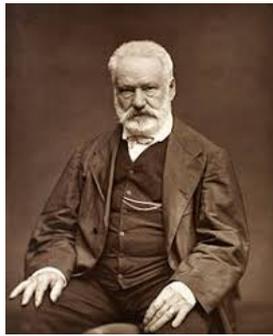


# **Victor Hugo in Guernsey**

## **Schools and Colleges Workshop**



(1802-1885)

**Poetry, Novels and Plays**

**Materials, Resources and Ideas for Project Work**

**to enhance understanding of Victor Hugo and his importance**

**in**

**Guernsey's Cultural Heritage**

## Victor Hugo's Poetry, Novels and Plays

Victor Hugo (1802-1885) is considered to be one of the greatest French writers. His literary fame came first from his poetry followed by his novels and plays.

Hugo spent 15 years on Guernsey while in exile from France. Throughout his life, Hugo continued to attempt all genres of writing including novels and plays. His writings provide us with an insight into his feelings and thoughts at distinct times in his life.

Through internet research, find out to which genre of literature each of these works belongs:

### Internet Search

### Poetry

### Novel

### Play

Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné

Hernani

Lucrèce Borgia

Ruy Blas

Notre Dame de Paris

Les Contemplations

La Légende des Siècles

Les Misérables

L'Art d'être Grand-Père

## Hugo and Romanticism

In Guernsey, we are accustomed to seeing portraits of Hugo as a man in his later years living in exile in Hauteville House. However, it is important to look at some of his early Romantic poetic verse, written when he was a young man.



Portrait by Thomas Staedeli. cyranus.ch

Hugo was at the forefront of the Romantic literary movement in France. Romanticism arrived relatively late in France and Hugo was searching for suitably exotic material for his poems. Hugo's main inspiration for his '**Les Orientales**' (1829) collection was the Greek War of Independence of 1821-1832 which reflected the cultural and political bias of the French public by depicting the exotic freedom-loving Greeks fighting the imperialist, decadent and even more exotic Ottoman Turks.

The general theme of most of the 41 poems in 'Les Orientales' is a celebration of liberty, linking the Ancient Greeks with the modern world, freedom in politics with freedom in art, and reflecting the evolution of his political views from the royalism of his early twenties to a rediscovery of the Bonapartist enthusiasms of his childhood. The collection is also intended to undermine the classicists' exclusive claim on antiquity and the poems clearly express the idea of 'la liberté dans l'art', a fashionable subject which was to ensure the collection's success. It offers a series of highly coloured tableaux depicting scenes from the eastern Mediterranean which is remarkable as we know that Hugo had not visited the Orient. Hugo described 'Les Orientales' as 'this impractical book of pure poetry'. Between 1831 and 1840, he went on to publish 4 more volumes of Romantic poetry, 'Les Feuilles d'Automne' (1831), 'Les Chants du Crépuscule' (1835), 'Les Voix Intérieures' (1837), and 'Les Rayons et les Ombres' (1840).

One of his earliest poems, 'Extase', comes from his collection 'Les Orientales' which flooded French poetry with colour and vibrancy. It is a good example of pure romantic poetry and shows Hugo's imaginative vision and his appreciation of nature and creation. We have to be aware that Hugo at this stage in his life had few experiences of living really close to the sea and was unaware of times to come, exiled in Jersey and Guernsey. His thoughts must have returned to this poem as he stood on the shoreline many years later in Guernsey and gazed at the stars above the horizon.

## Extase

J'étais seul près des flots, par une nuit d'étoiles.  
I was alone beside the sea, upon a starry night  
Pas un nuage aux cieus, sur les mers pas de voiles.  
With not a single wave or sail in sight  
Mes yeux plongeaient plus loin que le monde réel.  
Beyond the limits of the world far stretched my raptured eye,  
Et les bois, et les monts, et toute la nature,  
And the forests and the mountains, and nature all around,  
Semblaient interroger dans un confus murmure  
Seemed to unite in questioning, in vast and mingled sound,  
Les flots des mers, les feux du ciel.  
The billows of the ocean, and the splendour of the sky

Et les étoiles d'or, légions infinies,  
And the golden stars of heaven, in their unnumbered crowd,  
A voix haute, à voix basse, avec mille harmonies,  
With harmonies ten thousand, with voices clear and loud,  
Disaient, en inclinant leurs couronnes de feu;  
Replied, as low they bended down their radiant crowns of flame  
Et les flots bleus, que rien ne gouverne et n'arrête,  
And the blue floods that nought has power to govern or arrest,  
Disaient, en recourbant l'écume de leur crête:  
Replied, as low they bended down, the foam upon their crest  
— C'est le Seigneur, le Seigneur Dieu !  
—"It is our Lord God whose glory we proclaim!"

### Or this translation?

I was alone beside the sea, one starry night  
With not a single wave or sail in sight  
Past the world's limits, stretched my eye,  
And the forests and the mountains, with nature all 'round  
Seemed united in questioning, in a vast yet mumbling sound  
The billows of the ocean, and the splendour of the sky

And the infinite legions of golden stars  
With voices loud and harmonies over a thousand bars  
Replied, tipping low their radiant crowns of flame  
And the blue waters, which none could govern or arrest,  
Replied, tipping low the foam upon their crest,  
"The Lord, our great Creator! His glory we proclaim!"

## Poetry Challenge



A. Either: Compare and contrast the two translations

or

Use a French/English dictionary to attempt your own translation of 'Extase' and illustrate it.

B. Attempt to write a similar poem in English or French

Paint, draw or find pictures/photos to illustrate lines in your poem.

