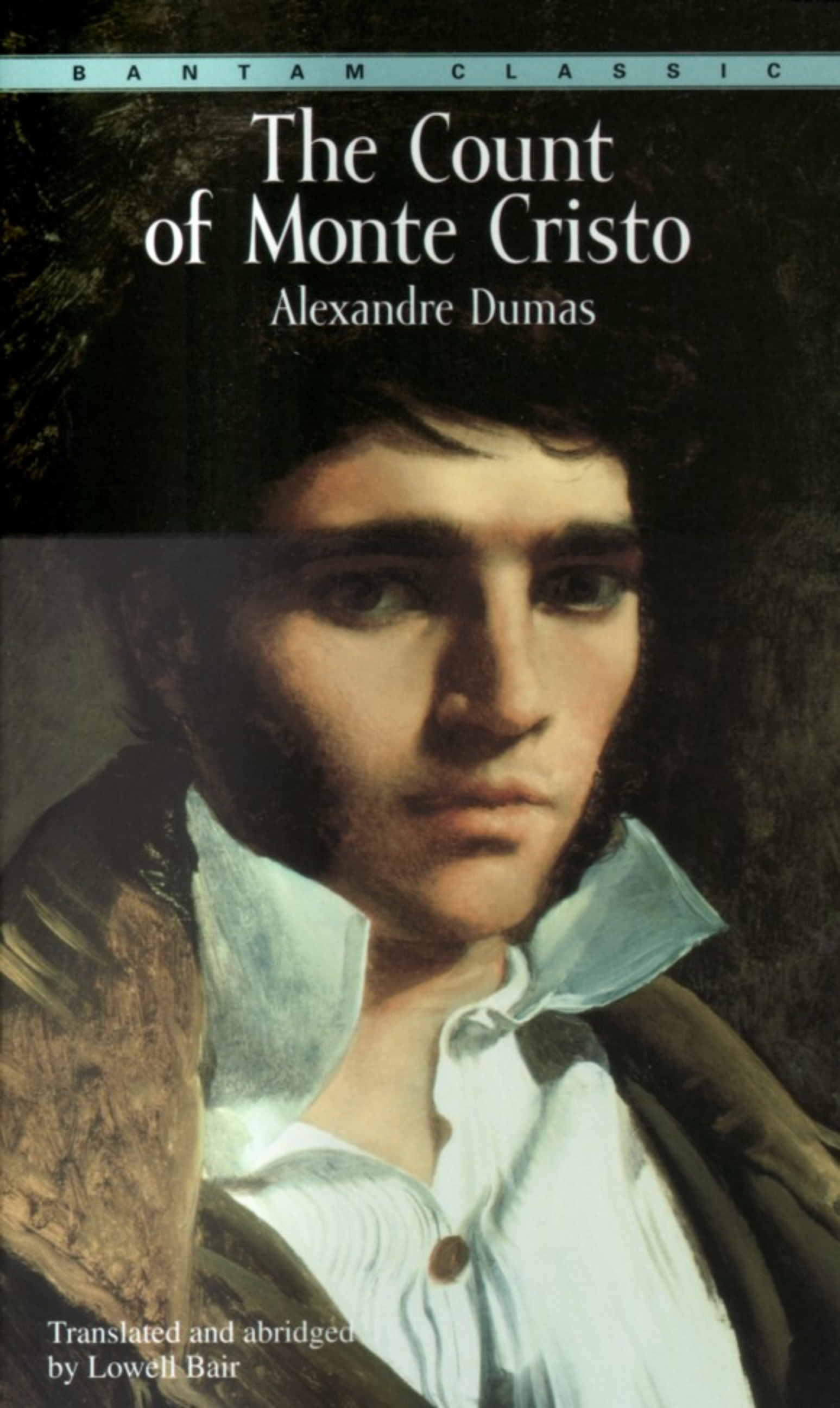


B A N T A M C L A S S I C

# The Count of Monte Cristo

Alexandre Dumas



Translated and abridged  
by Lowell Bair

## CHAPTER I

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ON FEBRUARY 24, 1815, the watchtower at Marseilles signaled the arrival of the three-master *Pharaon*, coming from Smyrna, Trieste and Naples.

The quay was soon covered with the usual crowd of curious onlookers, for the arrival of a ship is always a great event in Marseilles, especially when, like the *Pharaon*, it has been built, rigged and laden in the city and belongs to a local shipowner.

