To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Kevin Anthony Finn entitled "The Laughing Musketeer: an application of the principles and theories of comedy and laughter in Henri Bergson's Le Rire: essai sur la signification du comique to Alexandre Dumas' Les trois mousquetaires." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in French.

Patrick Brady

Patrick Brady, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Karen Levy

Paul Barrette

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor and Dean
of the Graduate School

THE LAUGHING MUSKETEER: AN APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLES AND THEORIES OF COMEDY AND LAUGHTER IN HENRI BERGSON'S LE RIRE: ESSAI SUR LA SIGNIFICATION DU COMIQUE TO ALEXANDRE DUMAS' LES TROIS MOUSQUETAIRES

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Kevin Finn
May 1999

DEDICATION

To my mother, Lila Marie Finn, and my father, Martin Patrick Finn.

ACKNOWLDEGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the encouragement and guidance shown to me by my advisor, Dr. Patrick Brady, as well as the counsel and assistance of the other members of my committee, Dr. Karen Levy, and Dr. Paul Barrette. The advice, assistance, and support given so generously by all members of my committee were invaluable in researching and writing this thesis.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Alexandre Dumas' use of comedy and humor in Les trois mousquetaires. Henri Bergson's theory of comedy and laughter, as outlined in Le Rire: essai sur la signification du comique, serves as a framework through which to analyze the novel. The thesis consists of three main sections corresponding to the main areas of Bergson's analysis: The Comic in Character, The Comic in Situations, and the Comic in Words and Language. It is argued that *le comique bergsonien* has particular relevance to comic characters in the novel, especially that of Porthos, the only ideally comic character in Les trois mousquetaires. Due to the genre of the novel in question, i.e. that of a historical novel, as well as the fact that the majority of references are made to comedy in the theatre, many of the observations and tenets found in Le Rire are either inapplicable or redundant. However, overall, Bergson's concept of comedy and laughter in these areas casts considerable light on the use of *le comique* in the novel, especially in the area of human behavior and societal influences, through the ideas of rigidity, mechanization, and absentmindedness. This thesis exposes the wealth of comedy and humor in Les trois mousquetaires, as well as uncovering certain weaknesses in Bergson's theories.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	I. Review of Previous Research and Criticism	1
	II. Background to the Novel	6
	IIi. Alexandre Dumas' prolific output	6
	IIii. Origins of the novel	7
	IIiii. The novel's popularity in the 19th Century	9
	IIiv. The novel's popularity in the 20th Century	10
	III. "Le Comique Bergsonien" as Defined in Le Rire	11
	IIIi. Comedy is limited to what is human	11
	IIIii. Laughter is incompatible with emotion	12
	IIIiii. Laughter requires a social significance and group reinforcement	13
	IIIiv. Rigidity and elasticity	14
	IIIv. Mechanization, automatism, and absentmindedness	15
	IIIvi. The rigidity of society	17
II.	THE COMIC IN CHARACTER	19
	I. Overview of Character in the Novel	19
	II. "Uncomic" Characters: Richelieu and Milady	20
	IIi. Richelieu	20
	IIii. Milady	23
	III. Semi-Comic Characters	25
	IV. Criteria Necessary for Creating a Comic Character	28
	IVi. Bonacieux	28
	V. Vices and Virtues	32
	Vi. Antitheses: D'Artagnan vs Bonacieux	32
	VI. The Ideally Comic Character	35
	VIi. Porthos	36
	VII. Professional Rigidity	45
	VIIi. Doctors	46
	VIIii. Innkeepers	47
	VIIiii. Ecclesiastics	49
	VIIiv. D'Artagnan and Grimaud	51
	VIII. Disguise	52
III.	THE COMIC IN SITUATIONS	54
	I. Repetition	56
	II. Coincidences and Great Expectations	58
	III. Repetition, Inversion, and Reciprocal Interference of Series	59
	IV. Comic Situations	61
	IVi. Duels with the musketeers	61
	IVii. The search for the musketeers	65
	IViii. The Bastion of Saint-Gervais	67
	IViv. Porthos' meal	69
IV.	THE COMIC IN WORDS	72
	I. The Comic Created by Language and the Comic Expressed by Language	73
	Ii. Inversion	74
	II. Le Comique et le Spirituel	75
	III. Vignettes and Satire	76
	IV. Comic Description	80

V. The Absurd 82
VI. Irony 83
VII. Victims of Wit 85
VIIi. Nationalities 87
V. CONCLUSION 91

BIBLIOGRAPHY 95

VITA 101

Chapter I: Introduction

I. Review of Previous Research and Criticism

Despite having produced over 230 works in his career, including 87 novels and 61 dramatizations, Alexandre Dumas père has long been largely overlooked by the French literary establishment, his work considered undeserving of serious literary criticism. It could be argued that this is due in no small part to the popularity of his writings, in the Nineteenth Century as well as today, where often works popular with the public are considered to be lacking in literary merit.[1] It may also be due to a lack of interest in swashbuckling novels amongst today's readers, and the fact that this genre of novel is seen as outdated by contemporary critics (Beigbeder, 197).

Barbara T. Cooper notes that Dumas' work seems to be enjoying somewhat of a renaissance of late, and that interest in his work, especially literary criticism of his novels, is growing. She mentions, in particular, these recent publications: Cent cinquante ans après (1995), and Œuvres et critiques : La réception critique de Dumas père (1996), both published by the Société des Amis d'Alexandre Dumas, and Le Grand livre de Dumas (1997).

However, literary criticism of Dumas père is infinitesimal when compared to the sheer volume of his output, and despite the recent growth in interest in his work it would seem that the general feeling of snobbery and apathy towards Dumas's work still seems to prevail: "The most prolific and successful (when measured by nineteenth

[1] "We are at no pains to conceal the contempt which we feel for Dumas, in spite of an undeniable cleverness and adroitness displayed in his works [....] He is not an artist, and cannot be criticised as such.

century audience response) of the French Romantic dramatists, his work continues to be ignored and dismissed as puerile and passé by critics and theater directors alike" (Cooper, 134).

Perhaps Dumas's most famous work, if one counts the number of cinema and television adaptations it has inspired, is Les trois mousquetaires: "No other work of his is better known and certainly none has surpassed its consistent and widespread popularity" (Stowe, 66). Critical analysis of this work has, for the most part, centered around the following areas: theatrical aspects and adaptation of the novel (Christout, 1995; Bassan, 1985; Yon, 1995, Autrand, 1995, Bassan & Chevally, 1972); the character and the heroic qualities of the protagonists, in particular d'Artagnan (Bonnet, 1978; Lombard, 1980; Picard, 1983; Callet-Bianco, 1995); the Three Musketeers trilogy, i.e., Les trois mousquetaires, Vingt ans après, Le Vicomte de Bragelonne (Tranouez, 1987; Bertière, 1990); symbolism and archetypes (Brady, 1993).

Arguably, one of the most interesting and enjoyable aspects of Dumas' work is his use of wit and comedy in his writings. It is surprising that this area remains relatively unexamined and unappreciated, especially given the fact that Dumas' was famous for his witticisms and razor-sharp sense of humor (Bell, 172-188). Comedy and humor have not been ignored in analysis of his works, but they remain relatively uncharted waters: Cooper, 1986, "*The Backward Glance of Parody: Author-Audience Complicity in a Comic Reduction of Dumas'* Henri III et sa cour", Cooper, 1996, "*Parodie et Pastiche: La Réception théâtrale d'*Anthony", Krakovitch, 1995,

---

He has no literary conscience; little literary merit." "Historical Romance - Alexandre Dumas", *The British Quarterly Review*, February 1848 (qtd. Harris & Abbey, 1986).

"*Alexandre Dumas et la censure théâtrale ou la comédie de* Qui perd gagne" Yet, overall, the attention given to the comic element in Dumas' novels is minimal.

It has not, however, been entirely ignored, one welcome exception being the recent article by Jacques Goimard entitled *"La Bande de farceurs : l'humour dans* Les Trois Mousquetaires"(1997) This insightful and enjoyable article is the only work of note on Dumas' use of comedy in this novel, but unfortunately the author limits his scope to that of *l'humour*, and then only in relation to chapters XXV to XXVIII inclusive. It would, of course, be ridiculous to expect a detailed study of the entire novel in just five pages, and his closing remark that "les effets humoristiques ne représentent chez Dumas qu'une petite partie des effets comiques [du roman]" underlines the richness of comedy and humor in the novel, as well as the possibilities for a more detailed study.

Moreover, Dumas' mastery of comedy has been appreciated in another medium: in the 1973 film *The Three Musketeers*, the director, Richard Lester, recognized the comic element of the novel by placing primary importance on humor, thus relegating to supporting roles the action and intrigue of the novel. Instead of forming the entire *raison d'être* of the movie, the plot seems to exist simply to provide situations for the comedy to blossom. Screenplay writer, George M. Frasier evidently identified the rich comic vein of the novel, and used many of Dumas' comic devices in the film: witty one-liners, the comic side of his character's personalities, comic situations of the novel, as a basis for his screenplay. Unfortunately, overall the humor of the screenplay bears scant similarity to that of the novel on which it is based. What we get instead is heavy-

handed slapstick lacking in any subtlety, pantomime humor especially in the fight scenes, cardboard characters of little comic depth, buffoonery, and sexual innuendo.

However, the mere fact that the humor of the film is not that of the novel does not, by any means, reduce its merits or its comic value; as comedy is a matter of personal taste, the comedy in this interpretation is no better or worse than that of the novel; simply, it is different. What is unsatisfactory is not that the film and the novel differ in their use of comedy, but that once again, the comic element of the original novel seems to have been overlooked. It would be naïve to expect the film to be a carbon copy of the text, and for the humor to transfer perfectly to the screen: that is simply not possible. Again, what is disappointing is that so little of the *le comique*, or humorous spirit, of the novel has been explored in the screenplay.

Even though this area of Dumas' writing remains relatively unappreciated in criticism of his writings, it is possible for studies and essays on comedy to make reference to his enormous opus of work. However, once again we find that Dumas has been disregarded in this area, with no reference to his novels or plays in any of the following works on comedy and comic theory: Emelina (1991), Defays (1992), Vesseid (1978), Bergson (1900), Seyler & Haggard (1946), Feibleman (1962), Charney (1978), Corrigan (1981). We might ask ourselves why the comic element of this novel has been overlooked for so long. Perhaps it is the genre of novel, possibly the fact that some find his work undeserving of literary criticism, or perhaps the nature of comedy and the humor in the novel is simply difficult to define, not resembling conventional definitions of wit, parody, irony, etc. There are, of course many famous essays on, and theories of, comedy, many of which could be used to define and analyze the comic element in Les

trois mousquetaires, for example Baudelaire (1855), Congreve, (1696), Aristotle (330 BCE), Meredith (1877), and so on. However, this writer has decided to examine the comic element in the novel, with reference to the criteria, observations, and definitions found in Henri Bergson's influential essay on comedy and laughter: Le Rire: essai sur la signification du comique.

Bergson's essay, first published in 1900 but borrowing largely from his 1884 lecture "Rire: de quoi rit-on? Pourquoi rit-on?", is in no way a complete, entirely definitive, and all-encompassing treatise on laughter and comedy, and no study could possibly be that. Bergson's essay was chosen for the following reasons: firstly, it is a seminal work on comedy, highly regarded for its theory of comedy and laughter: "Coming from the eminent Bergson, it has been a significant document in the writing of comic theory." (Felheim, 214). Secondly, Bergson could be considered a contemporary of Dumas, which makes his theory all the more applicable to this novel. Thirdly, his essay primarily draws from French literature and theater for its references, and as we know, humor is as culturally exclusive as it is diverse. Finally, Le Rire, apart from an providing an overall theory of comedy and laugher in terms of rigidity and automatism, etc., allows us to explore in depth the following aspects of comedy and laughter: inventing and defining the comic character, creating of comic situations, and differentiating between comedy and wit (which is essential in discussing Dumas's use of comedy in this novel).

The following section, a brief history of Les trois mousquetaires, provides a background to the novel, and will outline its origins and critical reception, as well as its popularity with the public. Before examining the comic element in the novel it is

perhaps best to provide a brief introduction to, or synopsis of, *le comique bergsonien*, which explains the fundamental rules and observations of Bergson's theory of comedy, and which should help to explain more clearly why these theories are pertinent to this study of Les trois mousquetaires.

II. Background to the Novel

IIi. Alexandre Dumas' prolific output

In the period between 1842 and 1844 Alexandre Dumas produced seven novels, two of which are regarded not only as his best, but also as his most well-known and most popular. If, as Maurice Baring says, Le comte de Monte-Cristo is "the most popular book in the world" (Bell, 163), then Les trois mousquetaires, with its many television and film adaptations, must surely come a very close second. It was believed to have been Dumas' favorite novel (Maurois, 195), and at the time of it's first serialization it was to be found in almost every home in France, and soon after found its way to every corner of the globe, even to China (Bell, 156).

Alexandre Dumas, père, was a prolific writer and, with the exception of Balzac, possibly the most prolific French writer of all time. His corpus of works consists of 87 novels, 61 plays or dramatizations of his novels, 6 biographies or autobiographies, 15 histories, 9 journals, 7 travel books, and 37 miscellaneous publications on subjects as diverse as cuisine, Belgian poetry, necrologies, and the French army (Bell, 387-393). In an attempt to detract from his work, certain critics cite the many collaborations which formed the basis for Dumas' novels, as well as the many works to which he simply

signed his name. Bell lists fifty or so works of doubtful authenticity accredited to Dumas, 26 plays in which he is believed to have collaborated, and 11 prefaces written by Dumas for the works of others (394-400).

Yet, the fact that Dumas collaborated with other writers was never a secret, neither was it something that he felt it necessary to apologize for. Perhaps his most famous "collaborator" was Auguste Maquet who worked with Dumas on Les trois mousquetaires. In the year following serialization of this novel an enemy of Dumas, one André Jacquot, published Fabrique de romans – Alexandre Dumas et compagnie, a scurrilous attack on Dumas' probity, which, without any validation whatsoever, claimed that it was Maquet who was responsible for the novel, and that Dumas merely assisted him. For this Jacquot was charged with libel and jailed for 15 days, but sadly for Dumas the calumny stuck, despite the absence of any truth to the accusation. In reality, Maquet's role was never much more than that of a researcher for Dumas, and he never claimed paternity of any of Dumas's works.

IIii. Origins of the novel

Dumas, a lover of historical novels, especially those of Scott, had been researching the era of Louis XIII when he happened upon the Mémoires de d'Artagnan by Gatien de Courlitz. Dumas' d'Artagnan, just like Rostand's Cyrano, has a historical predecessor. The actual d'Artagnan, son of Bertrand de Betz and Françoise de Montesquieu, was born in 1623, fought in the King's guards and was killed at the Battle of Maastricht in 1673 (Lombard, 65-75). To this genesis Dumas added tales borrowed from the memoires of the Duc de la Rochefoucauld, from Madame de Motteville, and

from the Comte de Brienne, which accounted for some of the most important plots and subplots of the novel. Dumas then wrote a rough draft of the adventures of d'Artagnan and the three musketeers and sent it to Maquet for his opinion. What Maquet envisioned was a novel of manners, no more, no less, and he subsequently sent a draft of his work to Dumas. Disagreeing with him on his interpretation of the novel, Dumas rewrote Maquet's draft, changing names, dates and places, breathing life into the characters and resuscitating the dialogue, leaving Maquet to "his own speciality, that of research and the setting of the historical milieu." (Bell, 153).

The story, set in the reign of Louis XIII, includes many historical figures such as Anne of Austria, Richelieu, and the Duke of Buckingham, but also other genuine characters whom we would be mistaken for believing were simply invented by the author: Porthos, Athos, Aramis, Milady, Constance Bonancieux, and even Felton. Add to this the fact that it is set against the background of actual historical events, such as the siege of La Rochelle, the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham, his closing of the channel ports, etc., and we appreciate Dumas' fidelity to the genre of the historical novel. In fact, Stowe claims that even the adventure of the Queen's studs can be documented (Stowe, 68). However, Dumas is, at times, guilty of certain historical inacuracies, for example the allocation of numbers to houses 150 years before Paris assigned them, and 19th Century street names used by Dumas instead of their 17th Century titles (Stowe, 72). Moreover, it is, unlikely that d'Artagnan would ever have enjoyed such proximity to the King and Queen. However, if this detracts from the verisimilitude of the novel, it certainly does not detract from its popularity.

Towards the end of 1843, Dumas set about arranging publication of the first volume of his adventures of d'Artagnan and the three musketeers, and sent the first completed volume to the editor of the journal *Siècle*, under the title Athos, Porthos et Aramis. The editor, fearing that readers would believe the title to be a history of the three Fates, proposed that it be changed to Les trois mousquetaires. Dumas agreed, believing that the absurdity of the title would help to sell the book (Bell, 154).

IIiii. The novel's popularity in 19th Century

The first installment was an enormous success among the general public and intellectuals alike. The anecdote claiming it to be the author's favorite work is included in almost every biography on Dumas, and his Flaubert-like penchant for rewriting entire sections of the book is indicative of his affection for this particular adventure. This novel and Le comte de Monte-Cristo made him the most famous writer in 1840s Europe, giving him even greater celebrity than Dickens or Hugo (Bell, 166). Seven other volumes followed the first and each was devoured by the musketeer-hungry French public. In order to satiate their thirst for adventures of the musketeers, Dumas published the sequel, Vingt ans Après in 1845, followed by the somewhat lackluster Le Vicomte de Bragelonne in 1848-50. This final installment of the trilogy is, at around 2000 pages, more voluminous than the first two combined. Because of its sheer size it is normally divided into three sections, the last and most famous being the legend of The Man in the Iron Mask, which is normally published separately.

Despite the considerable fortune earned from his writing, and also due to the year-long sabbatical he took from writing to pursue his interest in politics, Dumas soon

found himself in need of finance. In 1849 he returned to his d'Artagnan source for a dramatization produced for *La Comédie française* that he called *La Jeunesse de Mousquetaires*, which achieved modest financial success (Bassan & Chevalley, 156). Prior to this in 1846 he provided *La Comédie française* with two plays based on the musketeer adventures, called *Les Ferrets de la reine*, and *Milady*, neither of which was ever produced in French. Another play, *Les Mousquetaires*, which received its first performance in 1825, is based, not on Les trois mousquetaires, but on Vingt ans après (Schopp, 337).