## **'Soleils Couchants' from Victor Hugo's collection of poems 'Les Feuilles d'Automne'**

There are 6 poems entitled **'Soleils Couchants'** contained in the 40 poems of **'Les Feuilles d'Automne' (1831)**. They take as their principal theme the setting of the sun, a romantic theme in itself but for Hugo deeply symbolic of the passing of time, a key characteristic of romanticism. Hugo's artistic imagination is evident in these poems as he contemplates the beauty of the natural world. It is a work of transition where the colour and vibrancy of 'Les Orientales' is toned down as he meditates on the human condition. Here the poet comes face to face with nature meditating on fallen leaves, dead autumn leaves symbolic of the changing seasons of life. Although still full of colour, these poems are less vibrant than the poems in 'Les Orientales'. They are tinged with sadness about the passing of time as he reflects on his younger days with memories of his mother and father. Here is an extract from one of the 'Soleils Couchants' poems in French: You might want to look up the full version of the poem.

### **Soleils Couchants**

J'aime les soirs sereins et beaux, j'aime les soirs  
Soient qu'ils dorent le front des antiques manoirs  
Ensevelis dans les feuillages.  
Soit que la brume au loin s'allonge en bancs de feux  
A des archipels de nuages

Oh, regardez le ciel! cent nuages mouvants  
Amoncelés là-haut sous le souffle des vents  
groupent leurs formes inconnues  
Comme si, tout à coup, quelque géant de l'air  
Tirait son glaive dans les nues

Puis voilà qu'on croît voir dans le ciel balayé  
Pendre un grand crocodile au dos large et rayé  
aux trois dents de rangs acérées  
Sous un ventre plombé glisse un rayon du soir;  
Cents nuages ardents luisent sous son flanc noir  
comme des écailles dorées.

Puis se dresse un palais.  
Puis l'air tremble et tout fuit.  
L'édifice effrayant des nuages détruits  
S'écroule en ruines pressées  
Il jonche au loin le ciel, et ses cônes vermeils  
Pendent, leur pointe en bas, pareils  
A des montagnes renversées

Tout s'en va! Le soleil d'en haut précipité  
Comme un globe d'airain qui, rouge, est rejeté  
Dans les fournaies remuées  
En tombant sur leurs flots que son choc désunit  
Fait en flocons de feu jaillir jusqu'au zénith  
L'ardente écume des nuées

Read this English translation. You might like to attempt your own translation?



### Sunsets

I love these calm, clear evening hours - these hours  
When sunset gilds the brows of ancient towers  
Shrouded in shrubbery,  
Or distant fog spreads out in fiery rows,  
Or countless rays strike archipelagos  
Of clouds in heaven's sea.

Oh look at the sky! Breezes above us sweep  
A hundred shifting tufts into a heap,  
Amass them in strange crowds;  
Below these oceans, pallid lightnings flare  
Quickly, as if some giant of the air  
Drew his sword in the clouds.

And then it seems, across the windswept sky,  
With triple fangs and back brindled and high  
Some huge crocodile trails;  
Past its leaden flanks evening sunbeams glide;  
A hundred clouds glint under its black side,  
Glitter like golden scales.

Turrets rise. Then the air quakes; it all sways  
The great edifice of tumbling haze  
Collapses into shreds, litters the distant sky;  
And scarlet cones hang, peak downwards,  
Above our heads, heaving like mountains upturne  
When the earthquake heaves its massive cry.

All vanishes! The sun, from topmost heaven precipitated,  
Like a globe of iron which is tossed back fiery  
Into the furnace stirred to burn;  
Shocking the cloudy surges, plashed from its impetuous ire,  
Even to the zenith it spatters, in a flecking scud of fire  
The ardent vapour of the inflamed foam.

Find phrases in the poem in French and English which describe :



- the vibrant colours of the leaves on the trees in autumn which soon will fall and lie dead on the ground
- the beauty of the sunset as it transforms the colour of the sky
- the illumination of the sea and sky as the sun prepares to descend below the horizon
- the sky gradually losing its colour as the sun begins to disappear

## Demain dès l'aube

'Demain dès l'aube' is a short poignant poem included in Hugo's collection '**Les Contemplations**' (1856). Most of the collection was written during his exile in Guernsey so memories play a major role— memories of the joys of his youth and his love for his family as well as sad episodes in his life. In this collection, we find perhaps the most well-known of all Hugo's romantic poems, '**Demain, dès l'aube**' in which he recalls his love for his daughter, Léopoldine, who drowned accidentally with her husband in the Seine in 1843. In the poem, he is preparing to set out on a journey to place a 'bouquet de houx vert' et 'bruyère en fleur' on her tomb.

### Demain, dès l'aube

Demain, dès l'aube, à l'heure où blanchit la campagne,  
Tomorrow at dawn at the hour when the countryside whitens,

Je partirai. Vois-tu, je sais que tu m'attends.  
I will set out. I know you are waiting for me.

J'irai par la forêt, j'irai par la montagne.  
I will travel through the forest, and over the mountains,

Je ne puis demeurer loin de toi plus longtemps.  
I can no longer remain far from you.

Je marcherai les yeux fixés sur mes pensées,  
I will walk with my eyes fixed upon my thoughts,

Sans rien voir au dehors, sans entendre aucun bruit,  
Seeing nothing around me, hearing no sound.

Seul, inconnu, le dos courbé, les mains croisées,  
Alone, friendless, my back curved, my hands crossed,

Triste, et le jour pour moi sera comme la nuit.  
And the day, for me, will be as the night.

