



## Alexandre Dumas's Novels in Brazil

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Alexandre Dumas, popular novelist in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is still quite fascinating for current readers and spectators. His novels are part of different publishers' catalogues, both in original and adapted editions, so as to suit the interests of dilettanti or school readers. The languages also vary, with versions to graphic novels and, above all, cinematographic versions. However, the writer's prestige among his audience was never quite the same as among critics and historiographers of his or more current times.

Literary history books, teaching manuals and anthologies have practically ignored Alexandre Dumas, who is only mentioned in brief references to his drama *Antony*. One of the main factors that caused his work to be depreciated or despised by critics concerns precisely the success achieved in his time and the quantity of novels written to satiate the appetite of his audience. [Eugène de Mirecourt](#), in one of the most incisive critiques against the author, says that his work was nothing but a “boutique universelle de pièces, de romans et de feuilletons, laquelle à l'avenir sera connue, nous l'espérons bien, sous la raison commerciale *Dumas et compagnie*” (“universal boutique of plays, novels and feuilletons, which shall be later known, so we expect, under the business name *Dumas and company*”). [Émile Faguet](#), when writing *Dix-neuvième siècle: études littéraires*, so justified his choice of the ten most significant writers of the period: “Ce ne sont que dix études sur les écrivains de cette période qui ont paru à l'auteur les plus dignes d'un examen attentif” (“These are only ten studies on the writers of that period who, for the author, seemed the most deserving of a closer examination”). Dumas was not considered as worthy to feature in such study. If pundits and historiographers rejected the work of Dumas, what then has ensured his staying in the public's good grace?

Franco Moretti, when studying the circulation European novels, offered an answer proposing that the activities that define and create canons are not always responsible for preserving a piece of work for posterity (MORETTI, 2003). The reading audience, which quite often is not in tune with what the critics prescribe, is also responsible for the permanence of a writer in posterity. Dumas' novels are examples of this latter type of



promotion: if nowadays they still arouse the interest of the current public and impact the bookselling and movie markets, it is not due to critics' efforts to appraise his name and work.

In Brazil, Dumas' novels were introduced through a popular medium in a translated version. *Le Capitaine Paul*, which helped establish *feuilletons* in France by being published in the footer of [Le Siècle](#) newspaper from May 30 to June 23, 1838, was the first novel to be printed in Brazilian newspapers. From October 31 to November 27 of the same year, the pages of [Jornal do Comércio](#) circulated the book. The small lag between the novel's publication in France and in Brazil shows that the Brazilian press was well aware of French production, offering their readers the novels that stirred the attention of the French readership.

From then on, Dumas' novels were repeatedly published by newspapers from the Court and the rest of the country. [Ilana Heineberg](#), when studying *feuilletons* in the most important Rio de Janeiro newspapers – *Jornal do Comércio*, *Diário do Rio de Janeiro* and *Correio Mercantil* – found a total of 35 novels by Dumas published between the years of 1839-1870, twice the number of the second most published writer, Ponson du Terrail, who had 17 novels published by the press from Rio during the same period. Such difference is an indicator of the popularity and the interest that Dumas' novels aroused in the Rio de Janeiro audience. Among these novels, we find the great success *The Count Of Monte Cristo*, published by [Jornal do Comércio](#) in three sequences (between June 15, 1845 and April 27, 1846): there were two interruptions to await the originals from France, where it was published by [Journal des Débats](#) in two series, between August 28 and November 26, 1844, and from June 20, 1845 to January 15, 1846.

In other Brazilian states, Dumas' work also had a wide circulation because both the press and the book market realized how successful his novels were, striving to partake in the success. Research reveals the presence of the novels by Dumas in periodicals and bookselling markets of Ceará, Rio Grande do Sul, São Paulo, and Pará, which allows us to conclude that his work was spread through the country in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (DEAECTO, 2011; SANTOS, 2010; SILVA, 2009).

The popularity of the novels by Dumas among the Brazilian readership is also verified in ads made by booksellers and publishers operating in Rio de Janeiro. The ads on *Jornal do Comércio* and *Diário do Rio de Janeiro* reveal a wide presence of Dumas' novels in the



Court, both in original or translated versions. Between the decades of 1840 and 1860, Dumas is the most advertised writer by booksellers in Rio de Janeiro. These ads point to the prestige and the variety of his work. Such prominence may be verified through the way his novels are presented, often at the top of the [advertised books](#), or through the use of [eye-catching letters](#) for his name, or even through the presence of complimentary remarks, such as the one printed on *Jornal do Comércio* on [October 15, 1858](#): “Le nom de l’auteur dispense tous ces ouvrages de tous les commentaires possibles, chacun sait l’attrait que l’on éprouve à lire les romans d’Alexandre Dumas, romans toujours intéressants” (“The name of the author waives all these works from any possible comments, everyone knows how interesting it is to read the novels by Alexandre Dumas”). Among the most advertised novels translated to Portuguese are *The Three Musketeers* and its sequels *Twenty Years After* and *The Vicomte de Bragalonne*; *The Count of Monte Cristo* ([1° vol.](#), [2° vol.](#)); *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge*; *Gabriel Lambert*; *Pascal Bruno*; *Dieu Dispose*; *Le Capitaine Paul*; *Maître Adam le Calabrais*. The permanence of these and other titles by the author through decades points to the Brazilian audience’s constant interest in these novels.

Dumas’ novels in Brazil witness a period in which there was an intense dissemination of the genre and an amplification of the country’s readership. French, English and Portuguese novels and the increasing domestic production provided readers with a wide variety of the genre. Still, for a few decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dumas remained among the most sought-after writers, crossing over different generations, and, even today, continues arousing the imagination of the public.

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