

VICTOR HUGO'S



The Intervention

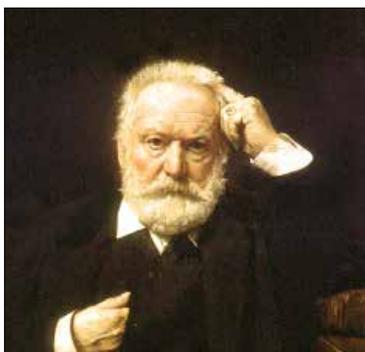
A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

SCRIPT

Adapted for the English Stage by Jill Sproule
from English Translations by Margaret Jones and Agnès Perry

The Victor Hugo in Guernsey Society

June 2018



The Intervention A World Project

The Society thanks
its supporters

The Victor Hugo in Guernsey Society's raison d'être is to promote and celebrate Victor Hugo and his link with Guernsey, and we are proud to have brought this play, written in the island, to the English-speaking public's attention.

Having the support of the Guernsey Amateur Dramatic and Operatic Society has been invaluable, and we thank them sincerely, as we do the Guernsey Arts Commission, Charles and Connie Wilkinson and our private sponsors, without whose financial support this project would have been impossible, and we applaud the translators and the team of actors, producers, and crew who have given their time in order to bestow a new kind of life on this fascinating work by one of the world's giants, Guernsey's most famous resident, Victor Hugo.



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The Intervention A World Premiere

An introduction by
Dinah Bott

Victor Hugo found time and inspiration in Guernsey to create many things: poetry, novels, political pamphlets, drawings of striking modernity, interior decoration of the most extraordinary kind. He had at one time planned to build a theatre in his garden at Hauteville House to stage another and less well-known part of his exile output—the Théâtre en Liberté.

Theatre in 19th-century France reached a wide and diverse audience. In the 1830s Hugo had used historical drama to comment upon the political situation. While in exile in Guernsey he began to write plays of a somewhat different kind that reflected and responded critically to contemporary French theatrical style, which itself tended towards the lighter genres favoured by the regime. Elements of this, Hugo's 'Second theatrical period' are innovative and surprisingly modern. Hugo found it unacceptable that in France he was subject to unofficial censorship and thus in principle did not want the plays produced there. Although he would have been quite prepared for them to be put on elsewhere, this never in the end came to pass, and they were not performed or published until after his death.

The Victor Hugo in Guernsey Society has chosen one of the most accessible of these plays, *The Intervention*, to present in English for the first time. Help in understanding the background to the play was provided by Florence Naugrette of the Paris-Sorbonne University, whose edition with its accompanying notes published by FolioPlus (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2012) we recommend for further reading, and who kindly agreed to introduce the play on its first English performance in Guernsey. Two members of the Society translated Hugo's text, and their translations were then adapted into a script.

In creating *The Intervention*, Hugo as always crafts a work that despite being intensely personal still carries a universal message. Its being written in Guernsey only adds to its interest. The Victor Hugo in Guernsey Society intends to produce materials for schools based on the play, making the script freely available, and to create an online archive to include a film of the première and which will be free to access.

Dinah Bott

Chairman, The Victor Hugo In Guernsey Society



Victor Hugo's 'Theatre In Exile'

An introduction by Florence Naugrette

The theatre Victor Hugo wrote during his exile was imaginative and fanciful. He interacted in a satirical way with contemporary Parisian productions, with which his friends kept him up to date.

Very diverse in form (from a brief poetical monologue to a large-scale prose melodrama via a symbolist 'fairy-play' and socially-relevant vaudeville), these plays, which would be later collected together as 'Theatre in freedom' (the title itself cocks a snook at exile) have a common theme which aligns them with another work written during the same period, *La Légende des Siècles*: both feature as heroes society's powerless – children, beggars, workers, old people, prostitutes, witches, exiles, forest spirits – who, thanks to their intelligence, their sincerity, their indignation, and the energy of their despair, find the power, paradoxically, to change their future and that of the world.

Florence Naugrette

Florence Naugrette is a Professor of French literature, history and theory of theatre at the Paris-Sorbonne University.