Je ne regarderai ni l'or du soir qui tombe,  
I will not watch the golden close of evening,

Ni les voiles au loin descendant vers Harfleur,  
Nor the sails that glide towards Harfleur,

Et quand j'arriverai, je mettrai sur ta tombe  
And, when I arrive, I will lay on your grave

Un bouquet de houx vert et de bruyère en fleur.  
A bouquet of green holly and heather in bloom

Read and listen to 'Demain dès l'aube' and try to imagine the scene at Hugo's daughter's graveside. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0gUMIzL06rk>



The translation of the inscription on her tombstone reads:

'Here lie Charles Vacquerie Aged 26 and Leopoldine Vacquerie née Hugo aged 19 Married 15 February 1843 and died 4 September 1843'

Significantly, the success of the publication of the Hugo's '**Les Contemplations**' allowed him to buy a home for the first time in his life, Hauteville House in Guernsey. His solitude facing the sea provided him with 'une immense horizon d'idées' with which to go on to complete the manuscript of his novel, 'Les Misérables'(1862) and three widely praised collections of poetry - Les Châtiments, 1853; Les Contemplations, 1856; and La Légende des siècles, 1859). He also wrote plays for 'Le théâtre en Liberté' including 'L'Intervention' probably written around 1866 but published posthumously in 1951 as well as 'Les Travailleurs de la Mer'(1866) and 'L'Homme qui qui rit' (1869)

A sad event for Hugo while he was living in Guernsey was the death of Emilie de Putron. He delivered a moving oration at her funeral at Le Foulon Cemetery in Guernsey where you can see Emilie de Putron's tombstone. It is just off the main path to the chapel, on the left, about 80 yards before the chapel. You can find more about Emilie de Putron's connection with the Hugo family.

<http://tonyshaw3.blogspot.com/2017/04/emilie-de-putron-in-foulon-cemetery.html>

**Who was Emilie de Putron?**

**Find out as much as you can about her**

## Seasons in Hugo's novels

### Spring in Guernsey

**There are lots of possibilities for a class project - identifying the different birds, flowers etc. in this passage from 'Les Travailleurs de la Mer' with the help of a French-English dictionary and/or reference to the translation on the next page.**

'Les premiers **papillons** se posaient sur les premières **roses**. Tout était neuf dans la nature, les herbes, les mousses, les feuilles, les parfums, les rayons. Il semblait que le soleil n'eût jamais servi. Les **cailloux** étaient lavés de frais. La profonde chanson des **arbres** était chantée par des **oiseaux** nés d'hier. Il est probable que leur **coquille d'œuf** cassée par leur petit bec était encore dans **le nid**. Des essais d'ailes bruissaient dans le tremblement des **branches**. Ils chantaient leur premier chant, ils volaient leur premier vol. C'était un doux partage de tous à la fois, huppés, mésanges, piquebois, chardonnerets, bouvreuils, moines et misses. Les **lilas**, les **muguets**, les **daphnés**, les **glycines**, faisaient dans les fourrés un bariolage exquis. Une très jolie lentille d'eau qu'il y a à Guernesey, couvrait les **mares** d'une nappe d'émeraude. Les bergeronnettes et les épluque-pommiers, qui font de si gracieux petits nids, s'y baignaient. Par toutes les claires-voies de la **végétation** on apercevait le bleu du ciel. Quelques nuées lascives s'entre-poursuivaient dans l'azur avec des ondoiements de nymphes. On croyait sentir passer les baisers que s'envoyaient des bouches invisibles. Pas un vieux mur qui n'eût, comme un marié, son bouquet de **giroflées**. Les **prunelliers** étaient en fleur, les **cytises** étaient en fleur ; on voyait ces monceaux blancs qui luisaient et ces monceaux jaunes qui étincelaient à travers les entrecroisements des rameaux. Le printemps jetait tout son argent et tout son or dans l'immense panier percé des bois. Les pousses nouvelles étaient toutes fraîches vertes. On entendait en l'air des cris de bienvenue. L'été hospitalier ouvrait sa porte aux oiseaux lointains. C'était l'instant de l'arrivée des **hirondelles**. Les **thyrses** des **ajoncs** bordaient les talus des chemins creux, en attendant les thyrses des **aubépines**. Le beau et le joli faisaient bon voisinage ; le superbe se complétait par le gracieux ; le grand ne gênait pas le petit ; aucune note du concert ne se perdait ; les magnificences microscopiques étaient à leur plan dans la vaste beauté universelle ; on distinguait tout comme dans une eau limpide. Partout une divine plénitude et un gonflement mystérieux faisaient deviner l'effort panique et sacré de la sève en travail'

**Your class could paint a large picture illustrating the scene with or without the help of the translation on the next page**

## **Translation of passage from 'The Toilers of the Sea'**

'The first butterflies of the year were resting on the early roses. Everything in nature seemed new- the grass, the mosses, the leaves, the perfumes, the rays of light. The sun shone as if it had never shone before. The pebbles seemed bathed in coolness. Birds but lately fledged sang out their deep notes from the trees, or fluttered among the boughs in their attempts to use their new-found wings. There was a chattering all together of goldfinches, peewits, tomtits, woodpeckers, bullfinches, and thrushes. The blossoms of lilacs, May lilies, daphnes, and melilots mingled their various hues in the thickets. A beautiful kind of water-weed peculiar to Guernsey covered the pools with an emerald green; where the kingfishers and the water-wagtails, which make such graceful little nests, came down to bathe their wings. Through every opening in the branches appeared the deep blue sky. A few lazy clouds followed each other in the azure depths. The ear seemed to catch the sound of kisses sent from invisible lips. Every old wall had its tufts of wallflowers. The plum-trees and laburnums were in blossom; their white and yellow masses gleamed through the interlacing boughs. The spring showered all her gold and silver on the woods. The new shoots and leaves were green and fresh. Calls of welcome were in the air; the approaching summer opened her hospitable doors for birds coming from afar. It was the time of the arrival of the swallows. The clusters of furze-bushes bordered the steep sides of hollow roads in anticipation of the clusters of the hawthorn. The pretty and the beautiful reigned side by side; the magnificent and the graceful, the great and the little, had each their place. No note in the great concert of nature was lost. Green microscopic beauties took their place in the vast universal plan in which all seemed distinguishable as in limpid water. Everywhere a divine fulness, a mysterious sense of expansion, suggested the unseen effort of the sap in movement'

