
BICENTENARY



FATHER OF THE THREE MUSKETEERS, THE
COUNT OF MONTE-CRISTO AND MANY
MORE...

JULY 24 1802 - DECEMBER 5 1870

ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR WRITERS OF
HIS TIME, ALEXANDRE DUMAS LED AS
COLOURFUL A LIFE AS ANY OF THE
CHARACTERS OF HIS BOOKS.
COLOURFUL?

It was not till I read the Literary Renaudot Prize written by Martine Le Coz this year, that I realised how little we all knew about the world famous author. The book - Céleste - deals with racism in 1830 (still a topical subject in 2002 ...) as Docteur Lodran, son of a slave born in Haïti and parent of mixed-blood Alexandre Dumas, falls in love with azure-eyed and white-skinned Céleste.

I was stunned. How could I have been studying literature at university and ignore that Dumas was coloured?

Alexandre Dumas was born in 1802 in Villers-Cotterêts - Département of Aisne - to a general in the Napoleonic army, Thomas-Alexandre Davy de La Pailleterie. The delighted general had given him his first inheritance: the colour of his skin. For the general's mother was a black slave from Santo Domingo.

His father's premature death - he was only 4 - led to financial difficulties and forced the family to live with the maternal grandparents. His vie de famille was always to be 'different', not

to mention his possessive mother who shared his bedroom till he was 17. After a provincial job as a solicitor's clerk, Alexander, drawn by the glitter of Paris, moved to the Capital to become a writer.

A year later, at 22 years old, a son, Alexandre Dumas fils, was born from one of his numerous relationships. His daughter Marie-Alexandrine, by another liaison, will be the last child he will legally recognize, out of at least another 12 illegitimate ones. He married only once, in 1840, in order to impress the French Academy who found his lifestyle too libertine. However, they did not accept him and he divorced Ida Ferrier 8 years later. He earned a lot of money, spent it liberally, swept women off their feet and wrote rapidly and prolifically to repay his debts.

He never fell into despair, as he knew that he was extravagant. When he died of a stroke near Dieppe in 1870, he had filled the newspapers with prose and the stage with dramas. By the way? Did you know that he was a great Chef who left us a wonderful Cookery Book? Non? Moi non plus.

