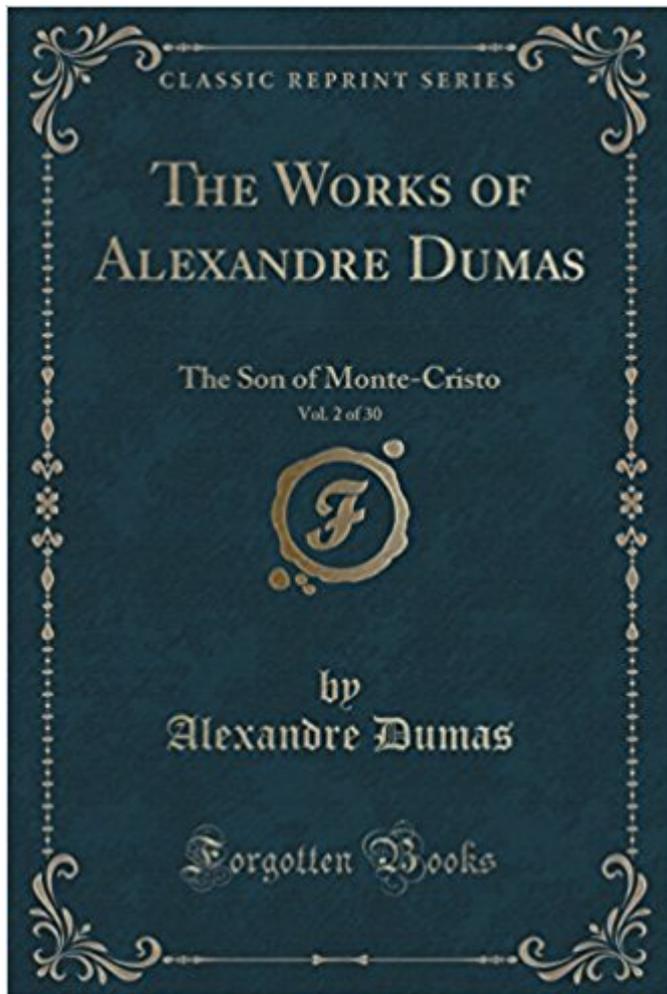


#39 – Son Of Monte Cristo volume II, Alexandre Dumas

BOOK REVIEW

Krauser PUA | 9 March, 2018 | by krauserpua



Inquisitive minds will have noted my rule of thumb introduced in [yesterday's Jules Verne review](#). Jules Lermina's *Son Of Monte Cristo* is a far superior book and I read all 356 pages of volume two in one afternoon non-stop [1]. It would appear Lermina has won the "Battle of the Jules" in my mind at least.

If you haven't already, I suggest you cast your eye over [Forgotten Books](#). It's a very odd website and I still can't quite figure it out. The headline business case is clear: they are unearthing, polishing and republishing important or obscure old books that are out of copyright. That isn't so remarkable. What is remarkable is they have almost **a million** titles.

Wait... what?



The Freemasonry section alone has 200 books

This isn't Google with limitless CIA investor funding nor Ferrari selling high margin single items. Forgotten Books is scratching out a living from 18th and 19th Century books that nobody read the first time around either. Consider some titles on sale:

- [The War Detective; Or, Secret Service in the Rebellion. A Story of Booth's Great Conspiracy \(volume 7\)](#)
- [The Report at Large of the Coroner's Inquest on Jane Watson, Shot at Mr. Robinson's, in Old Burlington-Street](#)
- [Gleanings From the Desert of Arabia](#)
- [Grey Maiden, the Story of a Sword Through the Ages](#)

We aren't talking *Harry Potter* sales numbers here, are we lads? Clearly they are using some kind of automation but I wonder who scanned all these original paper copies into the system and who checked their software's output. Who uploaded the products to Amazon? [2]. I held off on buying any Forgotten Books paperbacks for over a month because I assumed they'd be rushed botched jobs, or that it's all a scam.

But I can't resist the idea of having a treasure trove of lost scholarship. This was my way in.

You see, I've always wanted a library of my own. Not a public library that plebs can use for free coffee while listening to rap music on their smartphone speakers. I like the great libraries of antiquity, such as in Alexandria, or the fictional library in *Game Of Thrones* where the fat cuck discovers the secret to stopping the white walkers. I like George Lucas' private library in his house. I like the libraries where Dennis Wheatley characters sip port, smoke cigarettes, and plot the destruction of communism.



I'm glad winter is coming because I intend to spend it here

Back in my university days I'd enjoy exploring untraveled aisles of leather-bound academic journals dating back up to a hundred years. Some university would put out *The Postivist Journal of Criminology* [3] starting in 1923 and it would run quarterly for two decades. Each issue would have ten academic papers, each summarising a genuine research project backed by statistics, graphs, and methodological musing. My university would have a subscription and at the end of the year some librarian would have them bound into a single volume and placed on a shelf. There it would remain unnoticed and unloved for decades until I came along, dusted it off, and tried to figure a way to reference it in my term paper.