**Does this natural scene still exist in Guernsey?**

**Where/when did you last see some of the birds, plants, trees and flowers mentioned?**

**Attempt a similar description of nature in a special place in Guernsey**

## Winter in Guernsey

Hugo dedicated this novel to the island of Guernsey where he lived in exile for 15 years.

‘Je dédie ce livre au rocher d'hospitalité et de liberté, à ce coin de vieille terre normande où vit le noble petit peuple de la mer, à l'île de Guernesey, sévère et douce, mon asile actuel, mon tombeau probable’.

### Translation

‘I dedicate this book to the rock of hospitality and liberty, to that portion of old Norman ground inhabited by the noble little nation of the sea, to the island of Guernsey, severe yet kind, my present asylum, my probable tomb’

It is interesting that he begins by setting the novel of ‘Toilers of the Sea’ in the 1820’s on a snowy day in Guernsey. We cannot know if Hugo himself ever witnessed snow in Guernsey but he had obviously heard that frost and snow were remarkable events and that a white Christmas is a very rare event. The heading on the first page is entitled:

‘A word written on a white page’ ‘Un mot écrit sur une page blanche’

### Extract from **LES TRAVAILLEURS DE LA MER (1866)**

‘La Christmas de 182... fut remarquable à Guernesey. Il neigea ce jour-là. Dans les îles de la Manche, un hiver où il gèle à glace est mémorable, et la neige fait évènement.

Le matin de cette Christmas, **la route qui longe la mer de Saint-Pierre-Port au valle** était toute blanche. Il avait neigé depuis minuit jusqu’à l’aube. Vers neuf heures, peu après le lever du soleil, comme ce n’était pas encore le moment pour les anglicans d’aller à **l’église de Saint-Sampson** et pour les wesleyens d’aller à **la chapelle Eldad**, le chemin était à peu près désert. Dans tout le tronçon de route qui sépare la première tour de la seconde tour, il n’y avait que trois passants, un enfant, un homme et une femme. Ces trois passants, marchant à distance les uns des autres, n’avaient visiblement aucun lien entre eux. L’enfant, d’une huitaine d’années, s’était arrêté, et regardait la neige avec curiosité. L’homme venait derrière la femme, à une centaine de pas d’intervalle. Il allait comme elle du côté de Saint-Sampson. L’homme, jeune encore, semblait quelque chose comme un ouvrier ou un matelot. Il avait ses habits de tous les jours, une vareuse de gros drap brun, et un pantalon à jambières goudronnées, ce qui paraissait indiquer qu’en dépit de la fête il n’irait à aucune chapelle. Ses épais souliers de cuir brut, aux semelles garnies de gros clous, laissaient sur la neige une empreinte plus ressemblante à une serrure de prison qu’à un pied d’homme. La passante, elle, avait évidemment déjà sa toilette d’église ; elle portait une large mante ouatée de soie noire à faille, sous laquelle elle était fort coquettement ajustée d’une robe de popeline d’Irlande à bandes alternées blanches et roses, et, si elle n’eût eu des bas rouges, on eût pu la prendre pour une Parisienne. Elle allait devant elle avec une vivacité libre et légère, et, à cette marche qui n’a encore rien porté de la vie, on devinait une jeune fille. Elle avait cette grâce fugitive de l’allure qui marque la plus délicate des transitions, l’adolescence, les deux crépuscules mêlés, le commencement d’une femme dans la fin d’un enfant. L’homme ne la remarquait pas. Tout à coup, près d’un bouquet de chênes verts qui est à l’angle d’un courtill, au lieu dit **les Basses-Maisons**, elle se retourna, et ce

mouvement fit que l'homme la regarda. Elle s'arrêta, parut le considérer un moment, puis se baissa, et l'homme crut voir qu'elle écrivait avec son doigt quelque chose sur la neige. Elle se redressa, se remit en marche, doubla le pas, se retourna encore, cette fois en riant, et disparut à gauche du chemin, dans le sentier bordé de haies qui mène au **château de Lierre**. L'homme, quand elle se retourna pour la seconde fois, reconnut Déruchette, une ravissante fille du pays. Il n'éprouva aucun besoin de se hâter, et, quelques instants après, il se trouva près du bouquet de chênes à l'angle du courtil. Il ne songeait déjà plus à la passante disparue, et il est probable que si, en cette minute-là, quelque marsouin eût sauté dans la mer ou quelque rouge-gorge dans les buissons, cet homme eût passé son chemin, l'œil fixé sur le rouge-gorge ou le marsouin. Le hasard fit qu'il avait les paupières baissées, son regard tomba machinalement sur l'endroit où la jeune fille s'était arrêtée. Deux petits pieds s'y étaient imprimés, et à côté il lut ce mot tracé par elle dans la neige : Gilliatt.

Ce mot était son nom.

Il s'appelait Gilliatt.

Il resta longtemps immobile, regardant ce nom, ces petits pieds, cette neige, puis continua sa route, pensif.

