外国文学经典

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基督山伯爵

（中）

Alexandre Dumas père（法）著

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北京 BEIJING

京权图字：01－2005－6709

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

基督山伯爵 = Count of Monte Cristo. 中 /（法）大仲马(Dumas, A.)著 .— 北京：外语教学与研究出版社，2008.5
（外国文学经典）
ISBN 978－7－5600－7586－0

Ⅰ. 基… Ⅱ. 大… Ⅲ. ①英语—语言读物 ②长篇小说—法国—近代 Ⅳ. H319.4：I

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字（2008）第 078948 号

出 版 人：于春迟
责任编辑：周 晶
装帧设计：林 力 张苏梅
出版发行：外语教学与研究出版社
社 址：北京市西三环北路 19 号（100089）
网 址：http://www.fltrp.com
印 刷：北京京科印刷有限公司
开 本：880×1168 1/32
印 张：62.5（上、中、下册）
版 次：2008 年 6 月第 1 版 2008 年 6 月第 1 次印刷
书 号：ISBN 978－7－5600－7586－0
定 价：99.00 元（上、中、下册）

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物料号：175860001

36. La Mazzolata

"Gentlemen," said the Count of Monte Cristo as he entered, "I pray you excuse me for suffering my visit to be anticipated; but I feared to disturb you by presenting myself earlier at your apartments; besides, you sent me word you would come to me, and I have held myself at your disposal."

"Franz and I have to thank you a thousand times, M. le Comte," returned Albert. "You extricated us from a great dilemma, and we were on the point of inventing some very fantastic vehicle when your friendly invitation reached us."

"Indeed!" returned the count, motioning the two young men to sit down. "It was the fault of that blockhead Pastrini, that I did not sooner assist you in your distress. He did not mention a syllable of your embarrassment to me, although he knows that, alone and isolated as I am, I seek every opportunity of making the acquaintance of my neighbours. As soon as I learned I could in any way assist you, I most eagerly seized the opportunity of offering my services."

The two young men bowed. Franz had, as yet, found nothing to say. He had adopted no determination; and as nothing in the count's manner manifested the wish that

he should recognise him, he did not know whether to make any allusion to the past, or wait until he had more proof. Besides, although sure it was he who had been in the box the previous evening, he could not be equally positive that he was the man he had seen at the Colosseum. He resolved, therefore, to let things take their course without making any direct overture to the count. Besides, he had this advantage over him, that he was master of the count's secret, whilst the count had no hold on Franz, who had nothing to conceal.

However, he resolved to lead the conversation to a subject which might possibly clear up his doubts.

"M. le Comte," said he, "you have offered us places in your carriage, and at your windows of the Rospoli Palace. Can you tell us where we can obtain a sight of the Place del Popolo?"

"Ah," said the count negligently, looking attentively at Morcerf, "is there not something like an execution upon the Place del Popolo?"

"Yes," returned Franz, finding that the count was coming to the point he wished.

"Stay, I think I told my steward yesterday to attend to this; perhaps I can render you this slight service also."

He extended his hand, and rang the bell thrice.

"Did you ever occupy yourself," said he to Franz, "with the employment of time and the means of simplifying the summoning your servants? I have: —when I ring once, it is for my valet; twice, for my maître d'hôtel; thrice, for my steward. Thus I do not waste a minute or a word.

Here he is!" A man of about five-and-forty to fifty entered, exactly resembling the smuggler who had introduced Franz into the cavern, but he did not appear to recognise him. It was evident he had his orders.

"M. Bertuccio," said the count, "have you procured me windows looking on the Place del Popolo, as I ordered you yesterday?"

"Yes, excellency," returned the steward, "but it was very late."

"Did I not tell you I wish for one?" replied the count, frowning.

"And your excellency has one, which was let to Prince Lobanieff, but I was obliged to pay a hundred——"

"That will do—that will do, Monsieur Bertuccio, spare these gentleman all such domestic arrangements. You have the window, that is sufficient. Give orders to the coachman, and be in readiness on the stairs to conduct us to it."

The steward bowed, and was about to quit the room.

"Ah!" continued the count, "be good enough to ask Pastrini if he has received the *tavoletta*, and if he can send us an account of the execution."

"There is no need to do that," said Franz, taking out his tablets, "for I saw the account, and copied it down."

"Very well, you can retire, Maître Bertuccio; let us know when breakfast is ready. These gentlemen," added he, turning to the two friends, "will, I trust, do me the honour to breakfast?"