IIiv. The novel's popularity in the 20th Century

If Monte-Cristo is Dumas most popular novel, then possibly Les trois mousquetaires is his most popular adventure. If we consider that, to date, the novel has inspired 32 feature films, 22 other diverse productions such as parodies, musicals, cartoons, etc., and also, that the other books of the trilogy have between them inspired 43 various interpretations, we can state that few other novels are as well-known or as popular as this one. (Dantzig, 216-232) (Not that Monte-Cristo is lacking in interpretations either, with 33 various productions to date.) Beigbeder suggests that were he alive today, Dumas would be a Spielberg-like figure, with Indiana Jones the incarnation of d'Artagnan (Beigbeder, 199). Others have stated that in terms of cinematic adventures, Dumas was well before his time (Bell, 160). In the following section we will consider Bergson's theory of comedy and laughter before applying it to the study of the comic element of Les trois mousquetaires.

III. "Le Comique Bergsonien" as Defined in Le Rire

This thesis on the comic element in Les trois mousquetaires will be divided into sections based on the following: the comic in character, the comic in situations, and wit as distinct from comedy, or, in other words, the comic in words. However, as there are fundamental tenets central to all these areas, it will be helpful to begin with an introduction of *le comique bergsonien*, i.e., Bergson's theory of laughter and comedy put forth in Le Rire: essai sur la signification du comique.

At the beginning of Le Rire Bergson makes certain observations or remarks which are essential to an understanding of his theory of laughter and comedy. Firstly, he states that comedy is limited to what is human; secondly, that emotion is incompatible with laughter; and thirdly, that laughter requires group reinforcement and has a social significance. Let us consider each of these in turn before delving any deeper into *le comique bergsonien.*

IIIi. Comedy is limited to what is human

"Il n'y a pas de comique en dehors de ce qui est proprement humain" (Bergson, 2). Bergson explains that we may find a landscape beautiful but we certainly do not find it comical. What makes us laugh at things and objects is that quality which reminds us of ourselves, of our human nature, simply put, that which acts as a mirror of our own behavior. Of course, we laugh at animals: the parrot that talks, and the dog dressed up in human clothing. But what we laugh at is that element of the animal's physical appearance or behavior which reminds us of ourselves. If we laugh at the chimpanzee

dressed as a doctor, it is not due to the animal's special gift for comedy, but rather because we find amusing the profession of medicine mirrored in appearance of the chimp. Similarly, if we find the image of an ass refusing to move from the railroad tracks to be risible, it is not because it suggests the animal's imminent death, but rather the stubbornness displayed by the beast is, in our eyes, a human behavior.

IIIii. Laughter is incompatible with emotion

Bergson writes of, "l'insensibilité que accompagne d'ordinaire le rire" (3), and explains that laughter does not appeal to our emotions, it appeals solely to our intelligence (4). In order to laugh at something we must be able to achieve a temporary detachment from our emotions. A natural reaction, on encountering some one with a physical deformity or disability, would not be to laugh at it; were we to do so we would be considered "heartless" and "uncaring". By not identifying the character with the deformity, possibly by exaggerating this deformity to such an extent that it becomes ridiculous and larger than life, we are thus able to detach ourselves from our emotions for an instant and find humor in the character's misfortune.

To illustrate this point, let us consider the cartoon character, Mr Magoo: according to *le comique bergsonien*, this character is comic because his "deformity" is exaggerated to such an extent that we are able to "ignore" our emotions, our natural reaction, and find humor in the adventures caused by his shortsightedness. If this deformity is exaggerated enough for the character to become ridiculous, then our natural reaction is to laugh, rather than to pity him.

IIIiii. Laughter requires a social significance and group reinforcement

"Notre rire est toujours le rire d'un groupe" (5). Laughter does not exist in a vacuum: if we find something amusing, it is partly because we share with others the knowledge that it is so. An abstruse joke is funny not simply because it excludes those who do not understand it, but because there are others like us who we know are sharing in our connivance. In order to understand laughter, we must return it to its natural environment , i.e. society, and with this done we can then determine its function, and according to Bergson laughter serves a social function. One of the most important and pervasive ideas of *le comique bergsonien* is the idea of laughter as a means of social correction.

Bearing this in mind, we can appreciate the power of comedy, and the potential influence of the comic writer. Whoever can make others laugh at something or at some one, whoever can uncover the comic element in something we would not naturally find amusing, wields enormous power and influence.

These initial observations on laughter and comedy are essential to understanding what we may consider to be the central tenets of Bergson's theory of comedy, i.e. the idea of rigidity and elasticity. Crucial to this idea of rigidity are the concepts of mechanization, automatism, tension, and absent-mindedness. So, let us discuss the very essence of *le comique bergsonien* and get to the root of all that is comic and laughable: rigidity and elasticity.

IIIiv. Rigidity and elasticity

There are several manifestations or nuances of *rigidité* in *le comique bergsonien* and each requires individual analysis. Firstly, when we speak of rigidity we are referring to an individual who is, or seems to be, unable to adapt to a situation with sufficient alertness, some one who does not seem to be endowed with the necessary elasticity or flexibility we would expect from a human being. This may occur quite naturally, as in the example provided by Bergson of the man tripping over. We find this amusing because his erstwhile vigilance has been betrayed, the composure and concentration of his previous steps have been replaced by an inability to react to this situation with sufficient alertness. Bergson calls this rigidity, or inelasticity. (From this point on rigidity and inelasticity will be treated as synonymous.)

In this example the rigidity was accidental or natural. One could argue that if this set of circumstances was created by the comic writer, then it is contrived, and not at all natural. However, by "natural" in this sense we mean that the tripping over was not precipitated by anything other than the man's lack of alertness or attention. Creating sufficient circumstances or opportunities for this rigidity to manifest itself is one of the chief "tools" of the comic writer. In the previous example, let us suppose that the writer had placed a banana skin in the man's path to hasten the onset of the rigidity which caused him to fall. This is what we mean by "artificially produced", as distinct from natural rigidity. Let us refer to a scene from the film *The Three Musketeers* (Lester, 1973) for an example that is faithful to the very essence and simplicity of this type of rigidity.

In this scene a man is walking through what appears to be an empty marketplace carrying a box of eggs in front of him. The box is so laden with eggs that he can barely see two steps ahead. Suddenly, musketeers and guards on horseback gallop through the marketplace, causing a display of barrels to be knocked loose and come hurtling towards the man. Skillfully, he manages to avoid all the barrels and in the process the eggs remain intact. Yet, having successfully negotiated this obstacle, he does not take three steps before tripping over his own feet, falling face-first into the eggs. We find both types of rigidity here, that occurring naturally, the man tripping over his own feet, and that produced artificially, where an object was used in an attempt to accelerate the man's fall. In the end, what we saw was the man's inability to react with sufficient alertness and adapt to the present circumstances. In other words, rigidity.

IIIv. Mechanisation, automatism, and absentmindedness

Another way of approaching the concept of rigidity and elasticity is by viewing it as a kind of mechanization or automatism. The individual is, in a sense, unconscious of himself and of the outside world, and the resulting mechanical inelasticity makes us laugh. The more the comic character is ignorant of himself, the more amusing the character becomes, as does the behavior displayed by him. Bergson asks us to imagine the individual suffering a certain innate lack of elasticity of judgment and of intelligence, whereby he adapts himself , not to the present situation, to the present reality, but rather to a past and imaginary situation. If we can imagine ourselves in this situation, then we can better understand Bergson's idea of rigidity and elasticity, and especially the comic value of absentmindedness.

The more natural we consider the cause of rigidity to be, the more comic we shall find the effect. We have all witnessed enough forced comic situations to understand that, up to a certain point, we have to believe the causes to be natural. Inelasticity brought about through absentmindedness is invariably funny, because the lack of alertness is an essential ingredient of rigidity, and it echoes Bergson's idea of picturing the individual adapting himself to an imaginary situation rather than to the present one. A man walking along reading his newspaper who suddenly falls down an open manhole due to this very absentmindedness is definitive of this type of rigidity.

We previously discussed one of the fundamental rules of *le comique bergsonien*, namely that we do not laugh at a thing, we laugh at that aspect of a thing or object which gives us the impression of being human. Well, the reverse is also true. We laugh whenever a person gives us the impression of being a thing. This is one of Bergson's central tenets, and should be read in French, lest its meaning be altered in translation: "Les attitudes, gestes et mouvement du corps humain sont risibles dans l'exacte mesure où le corps nous fait penser à une simple mécanique." (Bergson, 23). In other words, we should try to imagine, "l'ensemble de la personne, où chaque membre a été raidi en pièce mécanique." (23)

To develop this point further, certain behavior, actions, movements, gestures, etc., cause us to view the human body as a machine. To understand this we need only to think of mime artists who manage to make their body act robotically, to make themselves appear to be an automaton or a marionette, controlled by another person or force. To imbue their movements with such a degree of automatism is, according to

Bergson, comical. Yet, it only remains so as long as the individual is able to assure us that, despite the mechanical behavior, he or she is still human.

IIIvi. The rigidity of society

Another type of rigidity is the rigidity of society; as was previously mentioned, laughter is a means of social correction. According to Bergson, the rigidity of society is the comic, and laughter is its corrective. By rigidity, in this instance, we mean a kind of stubborn independence, a desire to go one's own way, a refusal to conform to the norms expected. As society is suspicious of rigidity in individuals, it endeavors, by dint of laughter, to convert this non-conformity into pliability, in other words, it tries to change inelasticity into elasticity. Tension and elasticity, in *le comique bergsonien*, are two mutually complementary forces which life brings into play, and if either of these is found lacking in an individual's character, then this will lead to a serious inability to adapt to social life, and to society as a whole.

An inability or refusal to break free from the inelasticity of one's functions and *métier* can be termed *professional rigidity* – these characters become amusing because their rigidity makes them appear as though they are not "normal" people, and society does not tolerate that which is different.

Finally, let us consider that Bergson does not consider laughter to belong to the world of esthetics alone, because it aims, through its "corrective ability", to produce a general improvement. Yet there is something esthetic about laughter: as soon as society and people in general begin to take themselves too seriously and exaggerate their own

importance, laughter strikes as a corrective. People's rigidity is the ailment and laughter is the remedy.

It is apparent that in the hands of the comic writer the individual becomes a mere puppet, one that can be made to perform as the writer desires: the comic pulls the strings and the character (re)acts accordingly. Moreover, if we consider the power of laughter as a social corrective, then we can appreciate the degrees of influence available to the comic. Bergson compares laughter to a disease that afflicts some and spares others, yet it is in no way selective: the innocent are just a vulnerable as those deserving of it. This gives us an indication of the virulence of comedy and the supremacy of the writer, and this particular aspect will become more important when analyzing Dumas's use of comedy and wit in Les trois mousquetaires.

Of course, Bergson's theory of laughter is more complex and more detailed than has been outlined here. Each subsequent chapter will examine in greater depth *le comique bergsonien* with regard to the comic character, the comic situation, and the comic in words. These explain exactly what is the essence of *le comique bergsonien*; it resonates throughout Le Rire and is fundamental to any deeper analysis of his theory of comedy and laughter. In the next chapter we shall examine the comic in character as it applies to Les trois mousquetaires.

Chapter II: The Comic in Character

I. Overview of Characters in the Novel

Les trois mousquetaires is neither full of quintessentially comic characters, nor filled with stoic, serious figures at whom we are unable to laugh. Every individual performs an essential role in the story and his personality reflects this. The characters in Les trois mousquetaires cover the spectrum, and vary in their importance to the plot. The protagonists are d'Artagnan, Porthos, Athos, and Aramis, Richelieu, and Milady. Secondary characters, the supporting cast, are those who are important to the plot but exist primarily because of their relationship to one or more of the protagonists: these include Grimaud, Planchet, Mousqueton, Louis XIII, Anne of Austria, les Bonacieux, Rochefort, the Duke of Buckingham, Felton, de Winter, de Tréville, etc. The remaining characters can be termed peripheral, as they are not of paramount importance to the plot, for example, les Coquenard, the Swiss guard at la Rochelle, the *curé* and the Jesuit in chapter XVI, innkeepers, and so on.

Now, comic characters come from each of these categories, and are not limited to any particular hierarchy of involvement: Porthos, M. Bonacieux, and *le curé* are all comic characters belonging to different categories within the novel. Their comic quality comes from their behavior and not from their importance to the plot. These characters are comic because the author has painted them as such: in this respect they are entirely at the mercy of the creator, and are like marionettes controlled by whoever is writing the story. This relates to the notion of the power and influence of the writer, and his

decision to make the reader respect the character, laugh at him, or do both. A point in question is the Swiss guard at the siege of La Rochelle. Dumas could have chosen to make him a paragon of bravery, gallantry, and eloquence: instead, he presents us with a bumbling idiot who is characterized by the fact that he speaks French with an impenetrable German accent. Our attention is drawn to what he cannot do, i.e., the source of comedy for this character, rather than to what he excels at. To recap, each character's comic essence has less to do with his or her import to the plot than to the function assigned to him or her by the author.

II. "Uncomic" Characters: Richelieu and Milady

The two protagonists who are the antithesis of a comic character are Milady and Richelieu. Both inspire fear, awe, and respect, and for this reason neither can inspire laughter: were they to be found risible, this would detract from the impact of their perceived malevolence.

IIi. Richelieu

The Cardinal's authority is emphasized through comparison with that of Louis XIII. We would expect the King to be a majestic and awesome character, a ruler who should personify all the characteristics that Richelieu embodies, and who should command as much, if not more, respect; as it turns out, he is nothing of the sort. Louis XIII gives the impression of being an impotent and uninspiring leader, fearful of the Cardinal, and whose queen is in love with his enemy, the Duke of Buckingham. Instead

of confidently ruling his kingdom, he is shown to be an inferior strategist (567), a weak-hearted ruler - "Louis XIII, comme tous les coeurs faibles" (618) - and a self-indulgent malingerer: he succumbs to fits of boredom during which he often asks one of his servants to stand with him at the window so that they may be bored together (103). (As is the case with M. Bonacieux, his punishment includes being cuckolded by his wife.) Richelieu, *de facto* ruler of the kingdom and the most powerful man in the country, displays none of these laughable traits.

The Cardinal's power and influence are legendary. Louis XIII is intimidated by Richelieu and fears his majesty and power. The following quote explains the relationship between the two: "le cardinal était pour lui le serpent fascinateur et il était, lui, l'oiseau qui voltige de branche en branche sans pouvoir lui échapper" (Dumas, 618). Such is his perceived omnipotence and omniscience that M. de Tréville believes that Louis is alluding to God when in fact he is referring to the cardinal:

> "Sa majesté veut parler de Dieu, sans doute, dit M. de Tréville, car je ne connais que Dieu qui soit si fort au-dessus de Sa Majesté.
>
> Non, Monsieur; je veux parler du soutien de l'État, de mon seul serviteur, de mon seul ami, de M. le Cardinal" (104).

One might question whether this contradicts the earlier statement that Richelieu is never the subject of, or the cause of, laughter. Although this might at first appear to be the case, in fact what we laugh at in this instance is Louis, his reverence for Richelieu, and the extent to which his importance is exaggerated out of normal proportion. Bergson explains that it is quite possible to exaggerate to excess without obtaining a real caricature: "il y a des caricatures [...] où l'exagération est à peine sensible, et

inversement, on peut exagérer à l'outrance sans obtenir un véritable effet de caricature" (20). The exaggeration in this example does not bring about the ridicule of the Cardinal, rather it causes us to laugh at the image of a mortal being referred to as though he were a deity. This makes him appear beyond human, and, as we have already seen, Bergson states that we only laugh at things that remind us of our human side; we shall see this tenet displayed more fully in the analysis of Milady.

Richelieu seems almost to possess supernatural qualities, such as his omniscience and omnipotence. Very little seems to escape his notice, only those things which have been expressly designed by the Musketeers to escape his net. His influence on international events is incredible: he is able to set two countries at war simply because of his desire for it (Dumas, 413). He is universally feared, with Athos the only one who does not seem to be afraid of him. Even d'Artagnan displays trepidation in his dealings with him, and is intensely fearful of making an enemy of him: "ce fut cette crainte qui le retint, tant est puissante l'influence d'un caractère vraiment grand sur tout ce qui l'entoure" (409).

To sum up, it can be seen that Richelieu is immune from comic treatment for the following reasons. Firstly, it would detract from his legend as all-powerful, awe-inspiring, and vengeful, and supreme; we cannot laugh at a character we fear, as this subverts Bergson's tenet that we must be able to suppress our emotions in order to laugh at a character. Secondly, the more supernatural and the less human he appears, the less capable he is of inspiring laughter, because we can only laugh at that which reminds us of ourselves.

