

# DUMAS

THE STORY OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS AND AUGUSTE MAQUET





Film Oblige  
presents

Gérard DEPARDIEU

Benoît POELVOORDE

# DUMAS

(L'autre Dumas)

A film by Safy NEBBOU

Featuring

Dominique BLANC, Mélanie THIERRY and Catherine MOUCHET

French release by UGC Distribution :

FEBRUARY 10, 2010

Running time: 105'

In coproduction with UGC, France 2 Cinéma and K2



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## SYNOPSIS

At the height of Alexandre Dumas' collaboration with his ghostwriter Auguste Maquet, Maquet pretends to be Dumas to seduce Charlotte, an admirer of the illustrious novelist.

Confrontation between the two men is inevitable...





## INTERVIEW WITH SAFY NEBBOU

### *How did you get involved in this project?*

Safy Nebbou: I've been reading Alexandre Dumas since I was a teenager and I love how powerful his writing is. And I knew that he had a ghostwriter, Auguste Maquet. I was working on another subject when this project came to me from producers Frank Le Wita and Marc de Bayser, through Jean-François Gabard, my agent, and screenwriter Gilles Taurand, who Film Oblige had hired to adapt "SIGNÉ DUMAS", the stage play by Cyril Gély and Eric Rouquette, which had been very popular back in 2003. Even though I was a little hesitant at the idea of doing a period piece with costumes, I was instantly taken by the script and its perspective: that of the man behind the scenes. The identity swap, the ghostwriter who think he's the author, seemed like a great idea, with great comic and tragic potential as well. Like any director, I think, I wanted to put my stamp on the story. I'd wanted to work with Gilles Taurand for a long time and that took care of the rest. I actually didn't want to read the stage play, we worked with his adaptation. Things were very natural between us. We worked on the film's structure with great joy and freedom. Gilles' dialogue breathed life into the script, gave it a modern feel and a sense of truth that blew me away.

### *Are any of your own interests reflected in the script?*

Yes, especially in the identity crisis – a theme which permeates THE GIRAFFE'S NECK and MARK OF AN ANGEL, my first two feature films. But also the "too late" obsession, not having the time to do or say things,

the fear of missing out, of watching your life pass before your eyes. Auguste Maquet doesn't exist, he's an illustrious unknown. Dumas is the star. But what would THE THREE MUSKETEERS or THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE be today without the contribution of Auguste Maquet? The film also speaks about the secrets of creativity, literature, writing and injustice. Maquet doesn't have Dumas' genius, he can spend hours and hours writing but it won't change a thing – you can't learn genius.

### *How do you see the two characters?*

One, Maquet, has the profile of a hardworking, industrious pencil-pusher who eats himself up on the inside. The other, Dumas, has a genius for giving form to his text and ideas. He creates easily and enjoys it, as we see in the scene where his pages blow away in the dunes. How do you live in the shadow of a great man? How do you fit in? Maquet's personal drama is his boundless admiration for Dumas, and everyone knows that admiration, when it leads to imitation and self-effacement, is an explosive mix of love and hate. He'll never actually sign a writing contract, and he'll never succeed in really proving the role he played working with Dumas. I like to think something special happened between these two men, as Dumas' son pointed out to him, once the story behind the success was revealed.

Auguste Maquet is a source of creative strength for Alexandre Dumas. Without him, Dumas despairs and can't write, like in that scene where Maquet disappears for three days and Dumas realizes he is powerless. The bubbling genius of Dumas needs Maquet's methodical rigor.

*You play with an obvious paradox: Maquet, who is a little uneasy with fiction when writing, turns out to be excellent with it in life, since he takes on the identity of Dumas as if it were second nature.*

Misled by the sign indicating Dumas' hotel room in Trouville, Charlotte, a revolutionary trying to free her father, makes a mistake. Maquet pretends to be Dumas because he falls in love with the young woman. But also and above all because no one has ever looked at him that way. No one looks

at him at all, actually, and his name gets scratched out. The sweet smell of success overwhelms him. At first it's just a game, and then he gets in over his head, caught in his own trap. Despite himself, he becomes the character of his own story, and every day he writes a new page. It's also very narcissistic - he finally means something to someone else: Charlotte. And that gives him wings.