"But, M. le Comte," said Albert, "we shall abuse your kindness."

"Not at all; on the contrary, you will give me great pleasure. You will, one or other of you, perhaps both, return it to me at Paris. Maître Bertuccio, lay covers for three."

He took Franz's tablets out of his hand.

" 'We announce,' he read, in the same tone with which he would have read a newspaper, 'that to-day, the 23rd of February, will be executed Andrea Rondolo, guilty of murder on the person of the respectable and venerated Don César Torlini, canon of the Church Saint-Jean-de-Latran, and Peppino, called Rocca Priori, convicted of complicity with the detestable bandit Luigi Vampa and the men of his troop.' Hum! 'The first will be *mazzolato*, the second *decapitato*.' Yes," continued the count, "it was at first arranged in this way, but I think since yesterday some change has taken place in the order of the ceremony."

"Really!" said Franz.

"Yes, I passed the evening at the Cardinal Rospigliosi's, and there mention was made of something like a pardon for one of the two men."

"For Andrea Rondolo?" asked Franz.

"No," replied the count carelessly, "for the other" (he glanced at the tablets as if to recall the name), "for Peppino, called Rocca Priori. You are thus deprived of seeing a man guillotined, but the *mazzolato* still remains, which is a very curious punishment when seen for the

first time, and even the second, whilst the other, as you must know, is very simple. The *mandaïa* never fails, never trembles, never strikes thirty times ineffectually, like the soldier who beheaded the Comte de Chalais,* and to whose tender mercy Richelieu had doubtless recommended the sufferer. Ah!" added the count, in a contemptuous tone, "do not tell me of European punishments, they are in the infancy, or rather the old age, of cruelty."

"Really, M. le Comte," replied Franz, "one would think that you had studied the different tortures of all the nations of the world."

"There are, at least, few that I have not seen," said the count coldly.

"And you took pleasure in beholding these dreadful spectacles?"

"My first sentiment was horror, the second indifference, the third curiosity."

"Curiosity! that is a terrible word."

"Why so? In life, our greatest preoccupation is death; is it not, then, curious to study the different ways by which the soul and body can part, and how, according to their different characters, temperaments, and even the different customs of their countries, individuals bear the transition from life to death, from existence to annihilation? As for myself, I can assure you of one thing, the more men you see die, the easier it becomes to die; and in my opinion, death may be a torture, but it is not an expiation."

"I do not quite understand you." replied Franz; "pray

explain your meaning, for you excite my curiosity to the highest pitch."

"Listen," said the count, and deep hatred mounted to his face, as the blood would to the face of any other. "If a man had by unheard-of and excruciating tortures destroyed your father, your mother, your mistress, in a word, one of those beings, who when they are torn from you leave a desolation, a wound that never closes, in your breast, do you think the reparation that society gives you sufficient by causing the knife of the guillotine to pass between the base of the occiput and the trapezal muscles of the murderer—because he who has caused us years of moral sufferings undergoes a few moments of physical pain?"

"Yes, I know," said Franz, "that human justice is insufficient to console us. She can give blood in return for blood, that is all; but you must demand from her only what it is in her power to grant."

"I will put another case to you," continued the count; "that where society, attacked by the death of a person, avenges death by death. But are there not a thousand tortures by which a man may be made to suffer without society taking the least cognisance of them, or offering him even the insufficient means of vengeance of which we have just spoken? Are there not crimes for which the empalement of the Turks, the augers of the Persians, the stake and the brand of the Iroquois Indians, are inadequate tortures, and which are unpunished by society? Answer me, do not these crimes exist?"

"Yes," answered Franz, "and it is to punish them that duelling is tolerated."

"Ah, duelling!" cried the count; "a pleasant manner, upon my soul, of arriving at your end when that end is vengeance! A man has carried off your mistress, a man has seduced your wife, a man has dishonoured your daughter; he has rendered the whole life of one who had the right to expect from Heaven that portion of happiness God has promised to every one of his creatures, an existence of misery and infamy; and you think you are avenged because you send a ball through the head, or pass a sword through the breast, of that man who has planted madness in your brain, and despair in your heart. Without recollecting that it is often he who comes off victorious from the strife, absolved of all crime in the eyes of the world! No, no," continued the count, "had I to avenge myself, it is not thus I would take revenge."

"Then you disapprove of duelling! you would not fight a duel?" asked Albert in his turn, astonished at this strange theory.