IIii. Milady

Milady embodies the characteristics mentioned above, but defines them and personifies them more fully that M. le Cardinal. She is arguably the most interesting and psychologically complex character in the novel. Her sublime beauty, seemingly capable of hypnotizing all men and making them act as though devoid of reason (Athos, Buckingham, Felton, d'Artagnan, and so on), seems to be comparable only to that of the Queen. In fact, as the true expression of beauty in the novel seems to be incarnated in the hands, Milady and Anne of Austria are the only females who possess this attribute: "sa [Anne] main et ses bras étaient d'une beauté surprenante" (158), "Hélas! Dit Felton en regardant les belles mains [de Milady] et en secouant doucement la tête" (558).[1]

Given her singular beauty, her malice comes as even more of a surprise. It would appear that there are but two reactions from the other characters towards her, those of infatuation and of fear. Were she to be rendered comic it is certain that both these sentiments would be compromised: were we to laugh at her, her beauty would not be as irresistible, nor would she inspire fear so readily. For this reason Dumas steers her away from the whole area of comedy: she neither inspires laughter nor does appears in

[1] It is interesting to note the importance Dumas places on the beauty of the hands being of paramount importance to overall beauty in this novel. After the above quotation Dumas goes on to extol the exquisiteness of Anne of Austria's hands: "Buckingham appuya avec passion ses lèvres sur cette belle main" (162), and "sa main d'une admirable beauté, et qui semblait alors une main de cire" (198). Milady also has beautiful hands, yet none of the other women in the novel are described as sharing this attribute. Constance Bonacieux is "une charmante femme de vingt-cinq à vingt-six ans, brune avec des yeux bleus, ayant un nez légèrement retroussé, des dents admirables, un teint marbré de rose et d'opale", but unfortunately "les mains étaient blanches, mais sans finesse" (135). Similarly, Mme Coquenard has hands that are "un peu sèches" (345). The extent to which beautiful hands are essential to overall beauty is explained in the following quotation: "les mains, chez les femmes surtout, ont besoin de rester oisives pour rester belles" (142). This is not limited to women, though. Aramis, effeminized throughout the novel, also has pulchritudinous hands that conform to Dumas's stipulations: "ses mains semblaient craindre de s'abaisser, de peur que les veines ne se gonflassent" (64), "sa main blanche et potelée comme une main de femme" (285), and "il secouaient les mains pour les rendre blanches" (287).

any comic situation in the novel. We could not fear her as greatly as we do were we to find her, at the same time, laughable.

This recalls the notion of only being able to laugh at that which is human or resembles human behavior. Like Richelieu, Milady is described in terms which elevate her to a position above that of an ordinary person. She displays a passion for evil without repentance that does not remind us of our own behavior. Not that this is impossible to imagine; rather, it is difficult to relate to. When a failing or deformity, for example, is exaggerated to an extent where it no longer reminds us of human behavior, then we can laugh at it (Bergson, 20-21). This is certainly the case with the Swiss guard: but he still retains his humanness despite the exaggeration. In the case of Milady, the amplification of her malevolence makes us begin to wonder whether we can still regard her as human.

As the novel progresses, Milady sheds her human tegument to display feral and devilish behavior. Instead of being described in terms of a woman and a person, she is increasingly referred to as an animal or a beast: "suave créature" (357), "abominable créature" (358), "créature infâme" (372), "créature" (487), "étrange créature" (530). Moreover, Dumas play on the animalistic theme when describing her descent into infamy: she is a lion/lioness, tiger, panther and lynx (358, 387, 391, 482, 494, 497, 506, 517), a snake or reptile (387, 447, 494, 497, 507, 535, 610), and a monster (357, 494). At the end she sheds her human skin even more fully and becomes a demon (582, 615), and a phantom (477, 568).

Milady is feared by all: Richelieu is wary of her, Rochefort believes that she is in league with the devil – "Recommandez-moi à Satan, dit Rochefort" (518) –, and even

Athos, who seems to fear nobody, regards her as inhuman: "un démon échappé de l'enfer" (615). Milady does not remind us of ourselves, or of any human for that matter, and therefore cannot be found comic; she appears superhuman, supernatural, such is her apparent ability to escape death.

III. Semi-Comic Characters

This novel is not comprised of characters who are either entirely comic, or exclusively "uncomic". Semi-comic characters, in terms of this novel, are those persons at whom and with whom we laugh but who still inspire a sense of respect and esteem through their personality and conduct. They are human because we can identify with their weaknesses and thus find them comic, but they are not so rigid or unaware of their faults that they are incapable of or unwilling to change. Into this category fall Athos, Aramis, and d'Artagnan.

Athos embodies all the virtues and qualities of a musketeer, yet like a tragic hero he has failings that are apparent to the spectator, as well as to himself. Were he too perfect we could not relate to him; his failings display his humanness, which is essential to comedy. Taking into consideration all his many laudable and desirable virtues described by Dumas, his appearance and conduct when we encounter him at the *Lis d'Or* are all the more amusing. Consider the following description of Athos:

> "En effet, considéré même auprès de M. de Treville, l'élégant et noble courtisan, Athos dans ses jours de belle humeur, pouvait soutenir avantageusement la comparaison [...] S'agissait-il d'un repas, Athos

> l'ordonnait mieux qu'aucun homme du monde [...] s'agissait-il de science héraldique, Athos connaissait toutes les familles nobles du royaume [...] il montait à cheval et faisait des armes dans la perfection [...] son éducation avait été si peu négligée, même sous le rapport des études scolastiques, si rares à cette époque chez les gentilshommes, qu'il souriait aux bribes de latin [...] c'était donc un homme fort extraordinaire qu'Athos" (297-298).

This makes whom we discover at the inn even more humorous: rather than the paragon of a gentleman described above, he has transformed himself into a sort of savage who has locked himself in the cellar, eating and drinking the innkeeper's provisions. He has gone from "un homme fort extraordinaire" to the stage where "ce n'était plus un homme, c'était un diable" (302). Athos is an extraordinary character, but his failings – drunkenness and gambling – make him ordinary enough for us to laugh at him, and endow his personality with a comic aspect.

Aramis, too, has a comic side to his character. Whenever he threatens to take himself too seriously, his comrades quickly bring him down to earth with a bang. When he immerses himself in his study for his ridiculous thesis, and starts to lose all sense of what is important, d'Artagnan recognizes that it is no more than a façade and provides him with news of his mistress. Aramis, whose religious fervor has been simply an excuse for sulking, quickly returns to the man we knew before, and in the transformation regains the human quality he had lost through exaggeration. He had become "détaché des choses de la terre", which made him appear inhuman, and difficult to relate to. One feels that he realizes how ridiculous this change of character was when

he admits how ridiculous his thesis was: d'Artagnan states that the thesis should definitely be abandoned, to which Aramis replies, "Depuis lors, je vis agréablement" (318). His piety is often a front for his amorous interests, which would be incongruous with his devotion to the Church. However, we feel that Aramis realizes that he is fooling nobody, and this too shows us that he does not take himself as seriously as he might appear to. He has recounted a story about a doctor's niece, which is obviously a front for one of his mistresses: "pour le moment, j'imiterai la retenue de la nièce du docteur. Aramis sourit, car il se rappelait le conte qu'il avait fait certain soir à ses amis" (217).

D'Artagnan is certainly capable of being laughed at and also of causing us to laugh at others. The young Gascon we meet in the first few chapters causes the reader to laugh at him rather to admire him; he is hot-headed, zealous, vain, brash, proud, etc., in short, the opposite of what he needs to be to be a musketeer. What is important is the fact that he recognizes these faults and acquires a certain humility and self-deprecation that allow us to laugh at him and not find him ridiculous. Following d'Artagnan's encounter at Meung he learns from the experience that "pour la première fois de sa vie, d'Artagnan, qui jusqu'à ce jour avait une assez bonne opinion de lui-même, se trouva ridicule" (61). Similarly, having taken umbrage at being offered "charity" by de Tréville, (72) he does not make this mistake a second time when receiving money from the King (108). When Constance tells him that the Queen requires somebody "brave, intelligent et dévoué" to go to London, d'Artagnan replies that he has "au moins deux des trois qualités qu'il vous faut" (208).

Overall, these three characters, along with their many glorious virtues, display human weaknesses that allow us to find the comic in their character, without detracting from their heroic qualities.

IV. Criteria Necessary For Creating a Comic Character

There are two characters in the novel who neatly fall into the category of comic characters; these are M. Bonacieux and Porthos. Bergson lists three conditions or criteria necessary for a character to be comic. These are: *unsociability* in the performer, *insensibility* in the spectator, and *automatism* (Bergson, 111). With regard to Bonacieux, the following segment will examine how he complies with each of these conditions.

IVi. Bonacieux

1. *L'insociabilité du personnage.* In the introduction we examined the idea of rigidity, both in the performer and in society. The comic character, by refusing to conform to the norms set by society, becomes unsociable; laughter is the means society avails itself of to repress any separatist or antisocial behavior (antisocial in the Bergsonian sense). In brief, Bonacieux is a cowardly, pathetic figure of a man who is more interested in his money and his own safety than in the wellbeing of his beautiful young wife. His virtues, if in fact he does possess any, are grossly surpassed by his failings. His greed and self-interest are disagreeable to the audience, possibly seeming immoral to many. Apropos of immorality, Bergson explains that there is no difference between the social ideal and

the moral, and that others' faults makes us laugh because of their unsociability rather than their immorality: "Nous pouvons donc admettre qu'en règle générale ce sont bien les défauts d'autrui qui nous font rire [...] en raison de leur *insociabilité* plutôt que de leur *immoralité*" (106). Bonacieux's behavior is certainly antisocial, and is duly punished by his being detained at Richelieu's convenience in one of his dungeons. His antisocial behavior is punished not only by the laughter of the spectator but also by that of his peers.

2. *L'insensibilité du spectateur.* "Le personnage comique est souvent un personnage avec lequel nous commençons par sympathiser matériellement" (148). When we first encounter Bonacieux we learn that his wife has been abducted and that he is unaware of her whereabouts. We sympathize with him even more when d'Artagnan allows the Cardinal's guards to take Bonacieux away, when he had just that minute come to him for help (Dumas, 130). However, his behavior following this incident makes the reader lose this initial empathy with him: Bonacieux starts to spy on his wife for the Cardinal, he conspires in her abduction, he shows himself to possess an odious love for money, as well as a lack of bravery. He soon becomes entirely cold and at the end of the novel we are told that he no longer thinks or cares about what has happened to his wife: "M. Bonacieux vivait fort tranquille, ignorant parfaitment ce qu'était devenu sa femme et ne s'en inquiétant guère" (628). His actions make him a thoroughly dislikable character, thus allowing the spectator to achieve the necessary detachment from his emotions, and ultimately laugh at him.

3. *Automatisme*. As we have already learned, automatism is behavior displayed by the character that seems absentminded, or rather spontaneous. We learn from Bergson that a character is only ridiculous through some mental attribute resembling absentmindedness, through some organism that feeds on him without forming part of him. But this absentmindedness is momentary and capable of being corrected. The chief cause of rigidity is a failure to look around, or to look inside oneself: "La cause de raideur par excellence, c'est qu'on néglige de regarder autour de soi et surtout en soi" (Bergson, 112). This is not the sort of rigidity we saw in the example of the man carrying the crate of eggs tripping over his own feet. In this form of rigidity the character – Bonacieux – is not participating in the present reality, but rather in an imaginary or dreamlike "reality" where he displays a failure to look inside himself and recognize his own faults, as well as a failure to look and see what is happening around him. He fails to do these two things, and this rigidity impels him to continue to act in a way that causes him to become comic in the eyes of the reader.

"Il suffira, pour s'en convaincre, de remarquer qu'un personnage comique est généralement comique dans l'exacte mesure où il s'ignore lui-même" (13). Moreover, were a character to recognize his own failing, or give the impression of having done so, his flaws would fail to be as comic as they are when the character is ignorant of himself.

Bonacieux demonstrates these points: he does not learn from his mistakes or recognize his failings, even when they are pointed out to him. When Constance accuses him of cowardice, and tells him that he is being manipulated by the Cardinal, Bonacieux fails to look inside himself and around himself and this rigidity prevents him from changing. Yet at the same time we are grateful that he is not aware of his own faults, as

were he to change, we could no longer find him a figure of ridicule and laugh at him. This is an essential difference between Bonacieux and d'Artagnan, Athos, and Aramis: even though we laugh at them from time to time, we do not consider them deserving of ridicule. For the most part, this is due to the fact that they were shown to recognize their own faults and by looking inside and around themselves, thus displaying the necessary elasticity that frees them from being essentially comic characters.

"La comédie peint des caractères que nous avons déjà rencontrés, que nous rencontrerons encore sur notre chemin. Elle note des ressemblances" (125). Bonacieux's covetousness and miserliness are reminiscent of Molière's Harpagon. Harpagon, on being informed that he is a figure of ridicule in the community, does not look inside or around himself, refuses to change, and displays a rigidity identical to that of Bonacieux. Bonacieux is certainly not as complete or as well-defined a comic character as Harpagon, yet it would seem that Dumas was, to some extent, inspired by him in creating Bonacieux. It is not difficult to envisage him marrying off his daughter to whomever offers the biggest dowry, as he displays a similar level of self-interest to Molière's miser.

Bonacieux fulfils these three conditions; they explain exactly why he is dislikable, but we need to delve deeper into his behavior and personality to explain exactly why we find him risible, pathetic, and comic.

V. Vices and Virtues

Sympathy is incompatible with comedy: if we detect a fault, no matter how trivial it may appear to be, and allow this fault to arouse the spectator's sympathy, we will not succeed in making the character comic. But if we take a vice and make it ludicrous, it will leave our emotions unaffected and allow comedy to blossom. According to Bergson, "choisissez au contraire un vice profond et même, en général, odieux: vous pourriez le rendre comique si vous réussissez d'abord, par des artifices appropriés, à faire qu'il me laisse insensible" (106). Taking this into account, let us examine more closely the character of Bonacieux.

Vi. Antitheses: D'Artagnan vs Bonacieux

Bonacieux is the opposite of d'Artagnan in every way, physically, mentally and morally/socially. This contrast serves to highlight Bonacieux's vices and failings, as well as emphasizing d'Artagnan's virtues. Whereas d'Artagnan is brave, charming, and generous, Bonacieux is pusillanimous, disagreeable, and avaricious. D'Artagnan's honesty contrasts strikingly with Bonacieux's duplicity; his prudence with Bonacieux's reckless judgment. D'Artagnan is intelligent, Bonacieux is a fool; the musketeer is quick-witted, the haberdasher is a dullard.

Comparing the adjectives used to describe both men highlights their differences. D'Artagnan is honest (75, 119), prudent (129, 255, 266, 407), brave, (47, 137, 202, 209, 295, 407) - in fact, the description "brave jeune homme" becomes an epithet for him, so often is it used to describe the musketeer (47, 137, 202, 208, 407). Bonacieux, on the

other hand, is referred to by his least appealing characteristics: his avarice (164, 200, 203, 205), his cowardice (164, 205, 206, 250), his egotism (164, 203), his stupidity (206, 207, 212, 213). Adjectives such as *misérable* (205), *abruti* (206), *infâme* (213), *pauvre* (249), and *canaille* (269) are all used to describe Bonacieux, but we could never imagine them being applied to d'Artagnan. As we have already explained, d'Artagnan recognizes his failings and changes accordingly, and Bonacieux, of course, does not. Bonacieux displays rigidity, d'Artagnan elasticity.

Constance falls in love with the musketeer because he is young, charming, and "amoureux" (202). She cannot love her husband because he is old, anything but charming, and incapable of feeling love for anything except money: "l'amour que lui avait inspiré sa jeune femme était un sentiment tout secondaire" (164). The idea of a beautiful, young woman like Constance being married to a cowardly, wizened miser like Bonacieux is anti-social, and therefore immoral. Thus, society punishes this unsociability by having her fall in love with her equal, d'Artagnan.

The ruse whereby d'Artagnan provides himself with an alibi by setting the clock back at M. de Tréville's house is one example of his inventiveness and originality. Soon after, we encounter Bonacieux, who shows himself to be wholly lacking in these two attributes. While arguing with his wife he is unable to counter her with arguments of his own, and instead repeats what he heard Rochefort say at la Bastille: " Bonacieux répétait mot pour mot une phrase qu'il avait entendu dire au comte de Rochefort", and "c'était une autre phrase du comte de Rochefort qu'il avait retenue et qu'il trouvait l'occasion de placer" (204). It is comic when we hear these words come out of his

mouth because it displays his lack of invention, and also shows his automatism, as he mechanically repeats these remarks he has just heard without really understanding them.

"Est comique tout incident qui appelle notre attention sur le physique d'une personne alors que le moral est en cause" (Bergson, 39). Because Bonacieux is obviously physically inferior to d'Artagnan, this makes him, according to the values of the society at that particular time, morally and socially inferior to the musketeer. Let us extend this notion of physical inferiority to the notion of masculinity/strength and femininity/weakness.

The more we identify his less palatable characteristics, e.g. his feebleness, the more we reproach him for not being more like d'Artagnan. Bonacieux is entirely incapable of protecting his wife – "il était incapable de me défendre" (136) – whereas d'Artagnan proves himself a suitable protector; and although she is abducted he manages to track her down, whereas her husband soon forgets all about her. D'Artagnan embodies all the necessary masculine traits, such as bravery, gallantry, resourcefulness, secrecy, etc., whereas Bonacieux embodies none of these, and as a result compromises his standing as a man. At one stage his wife rebukes him and accuses him of being "une femme, une misérable femme, stupide et abrutie" (206), although this is probably more of an insult to women than to Bonacieux. Once again, society does not tolerate rigidity – in this case the refusal to act like a man – and punishes it accordingly.

VI. The Ideally Comic Character

According to Bergson, the ideally comic character must (131, 132):

1. Be deep-rooted (*profond*) in order that he or she deliver an inexhaustible supply of comedy material, but also superficial, in order that the character remain within the scope of comedy.
2. Be unaware (*inconscient*) of his flaw, vice, imperfection, etc., but to everybody else it must be blatantly obvious.
3. Be very *considerate to its own self* (*pleine d'indulgence pour elle-même*), so that it can be displayed without scruple; yet others must find it troubling enough to want to repress it through laughter.
4. Be certain of manifesting itself under new aspects or guises (*sûre de renaître sous de nouveaux aspects*).
5. Be inseparable from social life but at the same time insufferable to society, which will seek to repress such rigidity.
6. In order to take the greatest number of forms possible, be capable of being attached to all vices and many virtues.

However, we are forewarned that anybody attempting to concoct this mixture would find himself faced with a great deal of difficulty. In fact, the mixture already exists and is widespread in humankind: it is called vanity. Several characters display vanity in the novel, but none embodies it quite as completely as Porthos.

VIi. Porthos

Porthos is typified by his vanity; it is what defines him and makes him such a memorable character. Of all Dumas' creations, Porthos was his favorite. Bell reveals that Dumas based Porthos on his father, General Alexandre Dumas, who we are told was "a genius of warfare - I mean a physical genius, as Porthos was - outspoken, utterly devoid of fear, a good swordsman, a fine horseman, close on six feet in height, with the feet and hands of a woman and the strength of a colossus" (7).[2] Dumas indeed does comment on Porthos' strength in the novel, when he write that "plus d'une fois, dans ses luttes avec Porthos, il [Athos] avait fait plier le géant dont la force physique était devenue proverbiale parmi les mousquetaires" (Dumas, 297).