Her past posts include the University of Rouen, University Paris III, and Stanford University.

She directs the electronic edition of the Letters of Juliette Drouet to Victor Hugo. The website features over 6,000 of Juliette's letters and will eventually publish Juliette's entire epistolary diary from 1833 - 1883.

More information:

<http://www.juliettedrouet.org/>



Producing The Intervention

An interesting challenge Jill Sproule, Director

Actors need a script they can work with: changing pace and mood, enjoying space for interpretation, movement and gestures. Unnecessary words are cut to point language, especially when pace picks up in the poor couple's tiffs:

MARCINELLE: 'Miser!'

EDMOND: 'Flirt!'

Pomposity and artificial language are used as Eurydice and Gerpivrac fight:

EURYDICE: 'Let us say no more about it: I will write it on my list: ten francs from a worker, five francs from a baron.'

GERPIVRAC: 'So you can write, Eurydice?'

EURYDICE: 'Why shouldn't I? You can crochet.'

GERPIVRAC: 'My dear, our ancestors, the colonels of an hundred years ago, did raised-satin stitching.'

EURYDICE: 'And what's more, they won the Battle of Fontenoy.'

Sc I and V are fun to translate and act. The tone is mostly playful *dépits amoureux*: light with flashes of discontentment. The English dialogue must be as natural as the French. Both characters are deceived in their righteous indignation. The humour is gentle, though: readers and audience must identify with the couple if the play is to have success. As the couple rush childishly to destruction in the final scene, the little dress is taken out of the wardrobe like a *Deus ex machina*. It forces an abrupt realisation of what they are doing. The closing lines are suddenly stripped and vulnerable, there is a risk of bathos unless emotions can be harnessed.

Sc II gives Eurydice words to display her superiority. At the end, she has a plain soliloquy direct to audience. Edmond is under her spell but suddenly his wife is coming back. He confesses he is afraid of her. To Eurydice he warns his 'femme' is coming back - she likes his use of 'femme' rather than 'épouse':

EDMOND: 'It's my other half...'

EURYDICE: 'His other half ...He didn't say 'wife'.

This allows her to dream that she can go back to her old life. She is enjoying her stardom but sees how precarious her position is:

EURYDICE: "I'm on course for the abyss". (day dreaming) Oh, I wish I could live an honest life again.'

This sets the scene for Marcinelle and Eurydice to get to grips with each other - two girls from the same village who have different fortunes, reminiscent of Thomas Hardy's *The Ruined Maid*, written at the same time. Eurydice ditches her diva act, now she's trying to make common ground with Marcinelle, lapsing into the vernacular. Marcinelle stays subservient until she realises Eurydice is really Gros-Jeanne:

EURYDICE: It's me.

MARCINELLE: You, of all people!

EURYDICE: Me.

MARCINELLE: I beg your pardon, madam, but you spoke as if you knew me.'

Eurydice seeks to convince Marcinelle she made lace as a child - there is an encyclopaedic paragraph for the actor to deliver! There are also shared childhood songs and dances. I wrote the song lyrics with composer Michael Sproule. The existing French folksong imposed a metre and rhyme scheme with a repeating 'Fa la la' refrain - the English equivalent of 'Nique noc nac muche'. One innovation was to draw Marcinelle into the final verse to signify her recognition of Gros-Jeanne. It doesn't stop Marcinelle seeing her treachery though!

Sc IV is wordy and difficult. Baron Gerpivrac wields his worldly knowledge knowledge to dominate. He uses a different register with each, sparring in a desultory way with his mistress and dazzling the naïve object of his lust. Jargon about fashion, horse racing and toilettries abound: a challenge to translator and actor! Marcinelle is almost defenceless in Sc IV mirroring moon-struck Edmond in Sc II. Their rich clients intrude and parade about their attic home, seeing what they fancy and assuming they have a right to it:

EURYDICE: 'I have a foolish yearning to live in a garret!'

GERPIVRAC: 'This little one would suit me very nicely.'