### **Translation of extract**

'CHRISTMAS DAY in the year 182- was somewhat remarkable in the island of Guernsey. Snow fell on that day. In the Channel Islands a frosty winter is remarkable, and a fall of snow is an event'....'On that Christmas morning the road which skirts the seashore from St. Peter's Port to the Vale was clothed in white. From midnight till the break of day the snow had been falling. Towards nine o'clock, a little after the rising of the wintry sun, as it was too early yet for the Church of England folks to go to St. Sampson's, or for the Wesleyans to repair to Eldad Chapel, the road was almost deserted. Throughout that portion of the highway which separates the first from the second tower only three foot-passengers could be seen. These were a child, a man, and a woman. Walking at a distance from each other, these wayfarers had no visible connection. The child, a boy of about eight years old, had stopped, and was looking curiously at the wintry scene. The man walked behind the woman at a distance of about a hundred paces. Like her, he was coming from the direction of the church of St. Sampson. The appearance of the man, who was still young, was something between that of a workman and a sailor. He wore his working-day clothes-a kind of Guernsey shirt of coarse brown stuff, and trousers partly concealed by tarpaulin leggings-a costume which seemed to indicate that, notwithstanding the holy day, he was going to no place of worship. His heavy shoes of rough leather, with their soles covered with large nails, left upon the snow as he walked a print more like that of a prison lock than the foot of a man. The woman, on the contrary, was evidently dressed for church. She wore a large mantle of black silk, wadded, under which she had coquettishly adjusted a dress of Irish poplin, trimmed alternately with white and pink; but for her red stockings, she might have been taken for a Parisian. She walked on with a light and free step, so little suggestive of the burden of

life that it might easily be seen that she was young. Her movements possessed that subtle grace which indicates the most delicate of all transitions-that soft intermingling, as it were, of two twilights-the passage from the condition of a child to that of womanhood. The man seemed to take no heed of her. Suddenly, near a group of oaks at the corner of a field, and at the spot called the Basses Maisons, she turned, and the movement seemed to attract the attention of the man. She stopped, seemed to reflect a moment, then stooped, and the man fancied that he could discern that she was tracing with her finger some letters in the snow. Then she rose again, went on her way at a quicker pace, turned once more, this time smiling, and disappeared to the left of the roadway by the footpath under the hedges which leads to the Ivy Castle. When she had turned for the second time the man had recognised her as Deruchette, a charming girl of that neighbourhood.

'The man felt no need of quickening his pace, and some minutes later he found himself near a group of oaks. Already he had ceased to think of the vanished Deruchette, and if at that moment a porpoise had appeared above the water, or a robin had caught his eye in the hedges, it is probable that he would have passed on his way. But it happened that his eyes were fixed upon the ground: his gaze fell mechanically upon the spot where the girl had stopped. Two little footprints were there plainly visible; and beside them he read this word, evidently written by her in the snow 'Gilliatt'. It was his own name. He lingered a while motionless, looking at the letters, the little footprints, and the snow: and then walked on, evidently in a thoughtful mood.

**Can you find a picture or photo of Guernsey in the snow? When was the last time snow fell in Guernsey?**

**Do you recognize the way taken by Deruchette through the snow?**

**How well did Hugo know his way round Guernsey?**

**Are all his descriptions true to the map of Guernsey today?**

**Draw a sketch map to illustrate your findings.**

**Read the rest of the story in English or French and find out what happens in the novel to Gilliatt and to Deruchette**

## Victor Hugo and Christmas

Victor Hugo liked to give gifts to children in Guernsey at Christmas and gave careful thought to these gifts. We know from photographs that he held a Christmas party for the poor children in Guernsey around 1865. Extracts from the local press give us a glimpse into Hugo's philanthropic nature and philosophy of life.

\*See Alfred Barbou's biography of Hugo, *Victor Hugo and his time*, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Seattle and Rivington, 1883. (Priaulx Library, Guernsey) There is a picture of an engraving in the Priaulx Library which shows Victor Hugo in later life as the grandfatherly figure he had become from the romantic young man of his youth. : Victor Hugo and his time, London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1883. (Priaulx Library, Guernsey)



The press report of the event goes into great detail: 'Once a week M. Victor Hugo gives a large number of poor children an excellent dinner. He has just given out to his thirty-two protégés the clothes they needed, and gave them the pleasure of a Christmas tree, with presents suitable for their age. This family get-together took place on Wednesday [Christmas Eve] and was attended by several volunteers. Before handing out the clothes and toys, the poet gave the children a little speech couched in terms they could understand. He told them that it is every man's duty to give their less well-off brothers some of what they have; that he was happy to do what he was doing for them; but that they should understand that they did not owe him anything, but should be grateful to the Father of all, and if they wanted to thank anyone it should not be him, but God, who makes all things well. He then spoke to them about the enormous importance of work, which is for everyone, depending upon their vocation and abilities. He said that work was the only means of making people happy, virtuous, and good. Finally, he added: 'My dear children, amongst the toys I have just given you, you will find no guns, no cannon or swords, no murderous weapon that would make you think of war or destruction. War is a dreadful thing; the people of the world are made for loving one another, not killing each other. The girls will find dolls to play with, ideal for learning how to be mother, which will be their job later in life. For the boys there are little boats and little trains, in other words toys designed to encourage work, progress and the mind, and not destruction. The toys were then handed out to the children. It was lovely to see the joy on everyone's faces, and it would be difficult to say who was happier, those who gave the presents, or those who received them'.



### **An extract from 'LES MISERABLES' (1862)**

'le voyageur se rappela la gracieuse et immémoriale coutume des enfants qui déposent leur chaussure dans la cheminée le jour de Noël pour y attendre dans les ténèbres quelque étincelant cadeau de leur bonne fée. Éponine et Azelma n'avaient eu garde d'y manquer, et elles avaient mis chacune un de leurs souliers dans la cheminée'.