The "death" of Porthos greatly saddened his creator, and he expressed his deep regret at having killed him: "I have then, to my great regret, lost Porthos" (Bell, 244). This must surely be due to the memory of his father, on whom the character was based, but it also has a great deal to do with the fact that there was a great deal of Dumas himself in Porthos. Bell employs the term "Porthosian vanity" (172) to describe the special type of vanity embodied by Porthos; he states that, far from being limited to his creation, Dumas manifested this Porthosian vanity in his own personality and in other works (106). With regards to Porthos, the following segment examines the extent to which he meets the conditions necessary for creating the ideally comic character.

1. *The comic character must be deep-rooted, but at the same time superficial.*

[2] Refer to footnote 1, page 23 for commentary on Dumas' treatment of the importance of the beauty of hands in the novel.

Porthos is defined by his vanity; the fact that there is a term coined for his particular brand of vanity demonstrates to what extent it is an integral part of his character. In the film *The Three Musketeers* (Lester, 1973), the first glimpse that we have of Porthos is of a Musketeer sitting on a theatrical horse, resplendent in the gold sash that he has recently acquired. This initial display of vanity of dress and behavior continues to define his character throughout the remainder of the movie.

Our first encounter with Porthos in the novel introduces us to a musketeer who is proud, devoid of modesty, and full of self importance:

> "Au centre du groupe le plus animé était un mousquetaire de grand taille, d'une figure hautaine et d'une bizarrerie de costume qui attirait sur lui l'attention générale [...] Ce mousquetaire venait de descendre de garde à l'instant même, se plaignait d'être enrhumé et toussait de temps en temps avec affectation. Aussi, avait-il pris le manteau, à ce qu'il disait autour de lui, et tandis qu'il parlait du haut de sa tête, en frisant dédaigneusement sa moustache, on admirait avec enthousasme le baudrier brodé, et d'Artagnan plus que tout autre" (63).

This description leaves us in little doubt as to the portrait of Porthos that will develop throughout the novel. The image of him stroking his moustache typifies his Porthosian vanity, and it is an image that appears elsewhere in the book: "Athos réfléchissait, Porthos frisait sa moustache" (449), and "Ah! ma foi! Messieurs, dit Porthos, en se renversant sur la chaise et frisant sa moustache" (451).

It is not simply his appearance that demonstrates his vanity, it is also his actions. His lackey, Mousqueton, is hired by Porthos on condition that the former be dressed and

lodged splendidly. The musketeer accepts this condition and has his tailor dress Mousqueton in Porthos' own clothes so that so that his lackey will complement him perfectly: "Mousqueton faisait à la suite de son maître fort bonne figure" (111).

Once Porthos takes leave of the others and brings Planchet, d'Artagnan's lackey with him in order to improve his own appearance: "Porthos, pour faire plus grande figure, avait emprunté ce soir-là Planchet" (212). When d'Artagnan receives a letter, believed to be from Constance, requesting that they meet in a dangerous part of the countryside, Athos and Aramis fear that they will be led into a trap. For Porthos, however, it is "une occasion de montrer nos équipages" (398). He believes that he is doing the innkeeper of the *Grand St Martin* a favor by staying rent-free in its finest room, and takes offense when approached to pay for his board and lodgings (271-272).

Yet, his vanity and vainglorious behavior, hilarious as they are, are superficial. We find it easy to accept in a comic character, yet it would be difficult to find in an ordinary individual. This follows the Bergsonian rule about exaggeration, whereby a flaw can become comic if overstated to ludicrous proportions. For something to be deep-rooted and at the same time superficial may seem paradoxical. In an ordinary person we may have difficulty accepting this apparent contradiction; but we do not judge Porthos as harshly as we would a normal person, and in suspending our disbelief to accept the rather fantastic plot of the novel we grant its characters a certain freedom of personality and behavior that they would not enjoy off the page. This is the means by which the character remains within the scope of comedy.

2. *The owner must be unaware of his flaw, but it must be visible to everybody else.*

If Porthos is aware of his vanity, he hides it very well. Despite habitual cajoling and mockery by his fellow musketeers, he does not change his ways: if anything, he becomes more incorrigible. In Chapter XXV when d'Artagnan encounters Porthos at the inn he learns from the innkeeper exactly how Porthos came to be injured: completely outmaneuvered in a sword fight, he was forced to the ground, where he had to beg for his adversary's mercy. Believing that d'Artagnan is ignorant of the facts, Porthos tells a quite different story which demonstrates wonderfully his Porthosian vanity: "Il m'est arrivé qu'en me fendant sur mon adversaire, à qui j'avais déjà allongé trois coups d'épée, et avec lequel je voulais en finir d'un quatrième, mon pied a porté sur une pierre, et je me suis foulé le genou" (276). Of course, d'Artagnan knows the true story, although, given his experience with Porthos, it is likely that he would see through it regardless. Athos, though, is not fooled by it. When Porthos inquires whether Athos has ever suffered a sprain, he replies: "Jamais; seulement je me rappelle que dans notre échaufourée de la rue Férou je réçus un coup d'épée qui, au bout de quinze ou dix-huit jours, m'avait produit le même effet" (319)! In a lesser mortal this retort might discourage any further display of vanity, but for Porthos it has no effect whatsoever.

Porthos claims to live in a most salubrious dwelling, and when passing by it in the company of friends he would proudly claim, "voilà ma demeure" (112). Yet, Dumas tells us that he never invites anybody to his abode, and whenever any one calls for him, he is never at home, making one wonder what exactly is behind the façade: "mais jamais on ne le trouvait chez lui, jamais il n'invitait personne à y monter, et nul ne pouvait se faire une idée de ce que cette somptueuse apparence renfermait de richesses réelles" (112).

It is not as though the others hide their mockery from Porthos, or that he is unaware of their jokes at his expense, it is just that he seems to be deaf to any criticism. Several times in the novel he is called *un niais*, *un sot*, *un fat*, by the others, yet he never seems to be unduly troubled by it or really offended (131,319, 453, 588). If the other protagonists are aware of his vanity, the reader is doubly so, as he has the benefit of their perspective as well as that of the author. The following description, "Vaniteux et indiscret, on voyait à travers lui comme à travers un cristal. La seule chose qui eût pu égarer l'investigateur eût été que l'on eût cru tout le bien qu'il disait de lui" (113), leaves the reader in little doubt as to the extent to which Porthos is ignorant of his flaw, as well as the extent to which others see through it.

3. *The flaw must be displayed without scruple, yet others must find it troublesome and want to suppress it through laughter.*

As we have already seen, even when ridiculed by others Porthos still manages to display his vanity without any scruple or embarrassment. After lying so brazenly about the duel that led to his injury, we might expect him to be reluctant to display such boastfulness in future, lest he be found out. But Porthos does not behave like ordinary people, his vanity knows no bounds. After Athos' witty remark about the sprain, Porthos is not at all deterred and continues his fabrication of events to the amusement of the others: he ignores the present reality and sticks rigidly to his illusory reality. Porthos claims that, in order to treat Mousqueton's injuries, he was forced to, "faire venir le chirurgien deux fois par jour" (320). We know that Porthos never even paid the doctor, and that Mousqueton was elsewhere, poaching game and stealing wine to satiate his

master. He continues to claim that his mistress is "une des plus grandes dames de la cour" (272), when she is simply the wife of a procurator.

Porthos' sense of vanity and self-importance is, however, based on real foundations; as a gentleman, Porthos is worthy of praise and esteem. His physical strength is legendary among the Musketeers, and we are told that "pas une figure ne correspondait aux galanteries de Porthos" (325). Once he exaggerates this admiration of him far beyond an acceptable level of modesty, and begins to take himself too seriously, he crosses the line and becomes a comic character. For Bergson, vanity is "une admiration de soi fondée sur l'admiration qu'on croit inspirer aux autres" (132). This perfectly defines Porthosian vanity. Once we begin to take ourselves too seriously, and are too enamoured of our own self-importance, society brings us down to earth with a bang: "le comique naît au moment précis où la société et la personne, délivrée du souci de leur conservation, commencent à se traiter d'elles-mêmes comme des œuvres d'art" (Bergson, 16).

Athos, Porthos, and Aramis have no difficulty laughing at their friend, especially when it is at the expense of his own inflated self-image. Aramis remarks that he would love to see Porthos sitting up on the horse where "il aura, sans doute, l'air du Grand Mogol" (319). Similarly, d'Artagnan jests that he would love to see Porthos sitting astride his old horse, *Bouton d'Or* (367). Bearing in mind that the horse was around fourteen years of age and walked with his head lower than his knees, and that its qualities were "bien cachés sous son poil étrange et son allure incongrue" (46), the image of Porthos astride d'Artagnan's *bidet jaune,* makes us laugh at the incongruity. Despite this ignominy Porthos still manages to exude his "air plein de majesté" (367) as

unselfconsciously as ever. His greed at requesting more money from Mme Coquenard than is necessary is duly punished when the two horses he receives are not magnificent steeds, worthy of Porthos and Mousqueton, but rather a pair of nags, totally unbecoming a man of his (self)importance. The reader, too, laughs at him, as we too are attempting to ridicule his vanity, and play our role as part of the society whose function is to repress rigid behavior.

4. *The person's comic character must be capable of manifesting itself under fresh guises and new aspects.*

Porthos's vanity is by no means one-dimensional: it repeatedly displays itself in many guises throughout the novel. His vanity is shown in both his words and his actions. It manifests itself in the guise of pretentiousness and narcissism: "Porthos, vous êtes prétentieux comme Narcisse" (66); bravado: "Etriller, dit Aramis, le mot est dur. C'est celui qui convient à un homme à regarder en face ses ennemis" (79); self-importance: "non seulement il parlait beaucoup, mais il parlait haut" (110), later d'Artagnan remarks that "Porthos, parlant plus haut que nous tous, il l'a pris pour le chef" (223). We laugh at the idea of Porthos taking the vantage point in the church that gives him the best view of the women in the congregation: "Porthos profita de la circonstance pour lorgner les femmes" (324).

He is a character of not inconsiderable wit. He can make the others guffaw at his bawdy jokes – "après avoir rougi deux ou trois fois jusqu'au blanc des yeux aux grosses plaisanteries de Porthos" (570) – as well as injure with many witty ripostes: when Aramis claims that he was simply wearing a heavy coat to visit a doctor, Porthos quips

"Au mois de juillet [...] est-ce que le docteur craint que tu ne sois reconnu?" (129). We find the meal *chez* Coquenard especially amusing because of his expectations as well as his quick wit; his insistence on fighting a duel simply because a man disagreed with him is another comic aspect of his character that we might find unsavory in most characters, but amusing in the case of Porthos; similarly, we find it difficult to reproach Porthos for serving horsemeat to his friends simply because he did not want the sight of his two nags to embarrass his guests (319)!

5. *It should be inseparable from social life, yet insufferable to society.*

At this stage, we need not repeat how society punishes rigidity. It, of course, has a social significance, as we can all relate to vanity, and have certainly met proud and bombastic individuals ourselves. It is inseparable from society because Porthos is a member of society who interacts with people of his own class and those from classes above and below him. His failings and weaknesses are to be found in any society, and what is comic is the extent to which the author manipulates them to appeal to the spectator.

6. *It must be capable of being attached to all the vices and many virtues.*

As was already explained, Porthos' vanity does not come entirely from his imagination: it has a basis in his own physical and social qualities. Similarly, the extent to which the comic part of his character is capable of being displayed under fresh aspects proves that his comic disposition can be attached to all his vices. He is first and foremost a creature of vanity, it is what defines him; yet this does not make us forget his virtues. Porthos is

certainly a very generous soul who shares his money with his friends whenever he has it. Unlike Bonacieux, he is not an avaricious man, and does not attach undue importance to the value of money: "il [Porthos] avait pendant près de quinze jours encore subvenu aux besoins de tout le monde" (117). But, in a single bet, he gambles away all the money the four of them have. This is comic because of Porthos' character, and it echoes La Rochefoucauld's astute observation that "nos vertus ne sont le plus souvent que des vices déguisés" (La Rochefoucauld, 7).

Given that they are both comic characters, what is the essential difference between Porthos and Bonacieux? Both display rigidity, both display anti-social behavior (in the Bergsonian sense), and both are unaware of their flaws, while to the rest of society they are plainly evident. The one essential difference that separates Porthos from Bonacieux is the fact that the former is likeable and endearing.

Now, we might wonder whether being likeable contradicts the rule that we must detach ourselves from our emotions to find something amusing. According to *le comique bergsonien* we cannot find comic somebody we sympathize with or pity, but this does not mean that we cannot laugh at a character we like, or like a character we laugh at. The spectator can easily suppress his instinct to pity Bonacieux and thus laugh at him, but we do not laugh at Porthos because we pity him. We laugh at Porthos because (a) we realize to what extent his flaw has been exaggerated for comic effect, and (b), despite his vices, he has a great many virtues: loyalty, bravery, generosity, a quick wit, chivalry, etc. Bonacieux has no redeeming qualities to mention.

VII. Professional Rigidity

Whatever the peculiarity observed in the character may be, it should immediately appear as a sort of ready-made category into which the character can fit (Bergson, 135). Moreover, many of these divisions are based on professions, or on the division of labor. Each profession forms certain impressions of its members and their behavior, certain habits and idiosyncrasies which distinguish its members from the rest of society, while at the same time identifying members of the same profession. Bergson defines *le comique professionnel* as "une espèce de comique dont les variétés pourraient être déterminées à l'avance" (136). It is the duty of society to repress separatist tendencies through laughter, in other words, to transform rigidity into malleability, making members of professions a target for the comic writer.

A similar and related aspect is what Bergson calls *l'endurcissement professionnel*, whereby an individual becomes so involved in the functions and constraints of his profession that he ceases to resemble an ordinary member of society, and is defined by his indifference to society's norm. One manifestation of this *endurcissement professionnel* is the use of trade language and jargon in a context where it is seems out of place and therefore comic. Moreover, reasoning is governed by the constraints of the profession, which when applied to everyday situations comes across as strange and amusing.

VIIi. Doctors

One of the most popular targets of the comic writer is doctors. Their perceived professional vanity is ripe for exploiting, and their attitude often seems to be one of treating the patient as though "il avait été créé pour le médecin, et la nature elle-même comme une dépendance de la médecine" (136). Doctors were a favorite target of Molière, who lampooned them in such works as Le malade imaginaire, Le Médecin malgré lui, and L'amour médecin. In L'Avare, Valère sums up the popular opinion of doctors at the time: "Y connaissent-ils quelque chose? Allez, allez, vous pouvez avec eux avoir quel mal vous plaira, il vous trouveront des raisons pour vous dire d'où cela vient" (Molière, 531).

Dumas also displays a similar attitude towards doctors. Commenting on the wounds received by d'Artagnan following his skirmish with Rochefort in Meung, Dumas informs the reader that "grâce sans doute à l'efficacité du baume de Bohême, et peut-être aussi grâce à l'absence de tout docteur, d'Artagnan se trouva sur pied le soir même, et à peu près guéri le lendemain" (55). A similar commentary is found in Vingt ans après, concerning l'abbé Scarron: "on avait alors essayé, par tous les moyens connus, de lui rendre l'usage de ses membres; on l'avait tant fait souffrir du traitement, qu'il avait renvoyé tous les médecins en déclarant qu'il préférait de beaucoup la maladie" (Dumas, Vingt ans après, 285).

The self-importance of doctors and the belief that patients exist to provide them with a livelihood is touched upon when Dumas comments on the behavior of the doctor who arrives to administer aid to the wounded Athos. The most urgent need, in the surgeon's opinion, was not to diagnose the patient, but to have him moved to a private

room: "il [le médecin] fendit la foule, s'approcha d'Athos toujours évanoui, et, comme tout ce bruit et tout ce mouvement le gênait fort, il demanda comme première chose et comme la plus urgente que le mousquetaire fût emporté dans une chambre voisine" (71).

In fact, in the entire novel, there is not a single case of a doctor actually curing or saving anybody: Athos was simply diagnosed by the doctor, d'Artagnan's wound healed thanks to the absence of one, and Porthos' sprained knee was the kind of ailment that would heal with or without a medical diagnosis. When a doctor is needed to tend to Buckingham's wounds, there is none to be found: "en ce moment le médecin du duc arriva tout effaré; il était déjà à bord du vaisseau admiral, on avait été obligé d'aller le chercher là" (567). Overall, Dumas does not paint a flattering picture of the medical profession, and we get the feeling that in his opinion the 17th Century would have been just as well off without doctors.

VIIii. Innkeepers

Another profession that seems to fare badly in the novel is that of innkeepers.[3] There are three honest and honorable innkeepers in the novel, but they turn out to be the exception rather than the rule. The majority of innkeepers seem to be untrustworthy, self-serving, and motivated by greed. In Meung the innkeeper colludes with Rochefort to steal d'Artagnan's letter of recommendation to M. de Tréville. At the *Lis d'Or* d'Artagnan initially remarks that the innkeeper "avait l'air du plus honnête homme de la

[3] For a fuller account of Dumas' treatment of inns and hostelries in Les trois mousquetaires see Christope Mercier's paper "Paris: les auberges dans la trilogie des Mousquetaires", pp. 44-49, Cent cinquante ans après.

terre", but soon after he changes his opinion and decides that "la figure de l'hôte ne me convient pas, elle est trop gracieuse" (224). It turns out that she and her husband had conspired with the Cardinal's soldiers to impede them on their journey to England. Later on, the "hôte perfide" (300) and his wife are duly punished for their duplicity when Athos proceeds to lock himself in their cellar, devouring their food and drinking all their wine. The innkeeper at the *Grand St Martin*, who has the honor of lodging Porthos, fears that he will go bankrupt if he stays with him another week.