The identity swap is perfectly justified by the situation of the ghostwriter, who has every reason to want to become someone else. Being a different person not only changes how he appears to others, it also allows him to experience love and passion. In the "costume" of Dumas, Maquet is so enthralled by his feelings of love he becomes an ally of the revolutionary cause, which goes completely against his nature.

*In that respect, DUMAS seems to draw comparisons with the times we live in today.*

Today, when you look at STAR ACADEMY or any of the reality TV shows, celebrity seems to be an end in itself. Everybody's looking for it; everybody wants it, even if they haven't done much to earn it. Succeeding in life necessarily means being in the limelight... On the other hand, the need to have ideals, as personified by Charlotte, is a lot less common.

*It seems, looking back, like you're constantly fighting to avoid the clichés of period films.*

My team and I didn't want to get trapped in the history and the habitual style of a period piece. I thought we should shoot this story as if it were happening today. I admit I was a little afraid of the academic rigidity that sticks to this kind of film. So I tried to get away from that as much as possible by making myself a list of things to do: film mostly handheld, moving with the characters, avoid wide angled establishing shots, no crane shots, minimize frontal shots and cross-cutting, keep the editing pace quick and dynamic, tell the actors not to "act" the period, etc.... Choosing Stéphane Fontaine as director of photography was a part of this approach, he'd never done a historical film, and the films



he makes are very urban (THE BEAT THAT MY HEART SKIPPED, A PROPHET). We only had eight weeks to shoot, so we decided to use two cameras. That gave the actors the possibility of really doing the scenes together instead of getting cued off screen, and being there in action. And I could use a variety of shots without “wearing out” the actors.

#### *You shot on location?*

Yes, and I even felt like it was a blessing that we didn’t have the budget to be able to work in a studio. Studios allow you to shoot from any angle - they scare me. In the end we found freedom in the limitations, which deep down I really love. And with Cyril Gomez-Mathieu, our Production Designer and Art Director, we above all looked for the right distance from which to shoot a set, one that gave us a feeling, a mood, and lent itself to

visual circulation and depth of field. Having exotic animals is an attempt to give Dumas’ world a magical, offbeat dimension by bringing in a sense of fantasy, which contrasts with the relative austerity of Maquet’s environment.

#### *Did you have any influences?*

Mostly Anglophone movies, ELISABETH by Tom Hooper or DANGEROUS LIAISONS by Stephen Frears, THE AGE OF INNOCENCE by Martin Scorsese and a few films that succeeded in being more than a period piece, like SAINT-CYR by Patricia Mazuy or QUEEN MARGOT by Patrice Chéreau. But also painters like Delacroix, Rembrandt, Vermeer... Many biographies on Dumas and the one by Henri Troyat in particular. And then of course I also reread a few of Dumas’ novels.

***The inauguration of Monte-Cristo plays with the unlikely. We hear Arab music. And Dominique Blanc dresses up as Catherine de Medici, a choice that seems a little like a reference to QUEEN MARGOT.***

Yes, and Benoît Poelvoorde as Mazarin is a reference to VINGT ANS APRES. The ball is full of false appearances; Maquet is the only one who wears the mask of a false identity. We decided fairly quickly, with Karen Müller Serreau, our Costume Designer, and Cyril Gomez-Mathieu, that we had to find an overall theme for the party. That period overflowed with orientalism and Dumas had always been fascinated by the Arab world; he’d also travelled quite a bit in Asia. His Tsar costume was inspired by a photo of Nadar after a tour of Russia. I asked Fawzy Al-Aiedy, who is a great Iraqi singer and musician, to come participate in the film and I’m delighted he accepted.

***Choosing Gérard Depardieu to play Dumas, a man completely run by his desires, didn’t that run the risk of being redundant?***

I have to admit that Gérard Depardieu as Dumas quickly became the obvious choice to everyone, but I wondered if he still wanted to take on that kind of character. And where he was at with his own desire to make films. Also, in the last few years, the Depardieu/Dumas association had become synonymous with television - I think I couldn’t quite handle that. I talked a lot with Claire Blondel, who represents Gérard at Artmedia, and I expressed my desire to work with him as well as my fears, and she reassured me quite a bit. Together with Bertrand de Labbey, we decided to send him the script. He accepted right away, and told me what a pleasure it was for him to read, what he thought he could sink his teeth into as an actor, and about the strength of the dialogue and scenes and his desire to work with Benoît and Dominique. Before shooting, I almost always hold reading sessions with the actors. I had done it with Benoît, Dominique and Mélanie. When I mentioned that off-handedly to Gérard, he said, “What about me?” The next day at 9 A.M. he was reading Dumas and having fun like a kid. I think I was happy but hadn’t quite grasped the idea that I was going to

do a film with a legend of French film. I warned him that I would be keeping extremely close to the actors, breathing down their necks, moving with them. That the dialogue shouldn’t hold them back. But Gérard learned his lines every day.