"Oh, yes," replied the count; "understand me, I would fight a duel for a trifle, for an insult, for a blow, and the more so, that, thanks to my skill in all bodily exercises, and the indifference to danger I have gradually acquired, I should be almost certain to kill my man. Oh! I would fight for such a cause, but in return for a slow, profound, eternal torture, I would give back the same were it possible: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, as the Orientalists say; —our masters in everything; those favoured creatures who have formed for themselves a life of dreams and a paradise of realities."

"But," said Franz to the count, "with this theory, which renders you at once judge and executioner of your own cause, it would be difficult to adopt a course that would

for ever prevent your falling under the power of the law. Hatred is blind; rage carries you away; and he who pours out vengeance runs the risk of tasting a bitter draught."

"Yes, if he be poor and inexperienced, not if he be rich and skilful. Besides, the worst that could happen to him would be the punishment of which we have already spoken, and which the philanthropic French Revolution has substituted for being torn to pieces by horses or broken on the wheel.* What matters this punishment as long as he is avenged? On my word, I almost regret that in all probability this miserable Peppino will not be *decapitato*, as you might have had an opportunity then of seeing how short a time the punishment lasts, and whether it is worth even mentioning. But, really, this is a most singular conversation for the Carnival, gentlemen; how did it arise? Ah! I recollect, you asked for a place at my window; you shall have it; but let us first sit down to table, for here comes the servant to inform us breakfast is ready."

As he spoke, a servant opened one of the four doors of the salon, saying:

"Al suo commodo!"

The two young men rose and entered the breakfast-room.

During the meal, which was excellent and admirably served, Franz looked repeatedly at Albert in order to remark the impression which he doubted not had been made on him by the words of their entertainer, but whether with his usual carelessness he had paid but little attention to him, whether the explanation of the Count of Monte Cristo with regard to duelling had satisfied him,

or whether the events which Franz knew of had a double effect on him alone, he remarked that his companion did not pay the least regard to them, but on the contrary ate like a man who for the last four or five months had been condemned to partake of Italian cookery — that is, the worst in the world. As for the count, he just touched the dishes; he seemed as if he fulfilled the duties of an entertainer by sitting down with his guests, and awaited their departure to be served with some strange or more delicate food. This brought back to Franz, in spite of himself, the recollection of the terror with which the count had inspired the Countess G——, and her firm conviction that the man in the opposite box was a vampire.

At the end of the breakfast Franz took out his watch.

"Well," said the count, "what are you doing?"

"You must excuse us, M. le Comte," returned Franz, "but we have still much to do."

"What may that be?"

"We have no disguises, and it is absolutely necessary to procure them."

"Do not concern yourself about that; we have, I think, a private room in the Place del Popolo; I will have whatever costumes you choose brought to us, and you can dress there."

"After the execution?" cried Franz.

"Before or after, which you please."

"Opposite the scaffold?"

"The scaffold forms part of the fête."

"M. le Comte, I have reflected on the matter," said Franz. "I thank you for your courtesy, but I shall content myself with accepting a place in your carriage and at your window at the Rospoli Palace, and I leave you at liberty to dispose of my place at the Place del Popolo."

"But I warn you, you will lose a very curious sight," returned the count.

"You will relate it to me," replied Franz, "and the recital from your lips will make as great an impression on me as if I had witnessed it. I have more than once intended witnessing an execution, but I have never been able to make up my mind; and you, Albert?"

"I," replied the viscount—"I saw Castaing* executed, but I think I was rather intoxicated that day, for I had quitted college the same morning, and we had passed the previous night at a tavern."

"Besides, it is no reason because you have not seen an execution at Paris, that you should not see one anywhere else; when you travel, it is to see everything. Think what a figure you will make when you are asked, 'How do they execute at Rome?' and you reply, 'I do not know!' And, besides, they say that the culprit is an infamous scoundrel, who killed with a log of wood a worthy canon who had brought him up like his own son. *Diable!* when a churchman is killed, it should be with a different weapon than a log, especially when he has behaved like a father. If you went to Spain, would you not see the bull-fights? Well, suppose it is a bull-fight you are going to see? Recollect the ancient Romans of the Circus, and the sports where

they killed three hundred lions and a hundred men. Think of the eighty thousand applauding spectators, the sage matrons who took their daughters, and the charming Vestals who made with the thumb of their white hands the fatal sign that said, 'Come, despatch this man already nearly dead.' "

"Shall you go, then, Albert?" asked Franz.