In reality, we cannot blame these people for worrying about their livelihood, as it is a legitimate concern for them. Instead, what Dumas is punishing is their greed, and the importance that they attach to money and to material possessions. This vice becomes all the more shameful when contrasted with the musketeers' attitude towards money. For them, money serves only as a medium of exchange: it is a means to acquire things, and it has little, if any intrinsic value. It seems that they have an aversion to holding on to money over a prolonged period of time, as they spend it as quickly as they receive it. They have no care for losing what money they have, judging by how frivolously they gamble it away (117, 276, 313, 316), and they have little difficulty selling their possessions (such as the ring given to d'Artagnan by the Queen) when their pockets become empty once more. When they do come into money, it is shared equally among them, illustrating the motto "All for one, and one for all". This attitude comes across as far more appealing than the rapacious materialism of the innkeepers.

VIIiii. Ecclesiastics

When we think of *l'endurcissement professionnel* no profession in this novel better typifies this than the clergy. The constraints of their profession, or vocation, do not allow them to resemble ordinary people, and leads to their rigidity. Aramis stands apart from the other musketeers due to his religious background. He was raised by the clergy and his plan to enter the priesthood was temporarily put on hold while he became a Musketeer. Throughout the novel he keeps stating that his vocation is the priesthood and that he is only a soldier for the interim: "Mousquetaire par intérim [...] contre mon gré, mais l'homme d'Église dans le coeur" (113). By the social standard of the other musketeers, Aramis is a disaster: "C'était le plus mauvais mousquetaire et le plus méchant convive qui se pût voir" (114). Unlike the others, he never seems entirely comfortable as a musketeer.

Often he appears to be superficially and expressly pious, which separates him from Porthos, Athos, and d'Artagnan (not that they are not religious, just that they are not overly so). When Athos inquires of Porthos whether he believes in ghosts, he replies, very pragmatically, that he does not believe in what he has not seen. Aramis replies: "La Bible [...] nous fait une loi d'y croire: l'ombre de Samuel apparaît à Saul, et c'est un article de foi que je serais faché de mettre en doute, Porthos" (125). His *endurcissement professionnel* forces him to behave like an ecclesiastic, rather than as a man in the company of friends.

The use of professional jargon is touched upon briefly, as we see when d'Artagnan, speaking of the surfeit of wine available to them, provokes the following

response: "il faut user et non abuser, dit sentencieusement Aramis" (126). However, we soon discover that Aramis is not as devoted to the Church and his religious ideals as he would have us believe. Often his piety is a front for clandestine assignations with his various mistresses.

In Chapter XXVI, "La thèse d'Aramis", the *comique professionnel* is highlighted, not only in Aramis's behavior, but also in that of the *curé* and the Jesuit. Further proof that Aramis is entrenched in *l'endurcissement professionnel* is his insistence on speaking Latin, when only one of the other three present can understand it. In this case, we can term Latin a professional jargon, as its use certainly sets the speaker apart from the rest of the society. The trivial and abstruse nature of his thesis shows how rigid the profession appears to be, that its members would concern themselves with hypothetical and esthetic matters, whilst seemingly oblivious to everyday life. All three mechanically make the sign of the cross, as though unable to escape the limitations of their profession (286). Aramis' rigidity extends to his diet; he informs d'Artagnan that he cannot eat meat because it is Friday, and that all he can offer his friend is vegetables and fruit: "dans un pareil jour, je ne puis voir, ni manger de la chair. Si vous voulez vous contenter de mon dîner, il se compose de tétragones cuits et fruits" (289). However, news that Mme de Chevreuse still shares his affection allows him to escape the pretence of zealotry, showing that his behavior was just a front for his melancholy.

The Jesuit and *le curé* are anything but ordinary men. Dumas refers to them as "hommes noirs" (284, 285, 288), so indistinguishable are they from the uniform which identifies them with their profession. The Jesuit seems incapable of understanding any argument that is not in strict accordance with the scriptures; he finds Aramis' thesis

original and therefore Jansenist and heretical (286). He does not reason, he simply regurgitates what he has read or heard.

The *curé* is an even more pathetic figure and a more damning indictment of the clergy. He lacks the Jesuit's education and does not understand a word of the Latin that he and Aramis say, and he is not intelligent enough to have a reasoned opinion about the thesis; he is forced to live on his meager wits and contradict or agree wherever he can in the hope of saying something important. Dumas reduces him to a fool who perfunctorily repeats what the Jesuit says, without really understanding what he is uttering: "Admirable ou dogmatique! répéta le curé, qui, de la force de d'Artagnan à peu près sur le latin, surveillait soigneusement le jésuite pour emboîter le pas avec lui et répéter ses paroles comme un écho" (285).

VIIiv. D'Artagnan and Grimaud

D'Artagnan also exhibits traits of professional rigidity: for example, in the scene in which he is about to leave the Duke of Buckingham's residence. Here, the Duke thanks d'Artagnan for all his help and wishes him all the best: normally we would expect a display of appreciation and reciprocal friendship, yet d'Artagnan shows himself to be incapable of shedding the clothes of his profession, i.e. soldier of the King of France: "Nous nous quitterons bons amis, je l'espère. Oui, Milord, mais avec l'espérance de devenir ennemis bientôt" (238).

Grimaud, Athos' lackey, is so backed into the confines of his duties that he refuses to speak or do anything without prior authority from his master. So servile and obedient is he that he even swallows a letter when ordered to do so (504). (His rigidity

becomes even more exaggerated during the episode of de Beaufort's imprisonment in Vingt ans après.)

VIII. Disguise

The notion of disguise, through anachronistic clothing or the dress of the opposite sex, is, according to Bergson, a source of comedy (31). There is a single instance of disguise for comic effect in Les trois mousquetaires, and that centers around d'Artagnan's escape from Milady. In order to escape her he is forced to flee her room, leaving his clothes behind him. To cover his nakedness he borrows clothes from Ketty, flees Milady's residence and makes his way to Athos' house: "Athos reconnut son camarade, et, tout flegmatique qu'il était, il partit d'un éclat de rire que motivait bien la mascarade étrange qu'il avait sous les yeux: coiffes de travers, jupes tombantes sur les souliers, manches retroussées et moustaches raides d'émotion" (390). It is the juxtaposition of the feminine – skirts, petticoats, etc. – with the masculine, i.e. the mustache. As we have already seen, d'Artagnan is a strong masculine character, and to have him compromise this, even if just for a short time, is undeniably comic.

Comedy, we are told, depicts characters we have already come across and shall meet again; it takes note of similarities, and if necessary creates new types (Bergson, 128). Not that the comic types we have met here are all original, many of them are inspired by comic predecessors – Bonacieux by Harpagon, Porthos by Miles Gloriosus, Molière's doctors, etc. – yet they impart a certain uniqueness in their manifestation of

certain vices and virtues that makes them memorable, if not seminal. "La vanité, cette forme supérieure du comique, est un élément que nous sommes portés à rechercher minutieusement, quoique inconsciemment, dans toutes les manifestations de l'activité humaine" (Bergson, 134). Vanity has inspired the creation of many comic characters before Porthos, but he personifies a certain incarnation of that vice, which is so distinct and so unforgettable that it becomes eponymous with him.

In the case of most of the characters we laugh at and laugh with in the novel, Dumas identifies an essential aspect of *le comique bergsonien*, i.e. that which makes us laugh is that which is human and reminds us of our own human behavior. All characters have vices, but it is the way Dumas chooses to emphasize or underplay these failings that defines the comic disposition of each character. For the purposes of comedy, the reader's sensibility or insensibility to each character seems to be manipulated by the author: the reader may despise or delight in the malevolence of Milady, that is a question of the reader's personality, but what is certain is that we will not laugh at her. This demonstrates the author's power over his characters, as well as his, to a certain extent, his influence over the reader.

Chapter III: The Comic in Situations

Often it is difficult to decide whether a scene or incident is comic because of the situation being described, or because of the way it is described. More often than not it is a combination of both. Many of the scenes cited from this novel belong both to the categories of the comic in situations and to the comic in words. What results in the following two chapters is a certain overlapping, which is understandable given the ambiguity and duality regarding the reasons why certain scenes or passages are comic. However, whether the examples or scenes chosen fit into one category or the other is of minor importance, as what matters is understanding the comic value of the novel in question, and that is the major objective of the following chapters.

As was explained in the previous chapter, Les trois mousquetaires is neither a farce, nor is it a wholly serious adventure, entirely devoid of humor. Just as the characters in this novel vary between essentially comic types, semi-comic characters and entirely "uncomic" characters, so does the structure of the novel vary; Les trois mousquetaires is neither a pantomime, nor a rigidly serious historical novel.

The novel appears to have been structured in such as way as to achieve light, comic relief by the placing of comic scenes between the serious adventures of the main plot. The comic scenes can be categorized in accordance with their degree of comic content, and in relation to their importance to the main plot. The main section of the novel whose theme is essentially comic, and which provides a respite from the main action and intrigue, consists of chapters XXV through XXIX, and chapter XXXII. Of

course, other sections intermingle both serious action of the plot and comic situations, but these five chapters can be classified as comic and light relief from the intrigue.

Bergson's theory of *le comique* in situations and in language is less satisfying in its application to this novel than is his theory of the comic in character. One might wonder why this is the case: possibly, it is because the principles and tenets that make a character comic apply equally well to all genres of literature. However, in the case of situations and actions, Bergson refers most often to examples from the theatre, in particular to farce and burlesque comedy. The novels to which he does make reference have a strong comic character as the book's hero, e.g. Don Quixote, and Gargantua and Pantagruel. The overwhelming majority of examples chosen to illustrate his theory come from essentially comic works, which consequently have less adventure and greater liberty to manufacture humorous situations than does Les trois mousquetaires. Action on stage can be contrived relatively easily to produce comic effects, situations can be manipulated with much greater liberty, and the spectator can suspend his disbelief with much greater ease than is the case with a historical novel. For these reasons the theory of the comic in situations is less relevant to this novel than one might hope.

Yet, this does not make Bergson's observations in these areas redundant, inapplicable, or irrelevant; nor does it mean that there are no comic situations worthy of examination and analysis. His theories do apply to the comic situations in Les trois mousquetaires, perhaps not as much as one might hope but they are certainly important enough to allow an analysis of *le comique* in situations and actions in this novel.

"La comédie est bien un jeu, un jeu qui imite la vie" (Bergson, 52). Childhood games, we are told, have a significant influence on comic situations: Bergson applies the analogy of the puppet-master and the marionette to the writer manipulating his characters, making them perform in a mechanical manner. "Est comique tout arrangement d'actes et d'événements qui nous donne, insérées l'une dans l'autre, l'illusion de la vie et la sensation nette d'un agencement mécanique" (53). In this case, rather than acting as though a robot, *mécanique* suggests characters in an ambiguous state, halfway between puppets and free-thinking, free-acting individuals.

I. Repetition

The first child's game referred to is the *diable-à-ressort*: the essence of this game lies in the fact that there are two stubborn elements, one mechanical (*le diable*) and a second element, the child, who continually pushes the jack back into the box, exhibiting a stubborn force resisting its continual appearance. The essential element to take from the jack-in-the-box is the notion of repetition: Bergson notes that repetition of a word is never laughable, *per se*; what makes it comic is the fact that is symbolizes a play of moral elements, which itself is the symbol of a material diversion (55). Word repetition is comic because it adheres to the following tenet: "Dans une répétition comique des mots il y a généralement deux termes en présence, un sentiment comprimé qui se détend comme un ressort, et une idée qui s'amuse à comprimer de nouveau le sentiment" (56).

The example given is possibly the most famous, i.e. that of Orgon repeating "Et Tartuffe?" when being informed of his wife's health. Although there is no instance of the repetition of a single word in Les trois mousquetaires, that element of repetition which follows the above tenet and produces a notable comic effect is certainly present. In chaper XXVII, "La Thèse d'Aramis", repetition is provided by the *curé*. The repressed feeling and the idea that continually represses this feeling originate in the *curé*'s vanity and fear: in order to appear more learned and important than he actually is, he mechanically repeats everything the Jesuit says. It is this vanity, coupled with the fear of having his ignorance exposed to all present, which leads to behavior that is embarrassing and comic. In a certain sense, it bears a similarity to the fable of the frog and the ox, wherein the desire to be something that he is not, fuelled by his vanity, leads the frog to be the subject of ridicule.

In this scene Dumas presents a man floundering hopelessly, completely out of depth with regard to his understanding of and contribution to the debate unfolding around him. The *curé*'s vain refusal to be humble and admit his ignorance leads the reader to lose any initial sympathy he may have for him, thus allowing the reader to fund humor in the character's embarrassment and humiliation, and paving the way for laughter to occur. From another perspective the jack-in-the-box analogy can be seen in the *curé*'s stubborn refusal to betray his own vanity, and the author repeatedly creating situations for the priest's stubbornness to manifest itself. The following series of exchanges demonstrates the above points:

> "Admirable sujet!, s'écria le jésuite. Admirable et dogmatique! répéta le curé, qui, de la force de d'Artagnan à peu près sur le latin, surveillait

> soigneusement le jésuite pour emboîter le pas avec lui et répéter ses paroles comme un écho [...] Voyez quel exorde! s'écria le jésuite. *Exordium,* répéta le curé pour dire quelque chose [...] Imposez les mains, et non pas la main. Imposez les mains, répéta le curé en faisant un geste [...] Vous penchez vers les fausses doctrines, mon jeune ami, vous vous perdrez! Vous vous perdrez, dit le curé en secouant douloureusement la tête [...] Regretter le monde, c'est regretter le diable; voilà ma conclusion. C'est la mienne aussi, dit le curé [...] Le jésuite se leva ses bras au ciel, et le curé en fit autant [...] Un rondeau! fit dédaigneusement le jésuite. Un rondeau! dit machinalement le curé [...] *Severus sit clericorum sermo.* Oui, que le sermon soit clair, dit le curé." (Dumas, 285-288).

This constant repetition reflects the mechanization of life, the rigidity of the *curé* in refusing to drop his pretence of understanding; more importantly, it shows that actual life is comedy in so far as it produces, in a genuine fashion, actions similar to those of real life.

II. Coincidences and Great Expectations

The snowball effect is a series of events which, at the outset appear to have little consequence, but whose importance becomes more apparent with each related occurrence, ending up with an outcome which is a culmination of all the events which have lead to it. In other words, it can be seen as, "faire beaucoup de chemin pour

revenir, sans le savoir, au point de départ, c'est fournir un grand effort pour un résultat nul" (65). Bergson invokes Kant, who stated that, "Le rire vient d'une attente qui se résout subitement en rien" (*ibid*). This theory of unfulfilled expectations lies at the heart of what is perhaps the comic scene *par excellence* of the novel, that is Porthos' dinner at the procurator's house. (This will be examined in greater depth later on.)

"Le mécanisme raide que nous surprenons de temps à l'autre, comme un intrus, dans la vivante continuité des choses humaines, a pour nous un intérêt tout particulier, parce qu'il est comme une *distraction* de la vie" (66). According to Bergson, were this absentmindedness not present, coincidences, such a rich source of comedy, would seldom occur. Coincidences are abundant in Les trois mousquetaires, for example in the case of the fate of d'Artagnan's horse, *Bouton d'Or*.

III. Repetition, Inversion, and Reciprocal Interference of Series

In the case of mechanization of life, Bergson identifies three principal manifestations employed by the comic writer: repetition, inversion, and the reciprocal interference of series. Repetition, in this instance, is not the repetition of words as analyzed in the scene with the *curé*; rather, it refers to a combination of circumstances that occur several times in their original form, providing a contrast with the perpetually changing stream of life. In the case of inversion, a reversal of roles, and of situation is comic: this may occur, as pointed out by Bergson, in the case of the villain who becomes a victim of his own foul play, or a cheat who suddenly finds himself the victim of duplicity. Dumas employs this stratagem when the money given by Richelieu to

Bonacieux to encourage spying on his wife is used by d'Artagnan to finance the expedition to London which brings about the duping of the Cardinal, and also when the *carte blanche* he has given to Milady is used by the musketeers to execute her with complete impunity.

However, the effect is slight, and hardly uproarious. It is more satisfying when this principle is used in Porthos' attempt to procure money from the procurator's wife under false pretences: instead of receiving two becoming horses for himself and Mousqueton, he is given two nags, and thus duped by old Coquenard. (This will be treated in greater detail later in this chapter.)

The reciprocal interference of series (le *quiproquo*), in other words the comic misunderstanding, is a stock comic device and a plentiful source of comedy. Sadly, there are no such instances in the novel. The only instance of any significance in the novel which features misunderstanding occurs when Athos, mistaken for d'Artagnan, is brought to the Bastille and plays along with the pretence of being who the guards believe him to be. Although amusing, it is not typical of the theatrical *quid pro quos* cited by Bergson (74). In the following section the comic situations in the novel are examined to explore to what extent Bergson's theory of laughter applies to them, and where it does not to see what exactly makes the scene comic.

IV. Comic Situations

IVi. Duels with the musketeers

The first comic situation we encounter is at Meung, where d'Artagnan arrives to find himself and his horse the subject of mockery. The action unfolds as follows: d'Artagnan, brash and truculent, arrives in the town on his *bidet béarnais*. So unflattering and unusual is the horse that it and its owner become the subject of ridicule from those around. D'Artagnan, determined to seek satisfaction, challenges the culprit to a duel: the young Gascon loses, has his sword broken and letter of recommendation stolen. The scene does not fall into the category of inversion, repetition, inversion of series, so why exactly is it comic? It owes its comic value to the following: firstly, the description of the horse, and secondly, the behavior of d'Artagnan. D'Artagnan's behavior was examined in the previous chapter, and the description of the horse belongs to the comic in words, i.e. the following chapter. Of course, rigidity is ever-present here, characterized by d'Artagnan's inelastic conduct.

The snowball effect is described as: "un effet qui se propage en s'ajoutant à lui-même, de sorte que la cause, insignifiante à l'origine, aboutit par un progrès nécessaire à un résultat aussi important qu'inattendu" (62). The essential ingredients of the snowball effect can be found in the series of events ending in d'Artagnan's duel with the three musketeers. Through three separate but complementary incidents, d'Artagnan, just hours after arriving in Paris, sets in motion a chain of events which leads to a comic *dénouement* or outcome, that is, having to duel Athos, Porthos, and Aramis on the same day, one following the other.