'The traveller recalled the graceful and immemorial custom in accordance with which children place their shoes in the chimney on Christmas eve, there to await in the darkness some sparkling gift from their good fairy. Eponine and Azelma had taken care not to omit this, and each of them had set one of her shoes on the hearth.'

**What is the context of this passage in 'Les Misérables'?**

### **An extract from 'NOTRE DAME DE PARIS' (1831)**

'Et, si c'était une nuit de Noël, tandis que la grosse cloche, qui semblait râler, appelait les fidèles à la messe ardente de minuit, il y avait un tel air répandu sur la sombre façade qu'on eût dit que le grand portail dévorait la foule et que la rosace la regardait.'



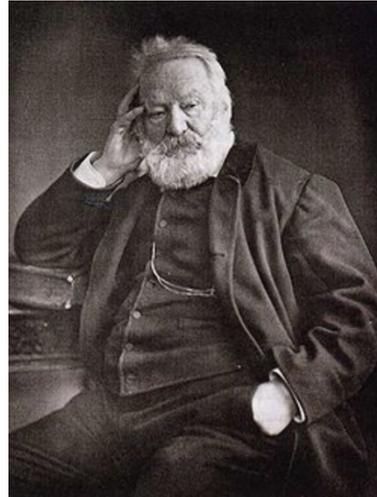
#### **Translation**

'And if it happened to be a Christmas-night when the great bell seemed to rattle in its throat as it called the faithful to the midnight mass, there was such an indescribable air of life spread over the sombre facade that the great door-way looked as if it were swallowing the entire crowd, and the rose-window staring at them.'

**What is the context of this passage in Notre Dame de Paris?**

\*See section on Victor Hugo and Paris

## 'L'art d'être grand-père' (1877)



In his collection of poems entitled **'L'art d'être grand-père'** (1877), the poem **'Fenêtres Ouvertes'** gives an evocative description of Guernsey and what can be heard through the open windows of Hauteville House on waking up half asleep in the morning.

**Read this poem in French and in English and attempt to write a similar poem describing what you hear when you wake up in the morning. Do you think Guernsey sounds have changed since Hugo's day?**

### Fenêtres Ouvertes

Le matin - en dormant  
J'entends des voix. Lueurs à travers ma paupière.  
Une cloche est en branle à l'église Saint-Pierre.  
Cris des baigneurs. Plus près ! plus loin ! non, par ici !  
Non, par là ! Les oiseaux gazouillent, Jeanne aussi.  
Georges l'appelle. Chant des coqs. Une trueller  
Racle un toit. Des chevaux passent dans la ruelle.  
Grincement d'une faux qui coupe le gazon.  
Chocs. Rumeurs. Des couvreurs marchent sur la maison.  
Bruits du port. Sifflement des machines chauffées.  
Musique militaire arrivant par bouffées.  
Brouhaha sur le quai. Voix françaises. Merci.  
Bonjour. Adieu. Sans doute il est tard, car voici  
Que vient tout près de moi chanter mon rouge-gorge.  
Vacarme de marteaux lointains dans une forge.  
L'eau clapote. On entend haleter un steamer.  
Une mouche entre. Souffle immense de la mer.

## Translation

### Open Windows

Morning. Voices pierce my sleep.  
Ghosts glimmering upon my eyelid.  
A lone bell swinging in Saint-Pierre church.  
Shrieks of swimmers. Closer! Further! No, through here!  
No, through there! Crows cawing cacophonies.  
George calls Jeanne no longer. Singing of the cockerels.  
A shovel scrapes the roof.  
Horses hooves clattering along the alley whilst  
squeaking sickles grate the grass.  
Thuds. Creaking. Screaming. Tilers tiptoe over tiles of terraces.  
Hubbub of the harbour, burping of the boilers.  
The military band billows waves of fanfaronade.  
Clatter on the quay. French voices – merci, bonjour, adieu.  
My red robin arrives, scolding my indolence.  
The distant din of hammers in the forge.  
Water laps, steamers puff for air. A buzzing flea  
Enveloped by the huge howl of the sea.

**Do you recognise the scene?**

**Could you sketch a picture of how St Peter Port might have looked in 19<sup>th</sup> century and how it looks today?**

## Victor Hugo's St Peter Port

**Here is Hugo's description of the Town church and the harbour.**

**This passage is found towards the end of 'Les Travailleurs de la Mer'**

'L'église de Saint-Pierre-Port, triple pignon juxtaposé avec transept et flèche, est au bord de l'eau au fond du port presque sur le débarcadère même. Elle donne la bienvenue à ceux qui arrivent et l'adieu à ceux qui s'en vont. Cette église est la majuscule de la longue ligne que fait la façade de la ville sur l'océan. Elle est en même temps paroisse de Saint-Pierre-Port et doyenné de toute l'île. Elle a pour desservant le subrogé de l'évêque, clergyman à pleins pouvoirs. Le havre de Saint-Pierre-Port, très beau et très large port aujourd'hui, était à cette époque, et il y a dix ans encore, moins considérable que le havre de Saint-Sampson. C'étaient deux grosses murailles cyclopéennes courbes partant du rivage à tribord et à bâbord et se rejoignant presque à leur extrémité, où il y avait un petit phare blanc. Sous ce phare un étroit goulet, ayant encore le double anneau de la chaîne qui le fermait au moyen âge, donnait passage aux navires. Qu'on se figure une pince de homard entrouverte, c'était le havre de Saint-Pierre-Port. Cette tenaille prenait sur l'abîme un peu de mer qu'elle forçait à se tenir tranquille. Mais, par le vent d'est, il y avait du flot à l'entrebâillement, le port clapotait, et il était plus sage de ne point entrer. C'est ce qu'avait fait ce jour-là le Cashmere. Il avait mouillé en rade. Les navires, quand il y avait du vent d'est, prenaient volontiers ce parti qui, en outre, leur économisait les frais de port. Dans ce cas, les bateliers commissionnés de la ville, brave tribu de marins que le nouveau port a destituée, venaient prendre dans leurs barques, soit à l'embarcadère, soit aux stations de la plage, les voyageurs, et les transportaient, eux et leurs bagages, souvent par de très grosses mers et toujours sans accident, aux navires en partance. Le vent d'est est un vent de côté, très bon pour la traversée d'Angleterre ; on roule, mais on ne tangué pas'.