"*Ma foi!* yes; like you I hesitated, but the count's eloquence decides me!"

"Let us go, then," said Franz, "since you wish it, but on our way to the Place del Popolo I wish to pass through the Rue de Cours. Is this possible, M. le Comte?"

"On foot, yes; in a carriage, no."

"I will go on foot, then."

"Is it important that you should pass through this street?"

"Yes, there is something I wish to see."

"Well, we will pass by the Rue de Cours. We will send the carriage to wait for us on the Piazza del Popolo, by the Strada del Babuino, for I shall be glad to pass, myself, through the Rue de Cours, to see if some orders I have given have been executed."

"Excellency," said a servant, opening the door, "a man in the dress of a penitent wishes to speak to you."

"Ah, yes!" returned the count, "I know who he is, gentlemen; will you return to the salon? you will find on the centre table some excellent Havana cigars. I will be with you directly."

The young men rose and returned into the salon, whilst the count, again apologising, left by another door. Albert, who was a great smoker, and who had considered it no small sacrifice to be deprived of the cigars of the Café de Paris, approached the table, and uttered a cry of joy at perceiving some veritable *pueros.*

"Well," saked Franz, "what think you of the Count of Monte Cristo?"

"What do I think?" said Albert, evidently surprised at such a question from his companion; "I think that he is a delightful fellow, who does the honours of his table admirably; who has travelled much, read much, is, like Brutus, of the Stoic school, and moreover," added he, sending a volume of smoke up towards the ceiling, "that he has excellent cigars."

Such was Albert's opinion of the count, and as Franz well knew that Albert professed never to form an opinion except upon long reflection, he made no attempt to change it.

"But," said he, "did you remark one very singular thing?"

"What?"

"How attentively he looked at you."

"At me?"

"Yes."

Albert reflected.

"Ah!" replied he, sighing, "that is not very surprising; I have been more than a year absent from Paris, and my

clothes are of a most antiquated cut; the count takes me for a provincial. The first opportunity you have, undeceive him, I beg, and tell him I am nothing of the kind."

Franz smiled: an instant after, the count entered.

"I am now quite at your service, gentlemen," said he. "The carriage is going one way to the Place del Popolo, and we will go another; and if you please, by the Rue du Cours. Take some more of these cigars, M. de Morcerf."

"With all my heart," returned Albert; "these Italian cigars are horrible. When you come to Paris, I will return all this."

"I will not refuse. I intend going there soon, and since you allow me, I will pay you a visit. Come! let us set off!"

All three descended: the coachman received his master's orders and drove down the Via del Babuino. Whilst the three gentlemen walked towards the Place d'Espagne and the Via Frattina, which led directly between the Fiano and Rospoli Palaces, all Franz's attention was directed towards the windows of that last palace, for he had not forgotten the signal agreed upon between the man in the mantle and the Transtevere peasant.

"Which are your windows?" asked he of the count, with as much indifference as he could assume.

"The three last," returned he, with a negligence evidently unaffected; for he could not imagine with what intention the question was put.

Franz glanced rapidly towards the three windows. The side windows were hung with yellow damask, and the centre one with white damask and a red cross. The man

in the mantle had kept his promise to the Transtevere, and there could now be no doubt that he was the Count. The three windows were still untenanted. Preparations were making on every side; chairs were placed, scaffolds were raised, and windows were hung with flags. The masks could not appear; the carriages could not move about; but the masks were visible behind the windows, the carriages, and the doors.

Franz, Albert, and the count continued to descend the Rue du Cours. As they approached the Place del Popolo, the crowd became more dense, and above the heads of the multitude two objects were visible; the obelisk surmounted by a cross, which marks the centre of the place, and before the obelisk, at the point where the three streets, del Babuino, del Corso, and di Ripetta meet, the two uprights of the scaffold, between which glittered the curved knife of the *mandaïa*. At the corner of the street they met the count's steward, who was awaiting his master.

The window, let at an exorbitant price which the count had doubtless wished to conceal from his guests, was on the second floor of the great palace situated between the Rue del Babuino and the Monte-Pincio. It consisted, as we have said, of a small dressing-room opening into a bedroom, and when the door of communication was shut, the inmates were quite alone. On two chairs were laid as many elegant costumes of *paillasse*, in blue and white satin.

"As you left the choice of your costumes to me," said the count to the two friends, "I have had these brought, as they will be the most worn this year; and they are most suitable on account of the *confetti* (sweetmeats), as they