Each of the three incidents has its own comic personality, and all three will be examined separately to see how they combine synergistically to produce this snowball effect. The first incident, where d'Artagnan bumps into Athos and shouts an apology at him on his way out of the building, owes its comic value to character more than anything else. D'Artagnan, unable to think of anything other than his desire to seek retribution from Rochefort, does not take the time necessary to look around and adapt himself to the present reality; in other words, he is guilty of rigidity. Athos, too, however, seems to be unable to break free from the character of musketeer, and finds it necessary to challenge d'Artagnan to a duel simply because he feels his apology to be insufficient.

The second encounter derives its comic value from Porthos' character, as do most situations involving him, but also from the events which unfold. When we first encounter Porthos, his shoulder-sash is described in resplendent detail, and the reader can discern that the wearer is immensely proud of it and of its effect on others. It transpires that, like much else in Porthos's life that is either a lie or greatly exaggerated, the *baudrier* is not all that it appears to be: "comme la plupart des choses de ce monde qui n'ont pour elles que l'apparence, le baudrier était d'or par devant et de simple buffe par derrière" (Dumas, 78). The image of d'Artagnan getting caught up in Porthos' coat, frantically trying to free himself while the other battles obstinately to hold onto it, lest the shoulder-sash be exposed, is undeniably funny. It owes its comic value to struggle between two stubborn elements battling against each other, as with the jack-in-the-box. What is also comic is the idea of two honorable and respectable soldiers behaving in such an unbecoming and unexpected manner; it could be suggested that this

demonstrates rigidity, i.e. the fact that neither is conforming to his role as defined by society.

The final encounter derives much of its comic sentiment from character, this time in the form of Aramis' inelastic behavior. Of course, the scene also owes a great deal to the fact that it succeeds two incidents of a similar nature – forming part of the snowballing of events – and to d'Artagnan's inability to do the right thing. Bergson writes that a character's inability or unwillingness to look around himself and change is a source of rigidity, and thus of comedy. But it is the fact that d'Artagnan, realizing the mistakes of his previous encounters and doing his best not to repeat them, still manages to antagonize Aramis and get himself into even more trouble, that makes us laugh. D'Artagnan says to himself: "si tu en réchappes, ce qui n'est pas probable, il s'agit d'être à l'avenir d'une politesse parfaite" (80), but it is this resolution to be more polite in future that is the cause of his dispute with Aramis.

What all three incidents have in common is d'Artagnan's rigidity, and the fact that he has not, as Aramis points out, "agi en cette circonstance comme un galant homme le devait faire" (82). The irony is that he has come to Paris to become a gallant gentleman, but his pursuit of Rochefort sidetracks him temporarily and prevents him from being so. The series of events leading to d'Artagnan fighting three duels in immediate succession, just after having arrived in Paris, is absurd and an affront to common sense, but even though it is improbable, it is possible enough to resemble real life and for the reader to find it comic. We shall discuss this further later on, but for now let us return to the consequences of d'Artagnan selling *Bouton d'Or*.

Despite being asked by his father not to sell the horse, the first thing that d'Artagnan does upon arriving in Paris is sell the *bidet béarnais*. (He was ridiculed because of it and his vanity, possibly, is the principal reason for getting rid of the horse.) Later on, when everybody has long since forgotten about the horse, it turns up in Porthos' possession. According to Bergson, to go to a great deal of effort only to come back inadvertently to the point of departure, or to expend a huge effort for no significant result, is a source of comedy (65). Similarly, Porthos makes a great effort to endear himself to la Coquenard in order to procure from her money and supplies he needs to equip himself and his lackey, in a style far more extravagant than is necessary.

His greed is an integral factor in his being duped, which is what Bergson terms the "voleur volé" syndrome, or, in this case, the cheater cheated. "Porthos sourit: on se souvient qu'il avait la selle qui lui venait de Buckingham, c'était donc trois cent livres qu'il comptait mettre sournoisement dans sa poche" (351-352). Expecting to receive two magnificent steeds from M. Coquenard, a valise full of accoutrements, a new harness, and other essential object, all of which will be paid for by the old man, Porthos leaves with an air of great expectation. However, his hopes are completely dashed when, instead of receiving these two fine beasts, the following transpires:

> "elle [la Coquenard] nous avait forcé d'accepter un petit souvenir, un magnifique gênet d'Espagne et un mulet d'andalou [...] le mari a appris la chose, il a confisqué au passage les deux magnifiques bêtes qu'on nous envoyait, et il leur a substitué ces horribles animaux" (366-367).

Porthos finds himself the victim of his own deception, and instead of deceiving M. Coquenard and being greatly rewarded for his conniving, it is Porthos who is cheated, and whose hopes are dashed.

IVii. The search for the musketeers

Another instance of the snowball effect can be seen in chapters XXV through XXIX, which recount d'Artagnan's tracking down of his three comrades and their subsequent return to Paris. As was the case with the duels, each incident leading up to the culminating event is individually comic. Each will be examined in sequence to see why each has comic value.

The first chapter deals with Porthos: his vanity leads him to fabricate a story to explain his sprained knee, and so far from the truth is this story that we cannot but find his behavior comic. He ensconces himself in the best room in the inn, refuses to pay the innkeeper for his stay, and has his lackey steal and poach to keep him in the style to which he is accustomed. This chapter owes its comic value, for the most part, to the character of Porthos. One should also bear in mind that it unleashes a series of events ending with a final comic situation. Mousqueton stealing food from the landlord's cellar is another example of the "voleur volé", as the landlord was trying to cheat them by offering them "un tas de grosses viandes bonnes pour des manants" for dinner (278). The same is true of the owners of the *Grand St Martin*, who are punished for betraying Athos and d'Artagnan when on their way to England.

From here we proceed to Aramis and his thesis. This scene, as we have already learned, owes its comic value to the professional rigidity of Aramis and the

ecclesiastics. There is no reason to dwell further on this chapter apart from pointing out that it is an important link in a chain of events leading to a comic outcome. The same can be said of the following chapter concerning Athos. In the previous chapter of this essay, "The Comic in Character", it was explained that our expectation of Athos, based on his actions and repute up to this point, made his behavior at the *Lis d'Or* all the more surprising and comic.

What is worth further examination is the following chapter which recounts the gambling fortunes of Athos and d'Artagnan, a chapter which really starts the ball rolling as regards the snowball effect of their fiscal fortunes. As the adventure begins, d'Artagnan has returned from a successful journey to England, where he has managed to warn Buckingham of the Queen's predicament and thus help her escape the trap set for her by the Cardinal. In return for his valor he has received an expensive diamond ring from the Queen, and four fully equipped horses from Buckingham for himself and his friends. This sudden wealth is gradually eroded, and under Athos's influence his prosperity fluctuates alarmingly.

Upon awaking early, Athos ventures downstairs and proceeds to wager with the English travelers. He soon loses the horse d'Artagnan had given him; then wins back the *carapaçon*, but loses d'Artagnan's horse. He then loses all the saddles and equipment, divides d'Artagnan's diamond into ten pieces and subsequently loses them all. He then divides Grimaud (example of the absurd) in a similar fashion and with this ante manages to win back the diamond. Then through a series of fluctuating fortunes he continued to win and lose, finally ending up with possession of both harnesses, but no horses carry them. He then encourages d'Artagnan to try his luck of the dice and bet the

travelers the harnesses for a horse or 100 pistolets; he wins the bet with a throw of three and took the 100 pistolets (Athos having convinced him of the inferiority of English horses).

Following this scene the reader is confronted with the image of d'Artagnan and Athos travelling on their lackeys' horses, then getting down from them and walking the horses into Crèvecoeur where they are met by Aramis (Planchet and Grimaud being forced to carry the saddles and hitch a ride in a wagon). This could be seen as an example of inversion, that is the masters leading the horses, playing the role of their lackeys.

Then we come to the crescendo that all previous events have been leading up to: having rid themselves of their English horses they end up unknowingly eating them, Porthos having prepared them for a meal. This is another example of absurdity, considering the verisimilitude and likelihood of the occurrences; secondly, it is an example of the snowball effect of comic progression; and to a certain extent it can be seen as expectation (of the wondrous meal) ending up at nothing. They end up losing most of what d'Artagnan started out with, but due to their insouciance concerning money and material possessions it is simply a minor setback that will soon be rectified.

IViii. The Bastion of Saint-Gervais

An interesting comic scene is the one where the musketeers and Grimaud have breakfast in the bastion of Saint-Gervais. It starts out as a means of holding a conversation in private, as well as duping other soldiers – the hapless Swiss guard included – and winning a dinner from them in a bet. They take a hamper with them to

the site of the bloody battle of the previous day and eat while discussing plans for dealing with Milady. While there, they notice the enemy approaching in an attempt to besiege the bastion. The musketeers find this annoying and troublesome: "rien n'est désagréable comme d'être dérangé quand on déjeune" (458). They manage to crush the attack through the use of superior cunning, including the use of cadavers as decoys, and this episode ends up with most of the enemy being either shot or crushed. All five return to a hero's welcome to partake of their hard-won meal. So what makes this scene comic?

One aspect is transposition from the solemn to the familiar, i.e., from death and war to the ennui of being disturbed whilst eating. Secondly, laughter is incompatible with emotion. Seen from an entirely different perspective, the scene recounts the bloody nature of religious conflict and the high price paid in human lives. Yet the episode is "dehumanized" in order not to incite our emotions. The dead bodies in the bastion become "une douzaine de morts tant Français que Rochelois" (455); despite the near annihilation of the besieging Huguenots, Dumas manages to avoid engaging the readers' sympathy. The battle is reduced to a trifling inconvenience getting in the way of eating breakfast. What we are confronted with is cartoon violence, i.e., violence without serious consequences. When the remaining soldiers are crushed by the fallen wall, the survivors are made to appear less than human, being described as "trois ou quatre de ces malheureux, couverts de boue et de sang" (462). This reduces their injuries and the death of their colleagues to a misfortune, rather than to a tragedy. From one perspective one may find the use of corpses as decoys to be thoroughly distasteful, and if that is the case laughter will certainly not be the result. But Dumas avoids this by

dehumanizing them (we can only laugh at what is human), sucking the life out of them and reducing them to inanimate objects, to unidentifiable cadavers. They become mere pawns, serving to accentuate the comic bravado and insouciance of the musketeers. Similarly, the attacking soldiers are not known to us, they are devoid of personality and we are given little reason to empathize with them. Instead of the siege being an emotional bloodbath, it is never elevated above that of a farcical spectacle, a stage for "l'heureuse forfanterie des quatre amis" (467). This situation is comic, not tragic: tragedy deals with individuals, and these victims are faceless soldiers (Bergson, 127). Finally, one can speak of rigidity in this scene, rigidity in the sense that the musketeers choose not to live in the present reality, but rather in some imaginary state where eating breakfast in peace and privacy are more important than human life.

IViv. Porthos' meal

Arguably, the most comically rich scene in the novel is chapter XXXII "Un dîner de procureur", and it is hardly surprising that it features the novel's comic character, Porthos. He starts the day full of expectations of what he will be able to trick M. Coquenard into giving him: "son coeur battait [...] il allait enfin franchir ce seuil mystérieux, gravir cet escalier inconnu qu'avaient monté un à un les vieux écus de maître Coquenard" (345). What follows is a prime example of great expectations leading to nothing. Having dreamed about the money *chez* Coquenard, he expects the meal to be equally rich and generous. He enters the house under false pretences, that of being a cousin of Mme Coquenard, in an attempt to swindle money out of her feeble old

husband; he hopes to find "une maison montée sur un pied flatteur" (346), but is soon disappointed.

The anticipation builds gradually, and so too does the realization that things are not going to turn out quite as he had hoped. His first doubts set in when on arriving he found the alleyway "puante et noire, escalier mal éclairé par des barreaux au travers desquels filtrait le jour gris d'une cour voisine" (*ibid*). (It would seem that he actually began to believe the lies he told about his mistress's fortune.) However, his hopes are temporarily restored when he sees that there are clerks: he reasons that any house that can afford to feed and lodge three clerks must have a great deal to offer.

Porthos then meets the old procurator; it turns out that he is not as ignorant of Porthos' schemes as he believed. His wife has told him that Porthos is a cousin, but it is evident that he does not believe a word of the lie, and then sets about toying with the musketeer. Porthos is then played like a fiddle by Coquenard, who invites him to dine with them. He sits down at the table full of expectation at the bounty awaiting him. The comic value of the situation is heightened by the feverish expectation and subsequent disappointment of the clerks, who are unaccustomed to the culinary odors permeating the house:

> "Les clercs, qui, à ce qu'il paraît, avaient senti dans la maison des parfums inaccoutumés, étaient d'une exactitude militaire, et tenaient en main leurs tabourets, tout prêts qu'ils étaient à s'asseoir. On les voyait d'avance remuer les mâchoires avec des dispositions effrayantes" (348).

Seeing the emaciated condition of the clerks Porthos begins to realize that things will not go to plan.

Porthos' disappointment at the paltry offering becomes the clerks' disappointment: "les clercs ne furent pas dupes de cette supercherie, et les mines lugubres devinrent des visages résignés" (349). M. Coquenard is truly reveling in the collective disappointment and continues to tease Porthos; he calls the meal a "véritable festin, epulae epularum; Lucullus dîne chez Lucullus" (350). Porthos then seeks revenge by endeavouring to cheat the procurator out of more money and possessions than he really needs; he believes that he has managed to acquire two wonderful horses, one for himself and the other for Mousqueton, as well as the very finest saddles, harnesses and accessories.

However, as has already been explained, M. Coquenard cheats the cheater by replacing the two magnificent steeds with horses fit for the slaughterhouse. There are sources of comedy in this scene other than that of the "voleur volé", for example the behavior of Porthos and of Coquenard, but most importantly the comic in words, i.e., the author's description of things and events, as well as his remarkably fecund wit.

As was stated at the start of this chapter, the comic in words and the comic in situations are very close, and often overlap: it is difficult to say whether a comic scene owes more to the situation or to the author's skillful use of language. In the following chapter we shall treat the comic in words, and cover many of the examples we have chosen for this chapter. For example, the chapter of the meal at the Coquenard's house is an undeniably comic situation, but it would be impossible to examine that scene fully if we neglected the author's use of language, and the brilliant wit found therein.

Chapter IV: The Comic in Words

As is the case with the "The Comic in Situations", applying *le comique bergsonien* to this novel does not yield results as satisfying as one might hope. The reasons for this are similar to those outlined in the previous chapter, and if it was somewhat disappointing then, it is doubly so in this case, considering the importance of the comedic words and language in Dumas's writing.

Dumas was renowned for his wit, not just in his writings but in his daily discourse. In 18th and 19th Century France, a witty retort could crush an adversary with the force of a hammer, and many unlucky individuals found themselves the victim of Dumas' wit. Bell writes of him that, "no man of his time, and not many of other times, had such a gift for repartee. His returns and ripostes, puns, wordy assaults and witty innuendoes, flashed keen and pointed like a swordsman's lunge" (Bell, 175), and goes on to quote Villemessant, a journalist of the time, who described Dumas as "the man of wit par excellence in a Paris celebrated for its wit" (165). It would appear that Dumas was to Paris in the first half of the Nineteenth Century what Wilde was to London society in the latter half of the 1800s.

There is no reason why this novel should not be replete with examples of this famous flair for words, and it certainly is, however, the comic in language encountered in Les trois mousquetaires does not always strictly follow Bergson's theories in this area. This does not in any way detract from the abundance of wit and the mastery of comedy in this novel.

I. The Comic Created by Language and the Comic Expressed by Language

Early in the section "Le comique des mots" Bergson distinguishes between "le comique que le langage exrprime et celui que le langage crée" (79). The comic expressed through language, we are told, can be translated form one language to another, although possibly losing some of its essence along the way, whereas the comic created by language cannot be translated and owes its being to the sentence structure and the words used. It is the latter distinction, that of the comic created by language, to which Bergson refers in Le Rire. Therefore, it is unfortunate that many of the theories that follow from this distinction do not have a great deal of relevance to the novel in question.

One might wonder why this is so, and the most obvious explanation is that Les trois mousquetaires follows the first kind of comic, i.e. the comic expressed by language, which is more or less ignored in Bergson's analysis. Puns and plays on words were no stranger to Dumas or to his work, but they play little or no part in this novel. One finds satire, humor, wit, etc., in abundance in the novel; however, most often the use of these comic devices is most relevant to this analysis if approached from a more general standpoint than via the somewhat restrictive definitions put forth by Bergson. Not that what he describes as *le comique des mots et du langage* is irrelevant to this analysis – certainly there are cases where his theory sheds light on the comic value of the novel – but to achieve an appreciation of the comic in words one must approach this novel from a slightly different angle.

More often than not it is impossible to state whether something is comic because of what is expressed or how it is expressed; usually it is due to a combination of the two. For the purposes of this analysis *le comique que le langage crée* will be limited to those instances where the comic value is dependent on syntax or on the words employed, as in the use of the *calembour* and the *jeu de mots*. The comic created by language may have less importance to Les trois mousquetaires than one might hope, but this does not mean that it has no relevance whatsoever. As was the case with the comic in situations, scenes may become comic through inversion, repetition, or reciprocal interference of series.

Ii. Inversion

Inversion is, according to Bergson, the least interesting of the three. He cites the example of a Labiche comedy where inversion is used to refute an idea previously expressed, whereby the words and syntax are inverted to use the sentence against the person who uttered it. The example given concerns a neighbor who criticizes the resident in the apartment above for emptying his pipe onto his balcony every day; the resident retorts that he should desist from placing his balcony below his pipe.

A similar, but not identical example is found in Les trois mousquetaires. The innkeeper at the *Grand Saint Martin* complains to d'Artagnan about the cost of lodging Porthos and his lackey at his inn. In defense of his friend d'Artagnan says: "j'ai toujours remarqué dans Mousqueton un devouement et une intelligence très supérieurs", to which the innkeeper replies: "mais supposez qu'il m'arrive seulement quatre fois par an

de me trouver en contact avec une intelligence et un dévouement semblables, et je suis un homme ruiné" (275).