#### ***So he was Dumas.***

Within minutes. I like to begin by shooting the first scene of the film. Also, I knew that on a boat, we would all be in the same boat! Gérard was already overdoing it a bit with his first two lines. I went up to him and timidly whispered, “I think maybe you don’t need to act out Dumas’ colorful, extravagant side so much. If you start out on too high of a note, in ten minutes everyone’s ears are going to be hurting, especially yours. Don’t forget how tremendously fond you are of Maquet...” There was a dead silence, and then he looked me deep in the eye: “You’re right, I have to stop doing Depardieu - when I see myself, I can’t take it anymore.” So he found a way to be Dumas with simplicity, without forcing it, with subtlety, sincerity and humility.





***What about Benoît Poelvoorde?***

I'd wanted to work with Benoît for a long time, preferably on a dramatic role. I love clowns, especially sad clowns. He's a remarkable actor who is becoming less and less afraid of showing his vulnerability. We looked for a clear line, a sort of calm and purity. Sometimes he couldn't stand the minimalism I was imposing upon him any more. He looked like an alka-seltzer in a glass of water. He was holding back and at the same time he was boiling on the inside. The encounter between the two men added a lot to the film. They immediately bonded with each other, were extremely fond of one another, but I never felt left out. On the contrary, I felt inspired by their confidence and kindness.



There was a really good feeling on the set thanks to those two, and thanks to our incredible, tight-knit team as well.

***How did you cast the female actors?***

Without hesitating an instant. I'd always wanted to do a film with Dominique Blanc. I've liked her impeccability and her work for a long time. I offered her the role of an exuberant character. I loved the idea of leading Dominique down that path. And she did too. I wanted her to be funny, disarming, unpredictable and radiant... Dominique gave Céleste depth and vulnerability.

***Was Mélanie Thierry an obvious choice?***

I didn't know much about her. It was her agent, François Samuelson, who suggested I meet her. I had already seen a lot of young actresses and we'd done screen tests. I had to admit she was obviously the one. Mélanie is a fantastic actress who fills Charlotte with the spirit of a young, committed heroine. She has character and energy, and a lot of imagination too. As for Catherine Mouchet, what a dream! Ever since she did THERESE by Alain Cavalier, I've wanted to work with her. She gives Caroline Maquet strength, depth and distinction and a musicality all her own. She's an exceptional actress.

***The women in the film are the ones who uphold the ideals of the revolution.***

Yes, the women are the free birds. Caroline Maquet (Catherine Mouchet) has fever in her veins, not just for politics but a fever to live - she wants to have fun and feel innocent again... Charlotte Desrives (Mélanie Thierry) comes to Paris to set the world on fire and fight "her own" revolution. Céleste Scriwaneck (Dominique Blanc) is tired of keeping her mouth shut and is fed up with the cowardice of men. The women embody irreverence and freedom.

***Now and then, something tragic pierces through the comedy.***

Yes, DUMAS is a tragicomedy, sometimes cruel as well as funny I hope – a love story and fantastic adventure. In the end, the real story is about two men and a writing partnership. Neither the Revolution nor women can break their creative alliance. When you go to Auguste Maquet's grave in Père-Lachaise, you can read,

engraved in stone: THE THREE MUSKETEERS, THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO, QUEEN MARGOT. Don't you find that moving?

Dumas is at rest in the Pantheon, Auguste Maquet in a cemetery. He wanted to make his mark and give life meaning. I find these two goals as essential as they are universal.