'The Intervention' is a beautifully crafted, intimate play which richly repays director and cast as they uncover new and deeper layers of meaning.



First presented on the English stage at the Princess Royal Centre for Performing Arts, Guernsey, on 23rd June 2018 by the Victor Hugo in Guernsey Society with the following cast and crew:

Characters

Edmond Gombert	Michael Sullivan
Marcinelle Gombert	Lydia Pugh
Mademoiselle Eurydice	Martine Wallbridge
Baron de Gerprivac	Chris Oliver
James, a young footman	Marcus Meredith

Production

Directed & adapted for the stage	Jill Sproule
Producer and Designer	Chris Oliver
Stage Manager	Emma Hodge
Properties	Fleur Rowe
Costumes	Jill Sproule
Set Production & Crew	Stuart Horsepool, Andrew Gethin-Jones
Lighting	Samantha Le Noury
Sound	Russell Kellaway

Music composed and performed by Michael Sproule

Characters

Edmond Gombert

Marcinelle, his wife

Mademoiselle Eurydice

Baron de Gerpivrac

James, a young stable boy/footman

An attic bedroom. Very poor furnishings. Side by side are two work benches, lace-making loom and tools for making fans. There are a few unfinished fans and some lace spread out on a white wooden table. Two straw-seated rattan chairs. A wooden chest of drawers. A cupboard in the wall. A little window. Fireplace without fire. It's summer. A simple trestle bed in one corner. At the back of the room, a door. To the left, another smaller door. A jug of water on the mantelpiece.

Scene One

EDMOND GOMBERT, wears a workman's smock and a cap 'képi'

MARCINELLE, wears a simple drill dress with a matching short cape 'camail'

EDMOND GOMBERT

Shame on you! What a jealous woman you are!

MARCINELLE

Shame on you too! You're the one who's jealous!

EDMOND GOMBERT

Come on now. Let's make it up. Give me a kiss.

MARCINELLE

No.

EDMOND GOMBERT

You don't love me then?

MARCINELLE

I adore you.

EDMOND GOMBERT

So what then?

MARCINELLE

I hate you.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Why?

MARCINELLE

Because I adore you.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Marcinelle, will you kiss me?

MARCINELLE

Where's my workbag? I'm late. I must go and deliver my handiwork.

EDMOND GOMBERT

(As she goes to pick up her bag, he gently takes her arm)
Promise me, not to quarrel any more?

MARCINELLE

Promise me not to be stupid again.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Who is more stupid, the 'lad' who's jealous or the 'lass'?

MARCINELLE

You are, it's the 'lad'.

EDMOND GOMBERT

No, it's the 'lass'.

MARCINELLE

I am telling you, you're the one who's being stupid.

EDMOND GOMBERT

The lass who's jealous is worried that she's not pretty.

MARCINELLE

And the lad who's jealous is worried that he's na canny.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Oh, who cares! You are pretty, Marcinelle, you're much too pretty.

MARCINELLE

And you, you're ...! I don't want to make you big-headed so I'm not going to tell you what I think of you. One should never give men the upper hand, they take advantage. Tell me, are you still feeling jealous?

EDMOND GOMBERT

Yes, I am. And you, are you still jealous?

MARCINELLE

No, I'm not. But don't let me catch you looking at another ...lass!

EDMOND GOMBERT

Ah! If only we weren't so poor, we wouldn't feel so jealous!

MARCINELLE

That's true. I know I'm not bad looking, but my dress is ugly. You look at better dressed women and I get worried about it. I can't afford to buy all those things you need to be a real woman - the ribbons, frills, flounces, trimmings — relish, you could call it! I don't have the money to make myself pretty. I'd have a job to outdo a broomstick draped in a lace shawl! I don't relish you looking at all those gorgeous women going past.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Well, what about you, you watch all the peacocks parading about on the boulevard in their patent leather boots, do you think I like seeing them when I am in my smock? Those peacocks look so handsome!