A similar example takes place in chapter XXVIII, "Le Retour", and concerns a rondeau that Aramis is composing, consisting entirely of lines of one syllable. Remarking that "le mérite en toutes choses est dans la difficulté", to which D'Artagnan retorts, "ajoutez au mérite de la difficulté celui de la brièveté, et vous êtes sûr au moins que votre poème aura deux mérites" (318).

II. Le Comique et le Spirituel

Bergson distinguishes between *le comique* and *le spirituel*, defining *le comique* as that which makes us laugh at the person saying it, whereas *le spirituel* makes us laugh at ourselves or at a third party. This definition may appear valid and practicable in theory, however, in practice it becomes almost unworkable. It seems that Bergson himself is unconvinced by it: just after making the distinction he asserts: "le plus souvent nous ne saurons décider si le mot est comique ou spirituel. Il est risible simplement" (80).

Later on he puts forth a "formule pharmaceutique" for analyzing every witty remark. After boldly stating that every witticism can be examined and dissected, Bergson offers the following formula: "prenez le mot, épaissez-le d'abord en scène jouée, cherchez ensuite la catégorie comique à laquelle cette scène appartiendrait: vous réduirez ainsi le mot d'esprit à ses plus simples éléments et vous aurez l'explication complète" (82). It this sounds too good to be true, that's because it is. After a somewhat

unconvincing example the reader is instructed to disregard what he has just read when Bergson explains that, "chercher directement la formule d'esprit, c'est aller à un échec certain" (84). With such apparent uncertainly and ambiguity as to what exactly wit is, it may be safer to stick with the general definition and work from there. Le Petit Robert defines wit as: "ingéniosité dans la façon de concevoir et d'exposer quelque chose" (620). The OED gives the following definition: "quickness of intellect, liveliness of fancy, with capacity of apt expression, talent for saying brilliant or sparkling things, especially in an amusing way" (422).

III. Vignettes and Satire

Bergson refines his definition of wit by dividing it into two types or categories. The first category, the broader definition of wit, is a certain dramatic way of thinking where the comic writer, instead of treating his ideas as mere symbols, makes them converse with one another like people. The second definition, the narrower one, defines wit as, "une certaine disposition à esquisser en passant des scènes de comédie, mais à les esquisser si discrètement, si legèrement, si rapidement, que tout est déjà fini quand nous commençons à nous en apercevoir" (81). Not that this is the definition that will be adhered to throughout this chapter, but it is interesting to see to what extent the narrower definition of with applies to this analysis of the comic in words. This ability to sketch out a comic scene with subtlety, discretion, and alacrity can certainly be applied to the vignettes in Les trois mousquetaires.

Firstly, the tale of Richelieu's chancellor, Des Roches le Masle. The story goes as follows: in his turbulent youth Des Roches retired to a monastery where he hoped to escape his hitherto uncontrollable passions. These passions lead the superiors to believe that the young man was possessed, and thus set about freeing him from the demon that controlled him. They instructed him to pull on a bell rope whenever he felt the evil influence, and on hearing it the other monks would come to his assistance and pray for him. However, because of this the monks did not receive a moment's rest: "à mesure qu'on redoublait les exorcismes, il [le diable] redoublait les tentations, de sorte que jour et nuit la cloche sonnait à toute volée, annonçant l'extrême désir de mortification qu'éprouvait le pénitent" (191). We are told that it is not known whether it was the devil who relinquished his hold, or whether the monks who gave up, but at the end of three months the young man left the monastery with the reputation of the most "terrible possedé qui n'eût jamais existé" (*ibid*). Soon afterwards, he rose through the ranks to become a member of the judiciary and then served as Richelieu's chancellor. This tale's content is absurd, and it's tone is satirical (the absurd will be discussed in greater detail later on).

In the 16th Century it was certainly not uncommon to believe in possession, so rather than being entirely absurd, the humor of the story comes from exaggeration, and exaggeration, according to Bergson is always comic when prolonged, and especially when systematic (95).[1] In addition, for exaggeration to occur, it should not appear as the primary objective, but as a tool which enables the writer to "rendre manifestes à nos yeux les contorsions qu'il voit se préparer dans la nature" (21). Furthermore, this story

[1] "L'exagération est comique quand elle est prolongée et surtout quand elle est systématique" (95).

is satirical in the way that Dumas takes something regarded by many as solemn, if not sacred – the Catholic faith and its insistence on belief in the devil – and uses it for the basis of comedy.

The second vignette concerns Mousqueton's father and his sons' religious upbringing. During the times of the religious wars between Catholics and Huguenots, Mousqueton's father led a dual faith which allowed him to be both Catholic and Protestant, whichever was most expedient in the circumstances. This duality allowed him to rob both Catholic and Huguenot with equal fervor, and persuaded him to raise Mousqueton in the Catholic faith and his brother as a Protestant. However, one day his father happened upon two men he had previously robbed and they subsequently hanged him from the nearest tree. Mousqueton and his brother were forced to flee and follow separate lives and separate faiths.

Apart from being an example of the "voleur volé", i.e., the villain falling victim to his own villainy, the situation is patently absurd. Secondly, it is a vehicle for Dumas's satire; through this vignette the author lampoons the folly of religious wars as well as the apparent arbitrariness of religious convictions.

The third and final vignette concerns Bassompierre and the siege of La Rochelle. Bassompierre, just like Mousqueton's father, exercised a profession which allowed his to follow a dual faith: he was Protestant by birth and through personal conviction, but Catholic as head of the King's forces at the siege. Furthermore, he was not the only Protestant fighting on the Catholic side in that conflict: as head of the army he commanded several Huguenots whom he assured would be "assez bête pour prendre La Rochelle" (413). As was the case with the previous vignette, Dumas mocks the

duplicity of those who are able to use faith in an expedient manner: that is to say, those who can betray their religious convictions in order to exercise a profession. In addition, Dumas suggests that far from being an wholly moral or idealistic conflict, its origins and causes were more utilitarian and self-serving.

This viewpoint is further supported by his comments on the origin of the war between Catholic and Protestant. Dumas reduces the siege of La Rochelle from an ethical and ideological battle to a puerile contest between two men to win the affections of a woman: "Il en résulte que le véritable enjeu de cette partie, que les deux plus puissants royaumes jouaient pour le bon plaisir de deux hommes amoureux, était un simple regard d'Anne d'Autriche" (413). It is important to remember that Dumas was a fierce Republican, despising the personal abuses associated with Absolutism. Later in the novel Dumas describes the siege of Paris in which the then monarch, Henri IV, fired bread over the wall of the city to break the resolve of the towns people. This is mirrored in the way Richelieu dropped pamphlets on La Rochelle spreading lies about the luxurious lifestyle the Huguenot leaders we enjoying while the city starved.

Both are scurrilous acts by individuals with absolute power, and it is no coincidence that throughout the novel Louis XIII is portrayed as a bumbling fool unable to rule his country. In conclusion, as well as showing Dumas' skill in creating comic scenes, these vignettes allow the author to satirize certain individuals or beliefs. As in any novel or story, the author has absolute control over the characters in his novel, as well as considerable influence on the reader.

IV. Comic Description

The definition of wit as a certain talent or genius for describing and presenting situations or ideas is supported by the comic description of two animals in the novel: *Bouton d'Or*, and the chicken served at the procurator's dinner. Dumas' description of d'Artagnan's horse demonstrates a wonderful lightness of touch, a subtlety of wit, and a rare talent for comedy that should be read several times to be fully appreciated. When we first encounter this horse we understand how no man, especially not a proud young Gascon like d''Artagnan, could be anything other than embarrassed to be seen riding this poor beast. The following passage needs little or no comment:

> "C'était un bidet du Béarn, âgé de douze ou quatorze ans, jaune de robe, sans crin à la queue, mais non pas sans javarts aux jambes, et qui, tout en marchant la tête plus bas que les genoux, ce qui rendait inutile l'application de la martingale, faisait encore également ses huit lieues par jour. Malheureusement les qualités de ce cheval étaient si bien cachées sous son poil étrange et son allure incongrue, que dans un temps où tout le monde se connaissait en chevaux, l'apparition du susdit bidet à Meung, où il était entré il y avait un quart d'heure à peu près par la porte de Beaugency, produisait une sensation dont la défaveur rejaillit jusqu'à son cavalier" (46).

In the above description, the comic is expressed through the language, but also created by it; the words used as well as the way in which the information is presented add to the comic value of the scene being described.

The humor of this passage is continued through the mocking and witty comment of Rochefort, who identifies the most egregious characteristic of the horse, i.e., its color, and exaggerates it systematically for comic effect. "Ce cheval est décidement ou plutôt a été dans sa jeunesse, bouton d'or" (50), and, "Remettez-le sur son cheval orange" (51) show the emphasis placed on the unusual hue of the beast. Later on the horse becomes "le cheval jaune" who "avait mangé trois fois plus qu'on n'eût raisonnablement pu le supposer pour sa taille" (55). Finally, d'Artagnan receives nine pounds for the horse, the buyer making it known that "il n'en donnait cette somme exorbitante qu'à cause de l'originalité de sa couleur" (57).

One might wonder whether this does not contradict one of the fundamentals of *le comique bergsonien*, i.e., that we only laugh at that which is human or that reminds us of our human nature. What is there in the strange shade of the horse's coat that reminds us of ourselves? One could contend that an individual with unusual or strikingly different skin or hair color would make us laugh in a similar manner. One characteristic of the horse that does mirror that which is human is old age.

Old age plays an essential role in the description of the chicken at the procurator's feast, and its apparent lack of youth is one of the key sources of humor in this scene. When the main course of the meal arrives, the frail and decrepit nature of the chicken is mirrored in the portrait painted of M. Coquenard himself:

> "La pauvre poule était maigre et revetue d'une de ces grosses peaux hérissés que les os ne percent jamais malgré leurs efforts; il fallait qu'on l'eût cherché bien longtemps avant de la trouver sur le perchoir où elle s'était retirée pour mourir de vieillesse" (348-349).

Compare this to the following description of M. Coquenard:

> "Le vieillard, enveloppé dans un grand pourpoint noir où se perdait son corps fluet, était vert et sec [...] les jambes commençait à refuser le service à toute cette machine osseuse" (347).

In addition, referring to the apparent age of the fowl, Porthos quips, "je respecte le vieillesse, mais j'en fais peu de cas bouillie ou rôtie" (349).

V. The Absurd

"Contraire à la raison, au bon sens commun", is how Le Petit Robert defines absurdity. Similarly, Bergson defines it as: "une inversion toute spéciale du sens commun" (141); it consists of seeing before us what we are thinking, rather that what we see. The absurd plays an important part in the comic in the novel, especially if we link it with exaggeration, in terms of an exaggeration of common sense.

To start, the very title of the novel is absurd: as was already explained, the original title was going to be Athos, Porthos et Aramis, but Dumas was advised to change it to Les trois mousquetaires, which pleased him greatly, especially since the title was patently absurd. Many of the novel's comic scenes are absurd, and require an exaggeration of common sense or reason. The vignettes of Mousqueton's father and that of the Chancellor seem absurd, not because they could not possibly be true but because they are improbable and "contraires à la raison". The same could be said of the sequence of event which leads to the three duels d'Artagnan manages to provoke: it is

hard to believe that on only his second day in Paris he is to fight the three title characters of the novel, one after the other, due entirely to coincidence.

Also absurd is Aramis's thesis. The sheer idiocy of dedicating time and effort to such a laborious, and practically futile, pursuit seems absurd. Yet it is not absurd in the sense that it could not happen, as history is filled with theological arguments and polemics on subjects as bizarre as the number of angels that could fit on the head of a pin, for example. Such questions are hypothetical and seemingly pointless because they can never be proven nor refuted; they are entirely theoretical and utterly impracticable to daily life. Such deliberation is contrary to Les trois mousquetaires, in which the reader is shown that a man's worth is measured through his valor and his deeds, not through cogitation and reflection. If Aramis' thesis seems ridiculous, then so is the rondeau consisting of lines of one syllable: it seems absurd that somebody would write such a poem, and doubly so that anybody would buy it. Finally, one could argue that the very names of the musketeers are absurd, that is to say, the use of Greek names by French soldiers. One of the guards at the Bastille remarks of "Athos" that, "[ce] n'est pas un nom d'homme, ça, c'est un nom de montagne" (167).

VI. Irony

Transposition consists of expressing an idea in terms different to its original character, for example, expressing something solemn in familiar terms, and vice versa. Regarding transposition in relation to the comic in words and language, Bergson makes a distinction between the real and the ideal, in other words, the actual and the ideal.

Stating what should be done and pretending to believe that this is what is actually being done, is, according to Bergson, irony, whereas describing what is being done and then pretending to believe that this is exactly what should be done is humor. Even though this definition of irony may seem reasonable, it appears to be far more complicated and ambiguous than need be. It is more productive and less confusing to approach the use of irony in this novel by adhering to a more general definition of irony, such as, a "manière de se moquer (de qqn ou de qqch) en disant le contraire de ce qu'on veut faire entendre" (Le Petit Robert, 934).

When we first meet Bonacieux he is described as a man "de mine assez simple et qui avait l'air d'un bourgeois" (118). The more the reader gets to know Bonacieux, the more he realizes that his behavior is anything but upper class. He is typified by many traits, one of which is his almost total lack of gentlemanly virtues, so when Richelieu calls him a "brave homme", it is ironic. Similarly, Dumas often describes the haberdasher as "pauvre", although he is neither destitute nor deserving of pity, nor is he deserving of the title "respectable martyr" (163).

Having discerned the type of individual his landlord really is, d'Artagnan resolves never to pay the rent he owes Bonacieux. When Mousqueton remarks that he finds the recent behavior of Bonacieux suspicious, d'Artagnan ironically remarks, "Planchet, tout cela me paraît fort louche, et sois tranquille, nous ne lui payerons pas notre loyer que la chose nous ait été catégoriquement expliquée" (255).

A similar use of irony occurs in the chapter where d'Artagnan finds Athos at the *Lis d'Or*. Athos, having almost drunk the cellar dry, requests (rather impudently) that the innkeeper bring him a bottle of the best wine in the cellar, most of the rest having

been broken "by his fall". The host retorts: "Mais c'est un foudre que cet homme [...] s'il reste seulement 15 jours ici, et qu'il paye ce qu'il boira, je rétablirai mes affaires" (307).

Irony is employed for comic effect in the dinner at the procurator's house. M. Coquenard tells his wife that she must really love her family to offer such "galanterie" to her supposed cousin. The meal turns out to be far from this, consisting of an emaciated chicken, a soup devoid of any substance save "quelques croûtes [qui] nagaient rares comme les îles d'un archipel" (348), and "quelques os de mouton, qu'on eût pu, au premier d'abord, croire accompagnés de viande" (349), followed by poor quality pastries and undrinkable wine. However, M. Coquenard call the soup "engageant" (348), and "un véritable festin" (350), with Porthos proclaiming the meal to be a "sacrifice" (350), apologizing for not possibly being able to eat another morsel. Dumas adds to the effect by calling the chicken "sublime" (349) and describing the house as "ce sanctuaire de la gourmandise" (347). Finally, chapter XLV, wherein Athos is reunited with the wife he once tried to kill, is ironically entitled "Scène conjugale" (444).

VII. Victims of Wit

Who are the actors and interlocutors with whom the author has to deal? Bergson explains that a witticism can involve one character addressing another, as in a direct retort; also, a witty remark can be directed at a third party, or most commonly, to every one. It best serves the purposes of this analysis to divide the above into two separate

categories: firstly, remarks made by one character directed towards another, and secondly, remarks directed at a third party or to everybody – these are usually made by the author through narration or description. Dumas is equally strong in both areas, skillfully displaying his wit through his characters and through his prose.

One may recall an incident from "The Comic in Character" where Aramis claimed to be meeting with the niece of a doctor friend of his when in fact he was arranging an assignation with one of his mistresses. He was spotted by d'Artagnan, who was curious to know why he was dressed in a cloak in the middle of summer. When Aramis tries to explain this to his comrades, Porthos quips, "que de précaution pour étudier la théologie" (129). In a later scene, when discussing their trip to England, Aramis is insistent to know why they are setting out on this adventure, to which d'Artagnan replies: "vous le saurez un jour, Aramis, mais, pour le moment, j'imiterai la retenue de la nièce du docteur" (217).

Having suffered listening to Aramis discuss his thesis, for the most part in Latin, d'Artagnan replies to Aramis' inquiry, "vous voulez rire" by jesting, "Je ne ris plus depuis que vous parlez français" (296). One of the wittiest replies in the entire novel was mentioned earlier in this chapter, but it certainly deserves to be repeated. Aramis, commenting on his rondeau, remarks that "la mérite de toutes choses est dans la difficulté" (318), and receives the following *quid pro quo* from d'Artagnan: "ajoutez au mérite de la difficulté, celui de la brièveté, et vous êtes sur au moins que votre poème aura deux mérites" (*ibid*).

Porthos, still pretending that his injury is due to a proud wound of combat, rather than an ignominious defeat, asks Athos if he has ever experienced such a sprain. He

receives the following retort: "Jamais; seulement je me rappelle que dans notre échauffaurée de la rue Férou je reçus un coup d'épée qui, au bout de quinze ou dix-huit jours, m'avait produit exactement le même effet" (319).

VIIi. Nationalities

A witty word, we are told, is one that makes us laugh at ourselves or at a third party, whereas a comic word is one that makes us laugh at the person uttering it. The difficulty of applying this distinction has already been noted; however, an important common denominator of both is the fact that both require a victim of some sort, somebody at whom the reader can direct his laughter. There are many such victims of ridicule and laughter in this novel, the most common being nationalities and professions.

Starting with nationalities, the race that suffers most at the hands of Dumas is the English. He takes every opportunity to make them the object of his virulent wit, as well as portraying them as incompetent and incapable of victory. The English travelers are unable to beat Athos and d'Artagnan at the game of dice at the *Grand Saint Martin*; similarly, the English lose the duel against the musketeers as well as the siege of La Rochelle. They are incapable of dealing with Milady, and it is the musketeers who have to execute her and help Buckingham extricate the Queen from the dilemma of the necklace (Buckingham having been easily seduced by Milady in order to acquire the jewels).