**Hugo's keen observation and descriptive powers in French are evident in this passage.**

**Look at the translation on the next page and comment on his style of writing**

## Translation of passage from 'Toilers of the Sea'

The church of St. Peter's Port, with its three gable-ends placed side by side, its transept and its steeple, stands at the water's side at the end of the harbour, and nearly on the landing place itself, where it welcomes those who arrive, and gives the departing "God speed." It represents the capital letter at the beginning of that long line which forms the front of the town towards the sea. It is both the parish church of St. Peter's Port and the chief place of the Deanery of the whole island. Its officiating minister is the surrogate of the bishop, a clergyman in full orders. The harbour of St. Peter's Port, a very fine and large port at the present day, was at that epoch, and even up to ten years ago, less considerable than the harbour of St. Sampson. It was enclosed by two enormous thick walls, beginning at the water's edge on both sides, and curving till they almost joined again at the extremities, where there stood a little white lighthouse. Under this lighthouse, a narrow gullet, bearing still the two rings of the chain with which it was the custom to bar the passage in ancient times, formed the entrance for vessels. The harbour of St. Peter's Port might be well compared with the claws of a huge lobster opened a little way. This kind of pincers took from the ocean a portion of the sea, which it compelled to remain calm. But during the easterly winds the waves rolled heavily against the narrow entrance, the port was agitated, and it was better not to enter. This is what had happened with the 'Cashmere' that day, which had accordingly anchored in the roads. The vessels, during the easterly winds, preferred this course, which besides saved them the port dues. On these occasions the boatmen of the town, a hardy race of mariners whom the new port has thrown out of employment, came in their boats to fetch passengers at the landing-place or at stations on the shore, and carried them with their luggage, often in heavy seas, but always without accident, to the vessels about to sail. The east wind blows off the shore, and is very favourable for the passage to England; the vessel at such times rolls, but does not pitch.

## Victor Hugo and Paris

Recent tragic event in Paris echoes Victor Hugo's description in his novel 'Notre Dame de Paris, published in 1831 of a fire at the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris.

Victor Hugo décrivait l'incendie dans son roman 'Notre Dame de Paris' publié 1831

“ Tous les yeux s'étaient levés vers le haut de l'église. Ce qu'ils voyaient était extraordinaire. Sur le sommet de la galerie la plus élevée, plus haut que la rosace centrale, il y avait une grande flamme qui montait entre les deux clochers avec des tourbillons d'étincelles, une grande flamme désordonnée et furieuse dont le vent emportait par moments un lambeau dans la fumée. Au-dessous de cette flamme, au-dessous de la sombre balustrade à trèfles de braise, deux gouttières en gueules de monstres vomissaient sans relâche cette pluie ardente qui détachait son ruissellement argenté sur les ténèbres de la façade inférieure. À mesure qu'ils approchaient du sol, les deux jets de plomb liquide s'élargissaient en gerbes, comme l'eau qui jaillit des mille trous de l'arrosoir. Au-dessus de la flamme, les énormes tours, de chacune desquelles on voyait deux faces crues et tranchées, l'une toute noire, l'autre toute rouge, semblaient plus grandes encore de toute l'immensité de l'ombre qu'elles projetaient jusque dans le ciel. Leurs innombrables sculptures de diables et de dragons prenaient un aspect lugubre. La clarté inquiète de la flamme les faisait remuer à l'œil. Il y avait des guivres qui avaient l'air de rire, des gargouilles qu'on croyait entendre japper, des salamandres qui soufflaient dans le feu, des tarasques qui éternuaient dans la fumée. Et parmi ces monstres ainsi réveillés de leur sommeil de pierre par cette flamme, par ce bruit, il y en avait un qui marchait et qu'on voyait de temps en temps passer sur le front ardent du bûcher comme une chauve-souris devant une chandelle”

“All eyes were raised to the top of the church. They beheld there an extraordinary sight. On the crest of the highest gallery, higher than the central rose window, there was a great flame rising between the two towers with whirlwinds of sparks, a vast, disordered, and furious flame, a tongue of which was borne into the smoke by the wind, from time to time. Below that fire, below the gloomy balustrade with its trefoils showing darkly against its glare, two spouts with monster throats were vomiting forth unceasingly that burning rain, whose silvery stream stood out against the shadows of the lower façade. As they approached the earth, these two jets of liquid lead spread out in sheaves, like water springing from the thousand holes of a watering-pot. Above the flame, the enormous towers, two sides of each of which were visible in sharp outline, the one wholly black, the other wholly red, seemed still more vast with all the immensity of the shadow which they cast even to the sky. Their innumerable sculptures of demons and dragons assumed a lugubrious aspect. The restless light of the flame made them move to the eye. There were griffins which had the air of laughing, gargoyles which one fancied one heard yelping, salamanders which puffed at the fire, tarasques\* which sneezed in the smoke. And among the monsters thus roused from their sleep of stone by this flame, by this noise, there was one who walked about, and who was seen, from time to time, to pass across the glowing face of the pile, like a bat in front of a candle”. \*The Tarasque is a fearsome legendary dragon-like mythological hybrid from Provence, in southern France, tamed in a story about Saint Martha. On 25 November 2005 the UNESCO included the Tarasque on the list of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Wikipedia