A university library is like a hill of rabbit holes, each one lets you tumble into a different world. I like that kind of thing. Forgotten Books lets me reproduce the experience at a fraction of the cost. I have my own library of Alexandria at my fingertips [4]

I couldn't resist so I found *Son Of Monte Cristo* and ordered a paperback on Amazon. It's print on demand (using the same printer as **Daygame Infinite**). Two weeks later I had a copy and it was solid. Nice cover, quality paper, no printing or legibility issues, and it felt weighty in my hands. Not a scam. I was impressed. [You can read my review of volume one here.](#)



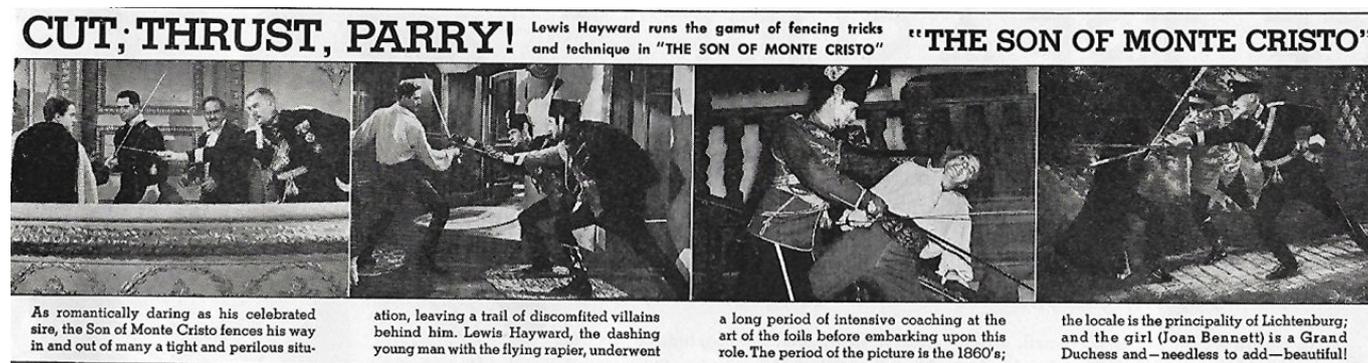
The movie version

Volume two picks up right where volume one left off, as Edmund Dantes' team are sitting around a camp fire in Algeria having just seen off marauding Bedouins with the help of some former travelling acrobats led by a man named Fanfaro. This volume begins with Fanfaro's back story and..... that backstory (told as flashback) doesn't end until page 202.

Really. This is a 356-page book and over half of it is a completely unrelated story involving characters who've only just been introduced a chapter before, and involving none of the main characters even tangentially. It's like it was its own novel thrown in upon a tenuous pretext.

You'd likely think this is a bad thing? Nope. It's an excellent 200-page story. I really enjoyed it. It

concerns a dastardly plot for a dissolute vicomte from Paris to murder his brother to secure inheritance of a fortune, then to hunt down and assassinate the brother's children as remaining legitimate heirs. The travelling acrobats get wrapped up in the plot. It begins with unexpected meetings in a Black Forest tavern in Germany then moves on to Paris.



I think they added all the fights in for the movie

The story told, the remaining 156 pages do then tie Fanfaro's story into Dantes', so the saga ends with symmetry and purpose. Nonetheless it's a brave diversion. We are in the unusual position of having a Count Of Monte Cristo book barely involving the Count, and not written by Dumas. Bold [5].

Written only ten years after his fellow Jules' aquatic adventure, Lermine's tale is a real page turner. However, the plotting is preposterous in its reliance upon wild coincidences to advance the plot. Here are a couple:

- Fanfaro must flee across the rooftops from police and accidentally falls through a skylight.... into the new home of his best friend he hasn't seen in years and didn't even know was alive.
- Fanfaro's sister escapes an abduction and throws herself into the Seine to commit suicide, unwittingly right in front of Spero, Edmund Dantes' son, who loves her and happens to be walking that street at that moment.
- This sister fled an Eastern province where her mother was burned alive during a Cossack raid. Ten years later in Paris she asks at a local hospice for an elderly unfortunate to take care of and the clerk assigns her.... her mother, who still lives but has lost her memory.

This book really is coincidence after coincidence. It's written as if France only has twenty people living there so they are continually pressed up against each other by fate. It didn't bother me because this is intended as a romantic (in the philosophical sense) tall tale so I switched my brain off and enjoyed the action. Lermine isn't lacking ingenuity nor the imagination to create interesting plot devices. He's also in keeping with themes from the Dumas original, such as a family being broken upon under traumatising conditions gradually reconstituting itself through unexpected meetings many years later.