He makes the English victims of his wit in the following remarks on their physiognomy: "ce n'était [la tristesse] pas non plus, comme chez nos voisins les

Anglais, une influence atmosphérique qui assombrissait son [Athos] visage" (299); when describing an English officer, he writes, "son menton, vigoureusement accusé, dénotait cette force de volonté qui, dans le type vulgaire britannique, n'est ordinairement que de l'entêtement" (484). (Although he says "britannique", apart from those familiar with Britain, the majority of people are unaware of any distinction, believing English and British to be synonymous, and often, if they are aware, still refer to them as being one and the same; one may suppose that this is the case here.) Regarding English weather he comments, "c'était une de ces belles et rares journées d'hiver où l'Angleterre se souvient qu'il y a un soleil" (483), and "ce pâle soleil d'Angleterre qui éclaire, mais qui n'échauffe pas" (520).

The English are not the only race to suffer at the pen of Dumas. The Swiss, or more specifically the German Swiss, are also victims of Dumas' wit. This time it is strictly comedy, as defined by Bergson, where we laugh at the person uttering the word; in addition, we laugh at "le comique crée par le langage", as the author ridicules the way in which the Swiss guard speaks and pronounces French. "N'avre bous bas bris un bastion? demanda une Suisse" (450), and "Dutieu! Dit le suisse, zi zela il être auzi grante tame que son l'égridure, fous l'être en ponne fortune, mon gamarate" (478). If we consider the definition of wit as being "the ability to express oneself amusingly" (Chambers 21st Century Dictionary, 890), it can be seen that the above quotations qualifies as comedy, rather than as wit. Dumas' following remark, "Balzampleu, fit le Suisse, qui, malgré l'admirable collection de jurons qu possède la langue allemande, avait pris l'habitude de jurer en français" (450), is more typical of the wit one has come to associate with him.

Dumas' propensity for making certain professions the victim of his wit (innkeepers, doctors, and the clergy) as well as his ability quickly to bring his characters down to earth with a skillfully worded retort have both been discussed in this analysis. However, there are a few example of the above that have been neglected thus far, and which are too interesting to ignore.

When describing Aramis readying himself to write a letter, the author comments that he possessed that "naïve confiance que tout poète a en lui même" (472). Commenting on a stanza from a Puritan book of psalms Dumas remarks of Protestants, and mostly likely of English Protestants, "ces vers n'était pas excellents, il s'en fallait même beaucoup; mais comme on le sait, les protestants ne se piquait pas de poésie" (516).

In certain instances the humor comes from Dumas' description of or commentary on what is said, how he phrases it, etc.; when listing Athos' virtues, one of his best attributes seems to be the fact that he had "l'air de comprendre Porthos" (298). When describing the conjugal coupling of a wizened old man like Bonacieux and a beautiful young bride, Dumas writes, "un homme de cinquante ans ne tient pas longtemps rancune à une femme de vingt-trois" (205). In a more caustic vein he comments on love between men and women of different fortunes: "quand la femme est riche et quand l'amant ne l'est pas, ce qu'il ne peut lui offrir elle se l'offre elle-même; et quoique ce soit ordinairement avec l'argent du mari qu'elle se passe cette jouissance, il est rare que ce soit à lui qu'en revienne la reconnaissance" (142). If it appears that Dumas is moralizing here and elsewhere, one should bear in mind Bergson's statement

that a humorist is a moralist disguised as a scientist; Dumas is certainly a great humorist, if not a greater wit.

To conclude, although the comic in words and language does not strictly adhere to the theories put forth in Le Rire, in many instances Bergson's philosophy of *le comique* does help us better to appreciate Dumas' wit and mastery of language. Most importantly, it can be seen that, even though there may be discord between certain aspects of Le Rire and the comic found in this novel, Les trois mousquetaires is undoubtedly rich in the comedy of words and language. It should also be remembered that language achieves laughable results simply because it is a human product, one that is modeled as closely as possible on the forms of the human mind (Bergson, 99).

Chapter V: Conclusion

In the previous two chapters, "The Comic in Situations" and "The Comic in Words", there were several instances where *le comique bergsonien* did not apply as well or as neatly to this novel as one might have hoped. The overall objective of this thesis was to examine the use of comedy and humor in Les trois mousquetaires, with Bergson's theories serving as a catalyst of sorts, helping to highlight and explain Dumas' use of comic devices in the novel; it was never an objective to validate or refute Bergson's theories of laughter and comedy. However, it would be disingenuous to believe that one could undertake such a work without it highlighting strengths or weaknesses in these theories, despite it not being a goal of this study.

One might wonder why this particular theory was applied to the analysis of the novel? Although, in certain instances, it may appear *le comique bergsonien* has little relevance to the comic in the novel, overall it is invaluable to an appreciation of Dumas' use of comedy, especially in the area of character and wit. One reason for this is the importance of society to Bergson's theory of laughter and comedy.

The strengths, and weaknesses, of this theory of laughter are explained and criticized clearly and precisely in D. H. Monro's An Argument of Laughter (1963). This book does not limit itself to *le comique bergsonien*; it examines many of the most important theories and philosophies of laughter in Western Civilization – by such names as Kant, Fiebleman and, Freud, Schopenhauer, Hobbes, Leacock, etc. – and categorizes them in nomenclatures such as Incongruity Theories, Superiority Theories, Nonsense Theories, Misfortune Theories, and so on. Bergson falls into the

category of superiority theories: considering that the theme of social conformity and rebellion is so central to *le comique bergsonien*, one can understand why this is so.

Along with the idea of "something encrusted on something living", one of the most prevalent themes of *le comique bergsonien* is that of social admonition, and the primordial importance of human behavior. In "The Comic in Character" it was demonstrated that any deviance from normal behavior, i.e. the behavior expected, even demanded by society, is instantly punished by laughter.

Bonacieux, most notably, deviates from his expected role through behavior and conduct that is unbecoming of him and therefore totally unacceptable. It is expected of him that he be able to protect his wife, that he be more in love with her than with him money, and that his loyalties be to his wife, rather than to his cowardice or his ego. For each of these transgressions, Bonacieux is duly punished.

We only laugh at what is human: as in the case of the animals used for comic effect, as well as humanness of most characters in the novel, this tenet holds true. We are entirely unable to laugh at Milady and Richelieu because they are "uncomic", i.e., they do not sufficiently resemble ordinary people for the reader to find their behavior "human" enough to laugh at. Similarly, the failings and weaknesses of d'Artagnan, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis are comic to the reader, because their mistakes and peccadilloes are human and remind us of ourselves.

Apropos of the superiority theory of *le comique bergsonien*, it is evident that in nearly all cases in Les trois mousquetaires, when an individual is the object of ridicule, he or she is invariably in a position of inferiority. D'Artagnan is superior to Bonacieux, the musketeers are superior to any of their rivals, the French are superior

to the English and the Catholics to the Protestants, and so on. Even Porthos, that most noble of musketeers, is inferior: to Athos as a soldier and gentleman (as are the Aramis and d'Artagnan), and to M. Coquenard as a schemer. Lastly, all the characters in the novel are inferior to the author: he controls them in every aspect of their being and is in a position of absolute superiority. It would be facile to limit the comic richness and depth of the novel to positions of superiority and inferiority: it has been shown that Dumas' use of comic devices in the novel is far more expansive than that.

Possibly, Dumas' greatest accomplishment in writing this novel was creating one of the truly great comic characters of French literature. Porthos fulfills are the criteria necessary to qualify as an "ideally comic character". In terms of vanity and duplicity he is certainly the equal of Falstaff, and it could be argued that he is a more endearing character than Shakespeare's creation; with the exception of d'Artagnan, he is perhaps the most interesting character of the Musketeer trilogy. Porthos importance to the success of the comic situations throughout the novel is evident, with arguably the two most amusing scenes in Les trois mousquetaires being his rehabilitation at the *Grand Saint Martin* and his meal at M. Coquenard's house.

If the success of the comic in character and the comic in situations is due largely to the presence of Porthos, the success of the comic in words and language is entirely due to the comedic genius of the author. Dumas' sublime wit and mastery of language make their presence felt from the first to the last page. His satirical portrayal of religion, war, monarchy, etc., underlines the considerable influence of the author on public opinion, and his ability lampoon the sacred.

To conclude, although the comic in Les trois mousquetaires does not correspond in every instance with the principles of *le comique bergsonien*, it is hard to deny the importance of Bergson's theories in an understanding of the use of comedy and humor in this novel. Moreover, even though it has previously been overlooked by critics and scholars, there is surely no question that Les trois mousquetaires is a novel rich in comic characters, amusing situations, which exhibits a mastery of the comic of words and language that, in the corpus of 19th Century French literature, finds few rivals.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Autrand, Michel. "*Les Trois Mousquetaires* au théâtre – *La Jeunesse des Mousquetaires.*" in Cent cinquante ans après edited by Bassan, Fernande and Schopp, Claude. Marly-le-Roi: Editions Champflour, 1995, pp. 9-20.

Baguley, David. "L'Hypernarrativité dumasienne: à propos des Trois Mousquetaires." in Cent cinquante ans après. pp. 74-81.

Bassan, Fernande."Le Cycle des Trois Mousquetaires du roman au théâtre." Studia Neophilogica, vol 57, (1985): pp. 243-249.

Bassan, Fernande & Chevalley, Sylvie. Alexandre Dumas père et la Comédie française. Paris: Lettres Modernes-Minard, 1972.

Bassan, Fernande, and Schopp, Claude. "Orientation bibliographique sur Dumas...." Œuvres et critiques vol. 21, no. 1 (1996): pp. 157-164.

Bell, Alexander C. Alexandre Dumas: A Biography and a Study. London: Cassell, 1950.

Bem, Jeanne. "D'Artagnan, et après: Lecture symbolique et historique de la trilogie de Dumas." Littérature vol. 22 (1976), pp. 13-29.

Bergson, Henri. Le Rire : essai sur la signification du comique. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1900.

Bertière, Simone. "Le Coadjuteur et son double: Retz inspirateur d'Alexandre Dumas dans la trilogie des Mousquetaires." Travaux de littérature vol. 3 (1990), pp. 169-177.

Biet, Christian, Brighelli, Jean-Paul, and Rispail, Jean-Luc. Alexandre Dumas, ou les aventures d'un romancier. Paris: Gallimard, 1986.

Bonnet, Jacques. "Où le lecteur découvre comment et pourquoi il arrive que des qualités sans héros dissimulent un héros sans qualités." L'Arc no. 71 (1978): pp. 76-81.

Brady, Patrick. "The Sword, the Letter, and the Gown: Dumas' *Les trois mousquetaires.*" in Memory and History as Fiction: An Archetypal Approach to the Historical Novel. Knoxville: New Paradigm Press, 1993, pp. 97-111.

Brix, Michel, "Nerval et l'auteur des *Trois Mousquetaires.*" in Cent cinquante ans après. pp. 82-93.

Callet-Bianco, Anne-Marie. "Du service à la Reine à celui du Roi: l'ittinéraire de d'Artagnan dans Les Trois Mousquetaires." in Cent cinquante ans après. pp. 30-35.

Charney, Maurice. Comedy High and Low: an Introduction to the Experience of Comedy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Christout, Marie-Françoise. "Les Adaptations théâtrales et chorégraphiques des *Trois Mousquetaires* dans les spectacles récents." in Cent cinquante ans après. pp. 20-29.

Clouard, Henri. Alexandre Dumas. Paris: Albin Michel, 1955.

Corrigan, Robert. Comedy: Meaning and Form. New York: Harpers & Row, 1981.

Danzig, Charles, ed. Le Grand Livre de Dumas. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997.

Defays, Jean-Marie. Jeux et enjeux du texte comique. Tubingen: Max Niemayer, 1992.

Dumas, Alexandre père. Les trois mousquetaires. Paris: Flammarion, 1844.
——— Vingt ans après. Edinburgh: Imprimerie Nelson,1845.

Emelina, Jean. Le Comique : essai d'interprétation générale. Paris: SEDES, 1991.

Faitrop-Porta, Anne-Christine. "La réception critique des Trois Mousquetaires et du Comte de Monte-Cristo en Italie." in Cent cinquante ans après. pp. 148-163.

Feibleman, James. In Praise of Comedy: A Study in its Theory and Practice. New York: Russell & Russell, 1962.

Felheim, Martin. Comedy: Plays, Theory and Criticism. New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1962.

Flowers, Ruth Cave. Voltaire's Stylistic Transformation of Rabelaisian Satirical Devices. Washington: The Catholic Universities of America Press, 1951.

Garnett, R. S. "The Genius and the Ghost." Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine vol. 226, no. 1365 (1929): pp. 129-142.

Glinel, Charles. Alexandre Dumas et son œuvre. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1967.

Goimard, Jacques. "La bande des farceurs: l'humour dans Les Trois Mousquetaires." in Cent cinquante ans après. pp. 21-29.

Gribble, Francis. Dumas: Father and Son. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1930.

Hamel, Réginald, and Méthé, Pierrette. Dictionnaire Dumas. Montréal: Editions Guérin, 1988.

Harris, Laurie & Abbey, Cherie., eds. Nineteenth Century Literary Criticism. 44 vols. Michigan: Gale Research Co., 1986

Hemmings, F. W. J. The King of Romance: A Portrait of Alexandre Dumas. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979.

Janson, F. Le Comique et l'humour. Brussels: La Renaissance du livre, 1956.

Joannidès, A. La Comédie française de 1680 à 1900. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970.

Kitchen, George. A Survey of Burlesque and Parody in English. New York: Russel & Russel, 1931

Lamaze, Jean de. Alexandre Dumas père. Paris: Pierre Charon, 1972.

Lombard, Jean. "D'Artagnan, ou le mythe victime du roman." Mythe-Symbole-Roman. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980, pp. 65-75.

Lucot, Yves-Marie. Dumas père et fils. Woignarue: Vague verte, 1997.

Maurois, André. Les Trois Dumas. Paris: Hachette, 1957.

Maxwell, Ian. French Farce and John Heywood. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1946.

Mercier, Christophe. "Les auberges dans la trilogie des Mousquetaires." in Cent cinquante ans après. pp. 44-49.

Meridith, George. "An Essay on Comedy." in Comedy. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1956.

Molière. Oeuvres complètes. Paris: Gallimard, 1971.

Monro, D. H. Argument of Laughter. South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963.

Munro, Douglas. Alexandre Dumas père: A Bibliography of Works Published in French, 1825-1900. New York: Garland, 1981.

——— A Second Bibliography of French and English Sources to 1983, with Appendices. New York: Garland, 1985.

Parigot, Hippolyte. Le Drame d'Alexandre Dumas. Paris: 1899.

Picard, Michel. "Pouvoir du feuilleton, ou d'Artagnan anonyme." Littérature vol. 50, (1983): pp. 55-76.

Raylor, Timothy. Cavaliers, Clubs and Literary Circles: Sir John Mennes, James Smith and the Order of the Fancy. Newark: Associated University Presses, 1994.

Reed, Frank W. A Bibliography of Alexandre Dumas père. London: J. A. Neuhys, 1933.

Rey, Alain, ed. Le Petit Robert. Paris: Dictionnaires le Robert, 1976.

Rey-Flaud, B. Molière et la farce. Geneva: Droz, 1996.

Robinson, Mairi., ed. The Chambers 21st Century Dictionary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Ross, Michael. Alexandre Dumas. London: David & Charles, 1981.

Santa, Angels. "Les Trois Mousquetaires, texte inspirateur." in Cent cinquante ans après. pp. 50-59.

Schmitt, Eric-Emmanuel. "Lorsque Dumas inventait le cinéma." in Le Grand Livre de Dumas edited by Dantzig, Charles. Paris: Belles Lettres, 1997, pp. 186-195.

Schopp, Claude. La Génie de la vie. Paris: Editions Mazarine, 1985.
——— "Dumas critique dramatique." Nineteenth Century French Studies vol. 18, no. 3-4 (1990): pp. 348-362.

Seyler, A. and Haggard, S. The Craft of Comedy. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1946.

Simpson, JA., and Weiner, E., eds. The Oxford English Dictionary. 20 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

Stern, Alfred. Philosophie du rire et des pleurs. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949.

Stowe, Richard. Alexandre Dumas père. Boston: Twayne, 1976.

Sypher, Wylie. Comedy. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1956.

The Three Musketeers (The Queen's Diamonds). Dir. Richard Lester. Film Trust, 1973.

Thibaudeau, Jean. "Disparition de la fiction dans le texte historique: la trilogie de Dumas." Europe no. 490-491 (1970): pp. 59-75.

——— Alexandre Dumas, le prince des Mousquetaires. Paris: Hachette, 1983.

Tranouez, Pierre. "Cave filium! Etude du cycle des *Mousquetaires*." Poétique vol. 18, no. 71 (1987): pp. 321-331.

Ubersfeld, Anne. "Alexandre Dumas père et le drame bourgeois." Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises vol. 35 (1983): pp. 121-139.

Veissid, Jacques. Le Comique, le rire et l'humour. Paris: Lettres du Monde, 1978.

Yon, Jean-Claude. "Du roman feuilleton à la scène. Les cas de Dumas et de Scribe à propos des Trois Mousquetaires." in Cent cinquante ans après. pp. 61-65.

Zimmermann, Daniel. Alexandre Dumas le grand. Paris: Julliard, 1993.

VITA

Kevin Finn completed his secondary school studies in the summer of 1991, graduating from Waterpark College, Waterford, Ireland. Subsequently he was accepted to the three-year diploma course in Languages and Marketing at the Waterford Institute of Technology. After completion of his second year he took part in the study abroad program where he entered into the second and final year of the course *Techniques de commercialisation* at the University de Nancy II, in Nancy, France. Following this he returned to Waterford where he graduated from WIT in the summer of 1995. Later that summer he entered the Department of French at the University of Wales, Swansea, to pursue a Bachelor of Arts degree. The degree was received in July 1997. The following month he commenced his position of graduate assistant in the Department of Modern Languages and Literature at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, from where he graduated with a Master of Arts degree in May 1999.