

SYNOPSIS

The story is set in Paris during the mid 1800's. The lead heroine is Marguerite Gautier, a young beautiful courtesan who is a "kept woman" by counts and dukes -- men of "Fashionable Society". She meets a young middle class lover Armand Duval who does the unpardonable thing of falling jealously in love with her and breaking all convention of what's expected between a courtesan and her admirers. He, of course, has no way of sustaining the standard of living which she is accustomed.

In her fragile physical state (Marguerite has tuberculosis which we learn later) she moves to the country. There in her new house, a confrontation between the jealous Armand and her rich admirers and "benefactors" takes place. For the first time she sticks up for her lover -- making a life choice -- and they are left indignantly and alone.

Armand becomes depressed, his career seems doomed by the intolerance of French society, and knowing he will never be able to support Marguerite to the level she deserves. Unbeknownst to Armand, his father comes to plead for her to leave Armand to save both his son's reputation and that of his younger innocent sister -- whom is also tainted by the scandal. To prove her love, she agrees and leaves Armand. She returns to Paris where she despairingly throws herself back into her old lifestyle. Armand can't believe she's left and searches for her -- finally finding her in Paris in the arms of a new lover.

Time passes.

The two accidentally meet again in public. Marguerite is now in the company of another beautiful courtesan and Armand begins "paying court" not with her but with her friend trying to strike back at Marguerite out of his own sense of hurt. Deathly ill, Marguerite visits Armand one last time to plead that he stop humiliating her, and they make love again -- both unable to deny the passion for each other. But Marguerite is haunted by guilt that she can only harm Armand and remembering her promise to his father -- she abandons him yet again as he sleeps. Armand is incensed when he wakes. Finding Marguerite at a grand ball with all society around, he approaches her and hands her an envelope stuffed full of money -- "Here! Payment for your services." She collapses as he walks out.

Abandoned by all her friends from the humiliation of Armand's act, exposed publicly for what she really is, she dies penniless, painfully and alone -- cast off by all the men that used her. In prologue, Armand is given Marguerite's diary in which he finally learns of her illness and her undying love for him along with the extent of anguish that he caused.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE NOVEL WRITER

Alexandre Dumas père was born on 24 July 1802 in the village of Villers-Cotterêts, just outside Paris, France, the third child born to Marie Louise Labouret, daughter of an inn keeper, and Thomas Alexandre Davy de la Pailleterie (1762-1806) a military General under Napoléon. Alexandres' grandfather, the Marquis Alexandre Davy de La Pailleterie (1710-1786) married a slave he fell in love with in San Domingo (now Haiti) named Marie Louise Césette Dumas (d.1772). Thomas took her last name when he himself enlisted with the French army. After a falling out with Napoléon due to his criticism of the Egypt campaign, and a long imprisonment which left him in poor health, Thomas returned home a broken man with no pension. After his death the family was left in dire financial straits. Alexandre's mother set her best efforts to providing an education for her son although he proved to be less than enthusiastic about it. He attended Abbé Grégoire's school before finding employment with a local notary to help support the family.

In 1822 Dumas père set off for Paris and was soon immersed in literary life. He worked as a scribe for the duc d'Orléans, later to be King Louis Philippe when the 1830 revolution which Dumas père participated in ousted King Charles X. He met noted playwrights and collaborated with them before making his own entrance to the stage at the Comédie française with his plays *Henry III and His Court* (1829), *The Tower of Nesle* (1832), *Kean* (1836), and his *Byronic Antony* (first performed in 1831) inspired by the works of Lord George Gordon Byron. An avid reader of William Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott, his dramas were immensely popular, being among the first of the Romantic Movement along with friend and sometimes rival Victor Hugo's (1802-1885). They were a decided change from the Neoclassic style that dominated Parisian stages at the time. During this period Dumas père had a son, Alexandre fils (1824-1895) with his lover Marie Laure Catherine Labay (1794-1868) who also became a noted author and playwright, being admitted to the Académie française in 1874. Although Dumas père kept up his womanizing ways, in 1840 he married

actress Ida Ferrier (1811-1859) and had an illegitimate daughter, Marie Alexandrine (b.1831) with Belle Kreilssamner (1803-1875).

After a short but terrifying bout of cholera during the epidemic of 1832, Dumas père was ordered by his physician--"when they have nothing more to say" [from *The Glacier Land* (1852)]--to take a tour of Europe; on 21 July 1832 he left Paris and embarked on his first of many travels which took him to such countries as Austria, the Netherlands, Spain, England, Germany, and North Africa. As was his wont, he kept remarkable records of his adventures included in *Travel Impressions: In Switzerland* (1834), *A Year in Florence* (1841), *From Paris to Cadiz* (1847), *The Caucasus* (1859), and *Travel Impressions: In Russia* (1860).

Dumas père continued his prodigious output of essays, short stories, and novels. With the success of *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers* he sought a place of refuge to concentrate on further writings. He bought land and built the *Château de Monte Cristo* (nicknamed *Château d'Iff*) in Port Marly, Yvelines, France, now and a museum. There he worked when not lavishly entertaining guests, but it was not long before he had to sell it when his debts grew too much. In 1851 he fled to Brussels, Belgium to avoid creditors. Further titles published during this time were his *Valois Romances* including *Queen Margot* (1845), *The Lady of Monsoreau* (a.k.a. *Chicot the Jester*) (1845), and *The Forty-Five Guardsmen* (1847); and *The Regent's Daughter* (1845), *The Two Dianas* (1846), *The Black Tulip* (1850), *The Wolf Leader* (1857), *The Companions of Jehu* (1857), and his autobiography *Mes Mémoires* (written between 1852-55).

Alexandre Dumas père died on 5 December 1870 at his son's villa in Puys, near Dieppe, France. He was buried in the cemetery of Villers-Cotterêts, but as of the year 2002 he now rests in the Panthéon in Paris, among other such notable French literary giants as Émile Zola, Victor Hugo, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Francois-Marie Arouet Voltaire.