MARCINELLE

Oh! Those other women in all their regalia! It's so easy for them to be beautiful when they are all dressed up! It's so easy for them to steal other women's husbands and lovers. They are just dolls, not like me who has a heart.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Oh yes, I'm well aware of our disadvantages! Your dandies wear white gloves while my hands are blackened with work. They're bone idle, that lot! (Both get on with their work.)

MARCINELLE

(pause) Do you remember our little girl?

EDMOND GOMBERT

Marcinelle! - Ah! I'm always thinking about her.

MARCINELLE

When she used to be playing just there, do you remember her?

EDMOND GOMBERT

In her little white dress.

MARCINELLE

That I used to wash myself with plenty of soap.

EDMOND GOMBERT

And the lace that you made for it.

MARCINELLE

She was starting to talk. Ah, she used to make us laugh! Instead of saying 'How do you do?', she'd say 'Ow doo doo'. Do you remember?

EDMOND GOMBERT

We didn't have anything, but it didn't matter, when she wore her white lace dress, she looked like a little queen. Oh dear God! That croup did for her!

MARCINELLE

She was only two years old.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Two. I can't understand how the good Lord couldn't lend us an angel for longer than that!

MARCINELLE

She was a cherub! - You know that cupboard? (She points to the wall cupboard off left)

EDMOND GOMBERT

Yes.

MARCINELLE

I keep her little dress in there. Do you want to see it?

EDMOND GOMBERT

No. It would make me cry. And I need my eyes to work. Time for us to get back to work now.

MARCINELLE

Right. I'm going to take my work back into town. I'm going off now with my workbag. Oh! I've just remembered - someone is coming today to collect the Brussels lace shawl that I had to mend, it is finished. It was the chambermaid who brought it, but she said her lady might come to pick it up herself. If someone comes, you can hand it over to whoever that might be. Here it is.

(She pulls a big lace shawl out of the chest of drawers and drapes it over the back of a chair. Edmond Gombert sits down at his work bench and goes back to painting a half-made fan)

If they ask to pay, you can take the money. It took me ten days to do the work, that's ten francs. Anyway, I am off now. Come on, give me a kiss.

(She goes towards him to kiss him. He looks at her)

EDMOND GOMBERT

Where are you going?

MARCINELLE

To deliver the work I've been doing.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Which way?

MARCINELLE

Duphot Street. To the big draper's shop at the corner of the boulevard.

EDMOND GOMBERT

You are going to walk along the boulevard again!

MARCINELLE

Which other way do you want me to go?

EDMOND GOMBERT

Not that way.

MARCINELLE

To get onto the boulevard, you have to go by the boulevard.

EDMOND GOMBERT

I don't want you to. It's the way to the Champs Elysées and the Porte Maillot.

MARCINELLE

So what ?

EDMOND GOMBERT

The other day I followed you. You stood and watched one of them.

MARCINELLE

One of what?

EDMOND GOMBERT

A beau, one of those handsome fellows.

MARCINELLE

A beau?

EDMOND GOMBERT

One of those awful dandies from the Bois de Boulogne. A beanpole of a man with a little monocle in the corner of his eye, a big goof on horseback with a riding crop, he looked like a thug. (To an imaginary opponent) Stupid idiot! I feel like giving you a thrashing with that crop of yours. But Marcinelle, you stopped and watched him prancing about.

MARCINELLE

Who was prancing about? The dandy?

EDMOND GOMBERT

No, the horse. You stood there more than five minutes admiring him. I saw you.

MARCINELLE

Well, fancy that ! I like that coming from a man who spends his life eyeing up the women on the first floor balcony opposite!

EDMOND GOMBERT

Here we go again! Another quarrel.

MARCINELLE

You started it.

EDMOND GOMBERT

No, you did.

MARCINELLE

Some of those women go about in preposterous flounces! When I think I only have a threadbare straw hat that I wear winter and summer and you refuse me a poor little bonnet with flowers!

EDMOND GOMBERT

I don't deny you, it's our poverty sees to that.

MARCINELLE

It would only cost twelve francs.

EDMOND GOMBERT

I don't even have twelve sous.

MARCINELLE

Miser!

EDMOND GOMBERT

Flirt!