# BIOGRAPHY SAFY NEBBOU

Safy Nebbou was born in Bayonne, France in 1968. Starting out as an actor, he performed at the Théâtre des Chimères for eight years, in plays by authors as diverse as Grumberg, Topor, Chekhov, Molière, Valle-Inclan, Chérid, Feydeau... After leading workshops and teaching theater arts, he became a director and put on thirty plays between 1989 and 1998. Safy Nebbou has written and directed many award-winning short films shown worldwide. In 2003, he made his first feature-length film: THE GIRAFFE’S NECK. He has also directed advertisements for both French and international companies since 2004. DUMAS is his third feature-length film. He is currently working on the script for his next film, an adaptation of L’AGE BETE, by Boileau-Narcejac, with co-writer Gilles Taurand.

## FILMOGRAPHY

1995 PORTRAIT DE PEINTRE (video documentary – short film)	2005 BIRTH / UNE NAISSANCE (short film for ARTE, in the ENFANCES collection) with Elsa Zylberstein and Pascal Elso
1997 PEDAGOGIE (fiction – short film)	2008 MARK OF AN ANGEL / L’EMPREINTE DE L’ANGE with Catherine Frot and Sandrine Bonnaire
1999 LA VIE C’EST PAS UN PIQUE-NIQUE (fiction - short film)	2010 DUMAS / L’AUTRE DUMAS with Gérard Depardieu, Benoît Poelvoorde, Mélanie Thierry, Dominique Blanc and Catherine Mouchet
2001 BERTZEA (fiction - short film)	
2003 LEPOKOA (fiction - short film)	
2003 THE GIRAFFE’S NECK / LE COU DE LA GIRAFE with Sandrine Bonnaire, Claude Rich, Louisa Pili, Darry Cowl and Maurice Chevit	







## A CURIOUS TALE BY GILLES TAURAND

The collaboration between Auguste Maquet and Alexandre Dumas spanned from 1844 to 1851 and gave rise to the publication of seventeen novels, including *THE THREE MUSKETEERS*, *THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO*, *QUEEN MARGOT*, *LE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE*, *JOSEPH BALSAMO*, *ANGE PITOU* and others. Masterful works, all signed by the hand of Alexandre Dumas, yet Maquet would claim he wrote them in a lawsuit that took place in 1858. The court awarded him 25% authorship rights but denied him credit as co-author. One man would be enshrined in the Pantheon; the other would end up in an anonymous grave in Père-Lachaise cemetery, 54th division, Chemin Montlouis.

During the ten years of their wildly productive collaboration, Dumas constantly repeated that he couldn't do without Maquet! He spoke of him as "the man who works perhaps more than anyone in the world, rarely goes out, is rarely seen, rarely heard and excessively loyal in spirit." The exact opposite of Dumas, and since opposites attract, they became inseparable. An infernal, co-dependant duo continually vacillating between love and hate. If Maquet was behind schedule, Dumas would panic: "I've run completely dry," he wrote, "quick, give me a boost!" Or again: "What will happen to Maurevel? I need to know, so I won't be walking like a blind man." When Maquet took time off to handle family business, Dumas suddenly felt powerless. The ghostwriter became the indispensable associate, breaking new ground, outlining the novels' structures, researching, archiving, proposing plots and dialogue. The master eagerly seized these pages, which he called "drafts", added a thousand details, rewrote the dialogue... and signed Alexandre Dumas.

At what point does an associate who can imitate to perfection become a true co-author? This is the question that would slowly eat away at their

friendship. In the beginning of the idyllic period, Maquet rejected the very idea of a contract, deeming it unworthy of such a productive partnership. Word of honor sufficed for co-writing "half a million lines"! Ten years later, the ghostwriter tallied up the bill, realized he'd been cheated, and the divorce began.

When Frank Le Wita and Marc de Bayser, Producers at Film Oblige, offered me the chance to adapt *SIGNÉ DUMAS*, the cruel and funny stage play by Cyril Gély and Eric Rouquette, I didn't take long to answer. Having read a biographer's comment that "the two men identified so completely with each other, so indistinguishable were their style and approach, that they could take each other's place," I thought it would be amusing if one day Maquet pretended to be the great Alexandre Dumas. That was the starting point for this tragicomedy. Of course, wanting to be someone else is a way of letting go of yourself, but for a man behind the scenes it's also a possibility, for the short time he is mistaken for another, to believe he's not just a "hack" but a master of words, an irresistible Don Juan, a revolutionary who will be stopped by nothing... at least in appearance.