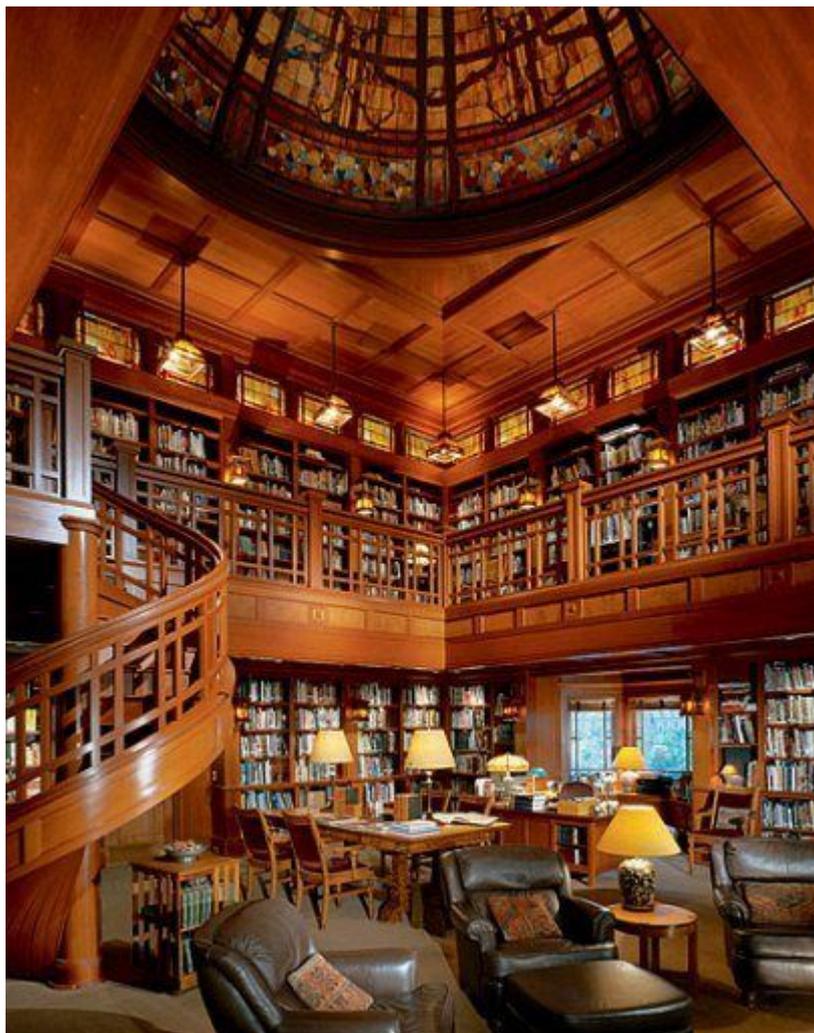
A flaw of this book that isn't so forgivable is his characterisation of the two Monte Cristo men, the father Edmund and the son Spero. Readers of the Dumas original will have been impressed by his presentation of Edmund Dantes as a complex character. Edmund burns with vengeance but is also tempered by a love for the world and a thirst for self improvement. He's calculating, brave, resourceful, and patient. Very patient. Edmund Dantes is a mover, a man who bends the world to his will. Modern men like *The Count Of Monte Cristo* specifically because Dantes is such a great fictional role model.

Lermine's Dantes doesn't really do anything but make noble speeches about doing the right thing. He's constantly referred to by other characters as a great man but within this book does nothing at all to earn it. It's tell not show. He's barely even in the book. His son is worse. He's an impulsive dunderhead who is tossed around by the vagaries of fate, precisely the opposite of Dumas' Edmund Dantes. It's hard to root

for him because although brave and virtuous, he is very easily tricked. Watching him face up to a challenge is as cringeworthy and incompetent as watching a **Deepak Wayne** [daygame infield](#).

Perhaps Lermina was trying to convey the tragedy at the heart of the book, that for all of Dantes' riches, his unquenchable thirst for vengeance ultimately ruined him and all around him. There's a section towards the end where Spero reflects upon having been overly protected by his father and his training in many arts was at the expense of learning to chart his own path through the world. So, Spero's blockheadedness and reactivity may actually be a deliberate theme – he's *not* a hero like his dad.

By far the best characters in the book are the black hats. Benedetto the former galley slave is brilliant, a squalid and irredeemable rogue. The Vicomtes of Talizeric, both father and son, are good too in their scheming and vanity.



A purchase of Daygame Infinite helps fund the Krauser Library of Antiquity

In summary, if you like the idea of rummaging through literary history like it's your own virtual library you could do a lot worse than dusting off this story. It won't uplift you like the Dumas original can but it's a ripping yarn within the same universe. I just ordered *The Countess Of Monte Cristo* to see if that can maintain the pace.

If you'd like to see a talented craftsman creating a masterpiece of personal development literature you should get yourself [Daygame Infinite](#). If you'd rather see an unoriginal hack shitting out a pale imitation you could try Str.... no, don't bother.

[1] Except for toilet breaks and a walk to Tesco's to buy a bag of onion rings crisps.

[2] I don't have any answers.

[3] I just made up that particular journal but it's close to the real ones.

[4] Literally all 945,609 books if you do the online subscription because it lets you access every volume instantly by PDF. I just happen to prefer paper.

[5] Or total piss-take, depending on your point of view.

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