MARCINELLE

Well! So here we go now with the name calling. If you keep this up...

EDMOND GOMBERT

(getting up from his chair)

Listen, I seriously think that it's impossible for us to go on living together. We were wrong to get married in the first place. I should have stayed a bachelor and you a working girl.

MARCINELLE

You always imply the most hurtful things. You can't even say 'single girl'? Oh! you're so common!

EDMOND GOMBERT

'Single girl', that's what the middle class say. But not me, I say 'a working girl'. I'm not part of your bourgeois society.

MARCINELLE

That's quite obvious. You sound common.

EDMOND GOMBERT

That's because I am! Working class and proud of it. I think like common people and I sound like them. I've got good strong arms and a good honest heart. So where's that getting me? I work hard, I don't spare myself, and can't even make ends meet. The other day, I saw a military General go past, festooned with medals, and the sentry presents arms as he goes by; what are they saluting him for? I ask you!

They have no idea what they are talking about in the Chamber of Deputies. They never seem to sort things out. I owe two months' rent. You earn fifteen or twenty centimes a day for your lace-making, ruining your eyesight into the bargain. And I get three francs for my painted fans. Otherwise, it's unemployment. And we have to provide the raw materials ourselves. Here's my wife, I love her, yet I can't allow her a wretched little scrap of a bonnet.

MARCINELLE

Because it would make me pretty, because there are flowers on it, you can't bear it because you're jealous...

EDMOND GOMBERT

Because we're poor! We only have this ugly, cheap furniture. A dirty pallet for a bed, that's all!, just so as we can say we don't sleep on the floor. Our child died because the doctor came too late: they don't put themselves out to help poor folk. Oh the day I get into politics, things will be different. In the meantime, I am poor and see my wife watch rich people going past!

MARCINELLE

I'm telling you that you're to blame. Your head is turned as soon as a silk skirt goes trotting along the street, or a velvet coat, a frilly layered skirt, fine cashmere wool,

a feather, it turns your head all right. But you quarrel with me so as to pull the wool over my eyes. All the other women have something nice to put on, but not me. I don't have proper shoes on my feet, just old worn out little boots that let in water as soon as it starts to rain. (pause) Oh! Get away with you! I know you only too well! It's just because the bonnet has flowers on it to make me pretty. That's why you refuse to let me have it. You want me to look plain. That pleases you. You're obsessed with it. And you dare to follow me, you have just admitted it! It is really sad to think that you can follow a woman along the streets because she might happen to step aside so gentlemen on horseback can pass her by on their way to the Bois de Boulogne. (pause) What's more, I would be really flattered if any of those smart people paid attention to me, dressed like this! Because I really am in rags. You know, sir, there's really no need for you to worry, you're a working man who allows his wife go out dressed like a beggar-woman. Look here, mister, look at my dress. Aren't you ashamed of it?

EDMOND GOMBERT

You'd like me to be ashamed of your hessian dress whereas I'd like you to be proud of my worker's smock.

MARCINELLE

Your worker's smock, pah! If a flirty young woman came here wearing satin, in no time you'd be envious of those idiots and their finery! Listen, I'm going now, all this isn't going to end at all well.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Jealous, yes. Envious, no

MARCINELLE

You heard me, if someone comes for the lace shawl, you will hand it over.
– Oh! I must eat something before I leave. What's for lunch?

(She opens the food cupboard. A piece of bread can be seen on a board)

This is all!

EDMOND GOMBERT

Well, it's bread.

(He sits down again and goes back to his work. Marcinelle breaks the bread, bites into half of it and leaves the other)

MARCINELLE,

(as she is eating) I'm leaving you your share of it.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Eat it all.

MARCINELLE

No, you must eat something.

EDMOND GOMBERT

I'm not hungry.

MARCINELLE

I'm off. (moving towards him) Will you kiss me?

EDMOND GOMBERT

No.

MARCINELLE

Why not?

EDMOND GOMBERT

I'm not hungry, I tell you.