Safy Nebbou immediately sized up the stakes of the imposture, both cinematographically and in the script: transforming the Château de Monte Cristo into an exotic baroque menagerie and imagining that when the masks fell away, the party would become an oriental costume ball, are not just decorative ideas, but real directorial choices. Since cinema is above all an art of illusion, in that game of hide and seek with truth, creating fiction was a challenge, as opposed to historical reenactment or what we call today a "biopic". I always find it fascinating to see how a director who starts out with a "commission" can create an inspired and personal work of art.

## CAST

Gérard DEPARDIEU  
Benoît POELVOORDE  
Dominique BLANC  
Mélanie THIERRY  
Catherine MOUCHET  
Jean-Christophe BOUVET  
Philippe MAGNAN  
Florence PERNEL  
Christian ABART

With the participation of  
Michel DUCHAUSSOY  
Roger DUMAS

Alexandre DUMAS  
Auguste MAQUET  
Céleste SCRIVANECK  
Charlotte DESRIVES  
Caroline MAQUET  
Monsieur BOCQUIN  
Minister GUIZOT  
Ida Ferrier DUMAS  
Inspector FLANCHET

Sub-Prefect Crémieux  
Monsieur de SAINT OMER



## CREW

Director	Safy Nebbou
Adaptation and screenplay based on the play "Signé Dumas"	Safy Nebbou and Gilles Taurand
Dialogue	Cyril Gély and Eric Rouquette
Produced by	Gilles Taurand
Production company	Frank Le Wita and Marc de Bayser
In coproduction with	Film Oblige
	UGC Images
	France 2 Cinéma
	K2 (Dominique Janne)
Director of photography	Stéphane Fontaine (AFC)
Production designer/Art director	Cyril Gomez-Mathieu
Editor	Bernard Sasia
Costume designer	Karen Müller-Serreau
Original soundtrack composed, arranged and conducted by	Hugues Tabar-Nouval
Sound	Pascal Jasmès, Bridget O'Driscoll, Anne Le Campion
	Philippe Larue
1st Assistant director	Agathe Hassenforder
Casting	Nathalie Duran
Production manager	UGC Distribution
French theatrical distribution	TF1 International
International sales	

With the participation of Canal + - TPS Star - France Télévision

In association with Sofica Soficinéma 5 - Sofica UGC 1

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# FILMOGRAPHY FILM OBLIGE

After LE PROMENEUR DU CHAMP DE MARS, Frank Le Wita and Marc de Bayser initiated and produced DUMAS.

2009

INSOUPCONNABLE

By Gabriel Le Bomin (in post-production)  
with Marc-André Grondin, Laura Smet, Charles Berling, Grégori Derangère  
In coproduction with Studio Canal

POLOGNE ALLERS RETOURS

52' documentary film by Valérie Wroblewski  
France 3 - North and National

DUMAS / L'AUTRE DUMAS

By Safy Nebbou with Gérard Depardieu and Benoit Poelvoorde  
In coproduction with UGC, France 2 Cinéma and K2

2008

NAURU, UNE ILE A LA DERIVE

Feature-length documentary by Julian Salgado  
Grand Format Arte  
Hot Docs (Toronto), Festival dei Popoli (Florence)

2005

THE LAST MITERRAND / LE PROMENEUR DU CHAMP DE MARS

By Robert Guédiguian  
Festival de Berlin 2005, in competition  
César Award, Best Actor 2005: Michel Bouquet

2004

QUI SONGE A LA DOUCEUR

Mid-length film by Isabelle Coudrier  
with Serge Riaboukine and Anne Alvaro  
Festival de Clermont-Ferrand, Pantin

2003

MA PETITE POLOGNE

52' documentary film by Valérie Wroblewski  
France 3 - North and National

2002

VARIETE FRANCAISE

By Frédéric Videau  
with Hélène Fillières and Gérard Meylan  
Festival de Venise 2003, Critic's Week

2001

LE FILS DE J.C VIDEAU

Feature-length documentary by Frédéric Videau  
Marseille International Festival

2000

CHARMANT GARCON

Starring and directed by Patrick Chesnais  
with Alexandra Vandernoot, Jean François Balmer  
Best Director, St Jean de Luz Film Festival 2001

1998

A MINUTE OF SILENCE / UNE MINUTE DE SILENCE

By Florent-Emilio Siri  
with Benoît Magimel and Bruno Putzulu  
Prix Cyril Collard 1998



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[www.lautredumas-lefilm.com](http://www.lautredumas-lefilm.com)

