preferred to spend most of his time with his mother. Dumas, too, had a son whom he loved, and, although the latter spent much of his time with his illustrious father, he preferred the company of his mother.

Kean with his emotional nature and romantic feeling of being alone and misunderstood, was an ideal subject for a romantic drama. Dumas refashions him into a Frenchman who studied the effects of human passions on himself in order to represent them with fidelity in the world of the theater; a great actor whose genius seemed to be born out of disorder.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the innovations made by Alexander Dumas père on the French stage was the historical drama which he instituted with his presentation of Henri III et Sa Cour. In this and the other historical productions which followed, he showed great talent in the molding of the character of his heroes, generally persons representing important epochs in history.

His historical characters were taken from no single era in history; they range from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Probably this is due to the wealth of material available at the time of his writing. He was as unlimited in his subjects as in the number of his works; he treats people from the lowest to the highest classes of society, from the common people to kings and emperors. His heroes are not confined to one country. It is but natural to expect the majority of them to be Frenchmen: Saint-Mégin, Charles VII; but he has represented England, Kean; and Corsica, Napoleon Bonaparte, as well.

The sources of material used by Dumas were as varied as the subjects themselves. They include chance readings in salons, accidental glances through Mémoires and actual contact with lives that appealed to him. The material acquired, he then made use of his vivid imagination to produce a work that was often interesting.

Dumas had no set method by which his plays were con-

structed. The majority, however, were romantic and in prose; but they vary in form from the melodramatic Henri III et sa Cour to the nearly classic Charles VII chez ses Grands Vassaux. In length they range from the usual five acts containing as many tableaux to the six acts and twenty-three tableaux of Napoléon Bonaparte.

As the author had used no one method in selecting his subjects, gathering material and in constructing his drama, he had no fixed form in which to mold his characters. In Henri III et sa Cour he makes his hero a man almost unknown in history, a man about whom history has told us very little other than that he was a frivolous favorite of the king, in love with the Duchesse de Guise. Dumas allows him to remain the king's favorite and the Duchesse's lover, but he goes a little further than history. He portrays him as a wise counsellor to the weak ruler, and a man who can be just, politically, to his rival in love. The death of Saint-Mégin as described by history was not dramatic enough to please the author, hence, he substitutes the death of another court favorite, Bussy d'Amboise.

Dumas did not always make such great changes in the character of his heroes. He gives to Napoleon Bonaparte the same traits, desires and actions that history has attributed to the great general. In this case he was not working with a single event in the life of a man but a period which covered thirty years. The drama is thus a sketch of the man's

ambition, hopes, accomplishments and sorrows during this time. The author must show his creative genius, hence, his imagination creates the role of the English spy who plays a more or less important part in the drama and in the life of the hero. Dumas did not like Napoleon but he had to admire the man's personality and career. The hero is drawn as he really was and the author leaves it to his readers or audiences to determine the merits or demerits of the man.

With Charles VII Chez ses Grands Vassaux, Dumas reverts to a policy slightly suggestive of his Henri III et sa Cour. The character of his hero was not exactly as he would desire it; thus the author's imagination must create for the man different qualities. In the beginning he follows history very closely picturing the king interested only in hunting and the happiness that he finds with his mistress, and entirely unconcerned about the condition of his country. But France must be saved and it will be more effective if the carefree king should be at least a part of the means by which this is accomplished. He, therefore, makes the king realize his duty towards his country and become desirous of saving his people even at the risk of his own life.

All of the historical works of Dumas père do not end tragically. In Kean he has given an amusing comedy which shows the ingenuity of his imagination. He presents the actor Kean as he was in real life, but the author invents situations to bring out more effectively the qualities attributed to Kean by his biographers. He imagines that these

things could have happened to the artist, and, so closely are they woven that the audience imagines so too. He gives us his idea of an Englishman, but it is an Englishman refashioned into a Frenchman.

Dumas' plots lead to a logical dénouement. Even in Kean one can foresee the conclusion, although at times one wonders just how the dramatist will attain it. We know, however, that it is to be a comedy, and Dumas' solution is acceptable.

Few or probably none of the historical works of Alexander Dumas are known today. This is due to the fact that each hero so represented his era that he can not be applied to another; thus, the dramas lack universal appeal.

Dumas used no one method in selecting material for his dramas, in forming these dramas, nor in molding the character of his heroes. His desire being to amuse and to interest his audience, he made use of any means that his imagination suggested. He preferred action to the psychological study favored by many of his compatriots; and therefore, in his plays one finds a complete mastery of stage technique, but little of the penetration of a Shakespeare or Molière.

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