

Les trois mousquetaires I

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Of course I read 'The three musketeers' when I was a child. In a Swedish translation of course, and at the age of ten or so I guess. Maybe I even reread it a few years later, if so at the age of 15 I guess. But that is speculation. I do remember that I found the book very exciting, and the names of Athos, Aramis and Porthos and their personalities became deeply engrave din memory (unlike those of their servants). But what did i really remember of it, except that I found it profoundly enjoyable. When it comes to specifics there are only a few fragments which linger in my memory. That d'Artagnan came from Gascony, and that it was important. That the musketeers got up at six o'clock in the summer at at eight in the winter (it is actually repeated once in the original text), and why should this stick in my memory? Maybe because it indicated a that every day was an adventure, as opposed to attending school? Also their signal of friendship 'One for all, and all for one' which I now encounter for the first time in the French original (Tous pour un, un pour tous). I also recall the king Louis XIII and the Cardinal Richelieu, and that much action seems to take place around 'Jardin de Luxembourg' which made this place somehow 'sacred' to me during my visits to Paris. But of the actual plot, nothing at all! Reading the book now I wonder what could have excited a young boy? The intimations of love and sex? Hardly. The politics? Would I even have recognized it. The first part encompasses well over four hundred pages, the second about as much. This makes a total of about 900 pages. Did I read such a thick book? I doubt it. Instead the translator probably took a lot of liberties, especially if writing for a younger audience and made sure that it would not be tedious. Maybe when I read the second part, I will recognize some of the plot when I encounter it again, but at the moment I am unable to recall anything at all. But it goes to show plot is not important, there are other things which make you remember and cherish a book (even in detective novels, the plot fades after some time, but you may still remember the book).

In fact if I now look at the book, at least the first half, it strikes me that not very much does happen. The Cardinal is about to humiliate the queen (whom he suspects of having sympathies for Spain and the Habsburgs, which is not fr fetched given her provenance) by making her wear a necklace given to her by the king, but which she has given to her lover. This state of affairs becomes known to young d'Artignan through the young wife of his elderly landlord, a woman he has fallen in love with and who serves as a chamber lady to the queen. He decides to go to England to retrieve the necklace, and to his aid he enlists his new found friends, the eponymous three soldiers, along with their valets. Why should they all go together, I do not understand, but they do. And they fall off the wayside, one after the other, at different hotels along the way (that being the result of the Cardinal's men trying to obstruct the mission). At the end only d'Artagnan is left. He

is barred from crossing the channel and needs a paper. He kills¹ a gentleman who has it and thus gets passage. He find his way to the lover of the queen who takes him in and is very accommodating. Then he hurries back with the necklace just in time. The cardinal is furious. As a reward he is given a rendez-vous with the young chamber lady (could this been the first time I encountered the word 'rendez-vous'?) but when he goes to the assigned place at the assigned time, she is not be seen, and he learns that she has been kid-napped. Love sick he retraces his route with his comrades in order to present them each with a splendid horse which have been given to them. He finds them one by one in different states of crises- Porthos has problem with money, Aramis is about to rejoin the church and is caught 'en flagrante' in a scholastic discussion, as it turns out in desperation after an unlucky love affair, but once he realizes that hope need not to be abandoned, he abandons, at least temporarily his theological ambitions, and finally Athos has barricaded himself along with his valet in a cellar where he proceeds to drink all the wine and eat all the food, to the consternation of the landlord. Athos joins d'Artagnae after having lost the two horses gambling with two English gentlemen, they pick up Aramis and then Porthos and return to Paris, where a new adventure awaits them, to be narrated in the next part. Not very intricate.

Yet the charm of the novel is in the way it is depicted in a picaresque way no doubt borrowing heavily from Don Quixote and similar novels, stringing episodes on episodes, interspersed with recollections. One of those being the woman of Athos and the unhappy marriage, which the latter reveals during inebriation and in the familiar guise of it having happened not to him, but to a friend. A young woman of sixteen living with her brother, a curator. Instead of raping the poor girl, the imagined friend (Athos?) is honorable enough to marry her instead. During a hunting expedition she has a riding accident and loses her consciousness, In order to relieve her breathing he loosen some clothing and discovers that this angel has a 'fleur de lys' imprinted on her, and hence have been a thief and been imprisoned. He takes revenge on her and kills² her overcome with his dishonor. He brother, appearing as a curate, was no doubt just a lover, both scheming. So this is the source of the melancholy nature of the musketeers, the oldest and the most enigmatic of the three. Is this edifying reading for a young boy? Maybe it was excised, or much more likely, it made no mark on an innocent mind.

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¹ Doe she really, or only seriously wounds? My French is a bit shaky, anyway his intention is to get hild of the permit, take what it takes.

² This is not entirely clear either, for the same reasons as above. But the brandishing with the *Fleur de lys* must be something that rings a bell, will not that mark be found on Milady as well? Maybe we are talking aboutt the same person, as it will later be revealed.