MARCINELLE

Suit yourself. (She picks up her bag and moves towards the little door)
(aside in the doorway) We are always quarrelling ! But I do still love him!
(Exit upstage L)

EDMOND GOMBERT

(alone) Oh Lord! Another quarrel! We don't seem able to find any way out of these misunderstandings between us. How is it all going to end? Will it come to us separating from one other? I wouldn't make any promises. We just don't seem able to be happy together anymore. Oh God, if she were to leave me, I'd not be able to live without her. Once the soul departs, what is left? A dying thing. I would be a dying thing.

(He settles down to his work again)

(Woman's voice, singing unaccompanied off. The voice gets nearer seeming to indicate that the person singing is climbing up the staircase)

“Oh lovely creature, if we were in this wood,
Oh lovely creature (oh yes! we could!)
We'd eat the nuts so cheerf'ly as squirrels eat their lunch,
Just like the little squirrels going munch, munch, munch.

Fa la la, Fa la la la,
Fa la la la, Fa la la la,
Fa la.

We'd eat those nuts so cheerfully
As squirrels eat their lunch,
We'd go munch, munch, munch”

EDMOND GOMBERT

Who's that coming up the stairs?

(The VOICE, singing the song again)

“Oh lovely creature, if we were in this hob,
Oh lovely creature (no tastier job)
We'd eat the little pastries so warm till all was spent,
We'd eat the little pastries to our hearts' content.

Fa la la, Fa la la la,
Fa la la la, Fa la la la,
Fa la.

We'd eat those tasty pastries all
until they were all spent
To our hearts' content!”

EDMOND GOMBERT

Sounds like a country woman!

(There is a gentle knock on the back door)

Come in !

(The door at the back of the room opens, and Mademoiselle Eurydice appears wearing a dress made of lightly coloured yak wool, with layers of light spring-green taffeta, a very low cut full length shawl of the same material. Down the front of the dress, green taffeta buttons secured by lace buttonholes. Green grosgrain belt silk ribbon holds a purse made of green moiré silk decorated with guipure lace. A cream straw hat decorated with a white feather from a wing of a rare exotic parrot. She holds an enormous bouquet. She pauses in the doorway and looks inside the attic)

NOTE

The text in green are English lyrics based on Victor Hugo's words to fit the traditional French melody.

Scene Two

EDMOND GOMBERT MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE

EDMOND GOMBERT

(aside)

A duchess at the very least. (He doffs his peaked cap, keeps it off) What kind of lady is this ? She is absolutely beautiful. But I'm overwhelmed by such beauty – it's like a sharp, sudden light in the night that dazzles. She's come at a bad time when I am feeling miserable. She must have come to the wrong door. Whatever could have brought her to my hovel?

MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE,

(entering and looking round)

What a charming little love nest! How simple it is! The people who live here must be happy.

(She stops)

This reminds me of what my life used to be like. I like these rafia seated chairs, this pine table, this pine bed. Pinewood smells so fresh!

EDMOND GOMBERT,

(in a low, sombre voice) Coffins are made of pinewood.

MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE

Calicot curtains. A vase of flowers on the window sill. You have to take care not to bump your head. A cracked mirror. This is what happiness is made of.

(Deciding to notice Edmond Gombert) Good day, sir. Who are you?

EDMOND GOMBERT

I am the man who lives here.

MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE

So I see. But who are you?

EDMOND GOMBERT

A working man. And who are you, madam?

MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE

You're a bit nose-y, aren't you?

EDMOND GOMBERT

(aside) Beauty and high society - a fatal combination!

MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE

(hums first bars of folk song)

I have come to collect my lace shawl. Is it mended?

EDMOND GOMBERT

(muttering to himself) Ah! it's the lady for the shawl.

(aloud) Here it is, madam. It is ready.

(aside) What a funny little song she was singing! I'm strangely charmed by the song and the singer.

MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE

(aside) He's all right, this young man. Big, hard-working hands, a workman's smock, he's handsome just the same. I like him. He makes a nice change from all my dull-witted dukes. In my youth, oh my goodness! I'm already twenty-five! When I was younger, I was a simple country girl. I wouldn't mind another bite of coarse bread...