**Look at the context of the fire in this passage in the novel. Are there any similarities in press accounts of the fire on 15 April 2019. Can you find any descriptions of the recent fire? How do they compare with Hugo's imaginary account? What can we conclude from this?**

**Why do you think Notre Dame was so important to Victor Hugo?**

## Notes

**'Les Châtiments'** published in 1853 was a collection of satirical poems which contributed to Hugo's exile from France. It was a virulent condemnation of the tyranny of the newly proclaimed Emperor Napoleon III who Hugo openly declared as a traitor to France. As well as exaggerating the failings of Louis Napoleon's regime, the collection is a strong critique of a society bound by censorship of the press and the arts. It has references to political figures all of whom gained notoriety for their corrupt and cruel natures.

Between 1855 and 1876, he wrote a collection of poems entitled, **'La Légende des Siècles'**, contemplating the 'wall of centuries', indistinct and terrible, on which scenes of the past, present and future are drawn, and along which the whole procession of humanity can be seen. These poems are depictions of these scenes, perceived and interspersed with terrifying visions. Hugo sought obscure figures, usually his own inventions, who incarnated and symbolized their eras. As he proclaims in the preface to the first series, "this is history, eavesdropped upon the door of legend." He combines different poetic genres- lyrical, epic and satirical to form a view of human experience, seeking to illustrate the history of humanity, and to bear witness to its long journey **'from the darkness into the light'** ( A reminder here of climbing the stairs in Hauteville House?)



In 1871, in the garden of Hauteville House, Victor Hugo and his grandchildren planted 'un chêne' from an acorn. He named it "Oak of the United States of Europe", hoping the tree would see Europe united and at peace. More than a century after Hugo's death, the oak is still alive. If you have not yet made a visit to **Hauteville House in Guernsey**, you will find it is not just a house! If you have visited it recently, you can see the tree in the garden and the house restored to how it was when Victor Hugo was living there.

What are your impressions?

## Some Victor Hugo quotes you may wish to consider

### Discuss some of these in the context of Hugo's writings. What do they tell us about Victor Hugo himself?

"He never went out without a book under his arm, and he often came back with two."  
— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

"Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise."  
— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

"What Is Love? I have met in the streets a very poor young man who was in love. His hat was old, his coat worn, the water passed through his shoes and the stars through his soul"  
— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

"Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent."  
— Victor Hugo, *Hugo's Works: William Shakespeare*

"To put everything in balance is good, to put everything in harmony is better."  
— Victor Hugo

"Love is like a tree: it grows by itself, roots itself deeply in our being and continues to flourish over a heart in ruin. The inexplicable fact is that the blinder it is, the more tenacious it is. It is never stronger than when it is completely unreasonable."  
— Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*

"The power of a glance has been so much abused in love stories, that it has come to be disbelieved in. Few people dare now to say that two beings have fallen in love because they have looked at each other. Yet it is in this way that love begins, and in this way only."  
— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

"To love another person is to see the face of God."  
— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

"It is nothing to die. It is frightful not to live."  
— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

"Not being heard is no reason for silence."  
— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

"Have courage for the great sorrows of life and patience for the small ones; and when you have laboriously accomplished your daily task, go to sleep in peace. God is awake."  
— Victor Hugo

"The greatest happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved -- loved for ourselves, or rather, loved in spite of ourselves."  
— Victor Hugo

"Laughter is sunshine, it chases winter from the human face."  
— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

"To love or have loved, that is enough. Ask nothing further. There is no other pearl to be found in the dark folds of life." — Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

“Those who do not weep, do not see.” — Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

“Promise to give me a kiss on my brow when I am dead. --I shall feel it.”

She dropped her head again on Marius' knees, and her eyelids closed. He thought the poor soul had departed. Eponine remained motionless. All at once, at the very moment when Marius fancied her asleep forever, she slowly opened her eyes in which appeared the sombre profundity of death, and said to him in a tone whose sweetness seemed already to proceed from another world:--

“And by the way, Monsieur Marius, I believe that I was a little bit in love with you.”

— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

“To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark.”

— Victor Hugo

“If I speak, I am condemned. If I stay silent, I am damned!”

— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

“Certain thoughts are prayers. There are moments when, whatever be the attitude of the body, the soul is on its knees.” — Victor Hugo

“Reason is intelligence taking exercise. Imagination is intelligence with an erection.”

— Victor Hugo

“You ask me what forces me to speak? a strange thing; my conscience.”

— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

“You who suffer because you love, love still more. To die of love, is to live by it.”

— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

“Teach the ignorant as much as you can; society is culpable in not providing a free education for all and it must answer for the night which it produces. If the soul is left in darkness sins will be committed. The guilty one is not he who commits the sin, but he who causes the darkness.”

— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

“People do not lack strength, they lack will.” — Victor Hugo

“He who opens a school door, closes a prison.” — Victor Hugo

“Nothing makes a man so adventurous as an empty pocket.”

— Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*

“Life's great happiness is to be convinced we are loved.”

— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

“A man is not idle because he is absorbed in thought. There is visible labour and there is invisible labour.”

— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

“No army can withstand the strength of an idea whose time has come.” — Victor Hugo

For more information, contact Margaret Jones, ‘Victor Hugo in Guernsey’ Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer. See Victor Hugo in Guernsey website.