Meanwhile the vessel was approaching the harbor under topsails, jib and foresail, but so slowly and with such an air of melancholy that the onlookers, instinctively sensing misfortune, began to wonder what accident could have happened on board. However, the experienced seamen among them saw that if there had been an accident, it could not have happened to the ship herself, for she had every appearance of being under perfect control. Standing beside the pilot, who was preparing to steer the *Pharaon* through the narrow entrance of the harbor, was a young man who, with vigilant eyes and rapid gestures, watched every movement of the ship and repeated each of the pilot's orders.

The vague anxiety hovering over the crowd affected one man so much that he could not wait until the ship entered the harbor: he leaped into a small boat and ordered the boatman to row him out to meet the *Pharaon*.

When he saw this man coming toward him, the young sailor left his post beside the pilot and walked over to the side of the ship, holding his hat in his hand. He was a tall, slender young man, no more than twenty years old, with dark eyes and hair as black as ebony. His whole manner gave evidence of that calmness and resolution peculiar to those who have been accustomed to facing danger ever since their childhood.

"Ah, it's you, Dantès!" cried the man in the boat. "What's happened? Why does everything look so gloomy on board?"

"A great misfortune, Monsieur Morrel!" replied the young man. "We lost our brave Captain Leclère off Civitavecchia."

"What about the cargo?" asked the shipowner eagerly.

"It arrived safely, Monsieur Morrel, and I think you'll be satisfied on that score, but poor Captain Leclère——"

"What happened to him?" asked the shipowner, visibly relieved.

"He died of brain fever, in horrible agony. He's now at rest off the Isle of II Giglio, sewed up in his hammock with one cannon ball at his head and another at his feet." The young man smiled sadly and added, "How ironic—he waged war against the English for ten long years and then died in his bed like anyone else."

"Well, we're all mortal," said the shipowner, "and the old must make way for the young, otherwise there would be no promotion."

As they were passing the Round Tower, the young sailor called out, "Make ready to lower topsails, foresail and jib!" The order was executed as smartly as on board a man-of-war. "Lower away and brail all!" At this last order all the sails were lowered and the ship's speed became almost imperceptible.

"And now, if you'd like to come aboard, Monsieur Morrel," said Dantès, seeing the shipowner's impatience, "you can talk to your purser, Monsieur Danglars, who's just coming out of his cabin. He can give you all the information you want. As for myself, I must look after the anchoring and dress the ship in mourning."

The shipowner did not wait to be invited twice. He grasped the line which Dantès threw to him and, with an agility that would have done credit to a sailor, climbed up the ladder attached to the ship's side. Dantès returned to his duties, while Danglars came out to meet Monsieur Morrel. The purser was a man of twenty-five or twenty-six with a rather melancholy face, obsequious to his superiors and arrogant to his subordinates. He was as much disliked by the crew as Edmond Dantès was liked by them.

"Well, Monsieur Morrel," said Danglars, "I suppose you've heard about our misfortune."

"Yes, I have. Poor Captain Leclère! He was a brave and honorable man."

"And an excellent seaman, too, grown old between the sky and the water, as a man should be when he's entrusted with the interests of such an important firm as Morrel and Son."

"But," said the shipowner, watching Dantès preparing to drop anchor, "it seems to me a man doesn't have to be old to do his work well, Danglars. Our friend Edmond there doesn't look as though he needs advice from anyone."

"Yes," said Danglars, casting Dantès a glance full of hatred, "he's young and he has no doubts about anything. As soon as the captain was dead he took command without consulting anyone, and he made us lose a day and a half at the Isle of Elba instead of coming straight back to Marseilles."

"As for taking command," said the shipowner, "it was his duty as first mate, but he was wrong to waste a day and a half at the Isle of Elba, unless the ship needed some sort of repairs."

"The ship was as sound as I am and as I hope you are, Monsieur Morrel. Wasting that day and a half was nothing but a whim of his; he just wanted to go ashore for a while, that's all."

"Dantès," said Morrel, turning toward the young man, "come here, please."

"Excuse me, sir, I'll be with you in a moment," said Dantès. Then, turning to the crew, he called out, "Let go!" The anchor dropped immediately and the chain rattled noisily. Dantès walked over to Morrel.

"I wanted to ask you why you stopped at the Isle of Elba."

"It was to carry out an order from Captain Leclère. As he was dying he gave me a package to deliver to Marshal Bertrand there."

"Did you see him, Edmond?"

"Yes."

Morrel looked around and drew Dantès off to one side. "How is the emperor?" he asked eagerly.

"He's well, as far as I could tell. He came into the marshal's room while I was there."

"Did you talk to him?"

"No, he talked to me," said Dantès, smiling.

"What did he say?"

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