(aloud, examining the shawl) This is extremely well mended. It's very well done. I know all about this kind of work. Madame Gandillot has recently taken up Venetian lace-making again. She makes what is known as the Anne of Austria's pilgrim collar. It won't sell though, her Anne of Austria collar. Fifteen francs is much too cheap; if it were to cost two hundred francs, it would be very sought after. Indeed, I like Binche lace as much as Venetian lace...

By the way, good sir, I am a charity collector. I came here for this shawl and my charity work. I'm collecting for victims of a fire, I go from door to door to ask for money. You might wonder where this particular fire took place. Don't ask me where, but there was a fire. It happened. Will you give me something for my collection? There are women and children on the streets, many poor people. Last year, I collected for a flood. (Pause). So, how much do I owe you for the shawl?

EDMOND GOMBERT

Ten francs, madam.

MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE

Here you are.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Keep the money for the poor people in the street.

MADEMOISELLE EURYDICE

(aside) He is so generous. I could really fall in love with this man.

EDMOND GOMBERT

(aside) I'm really attracted to this woman. I feel as if I am on the edge of a precipice. It's not for her paupers that I have fallen, it is for her eyes.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

(looking at the fan that Gombert was working on) Why did you lie to me?

Edmond Gombert

Me, Madam !

MADemoiselle Eurydice

You told me that you were a worker.

Edmond Gombert

Well so I am !

MADemoiselle Eurydice

It's not true. You are an artist.

Edmond Gombert

Madam! (aside) Heavens! I'm getting out of my depth here!

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Your fans are exquisite.

(aside) Oh! If only I could go back in time and have a genuine love affair! Oh yes, like I used to! I had a room like this. Imagine two young lovers, twittering like love birds. I long for a man like this!

(She looks around her and considers the attic room. She notices a book on a shelf)

And you read ? (Reading the book title) 'Paradise Lost'

Edmond Gombert

Yes, Milton. Do you know this book, 'Paradise Lost'?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

I don't know the book, but I see something here that interests me.

(She looks at the fan he is working on) This fan is a work of art. It is made from special paper, isn't it?

Edmond Gombert

Chinese vellum. I also paint on silk.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Is it you who paints those pictures, there?

Edmond Gombert

Yes, Madam.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Who is that man there with his fork?

Edmond Gombert

Neptune.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

And those little things, there? Are they angels?

Edmond Gombert

Cherubs.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

That's the same thing.

Edmond Gombert

More or less.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Those have wings. They are church angels, it's only at the theatre that they are called cherubs.

How much are you selling this fan for?

Edmond Gombert

To you, I am not selling you anything.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

(aside) He's a canny one! He's after landing the bigger fish.

Edmond Gombert,

(aside, admiring her) Now, she's what I call a woman.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

I want to buy it. Tell me how much.

Edmond Gombert

A flower from your bouquet.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

(aside) He is quite galant. If you were to put some pomade on his hair and give him a monocle, would there would be any difference between him and any royal prince? The only difference would be that this man is better than they are.

(out loud) What is your name?

Edmond Gombert

Gombert.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

I don't mean your surname. You have a first name. You only ever tell a woman your first name.

Edmond Gombert

Edmond.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

My name's Eurydice. Edmond, at last, pleased to meet you.

Edmond Gombert

Madame...

MADemoiselle Eurydice

I am not Madame.

Edmond Gombert

Mademoiselle...

MADemoiselle Eurydice

I am not Mademoiselle.

Edmond Gombert

Well then, how shall I address you?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

What? Eurydice. What a dolt! My name is Eurydice – it's quite simple, I think. Call me Eurydice.

(noticing the lace loom) What is that thing there?

Edmond Gombert

That thing there?...

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Yes, I want you to tell me what that is, there. Just a minute, I must be going mad! I have just had my shawl mended here. That is a lace loom, I know that for certain. I really don't know what I'm saying any more. I must be going mad. It seems to be alive and looming over us...

Edmond Gombert

(aside) I don't want this to go on any longer. Seeing this woman gives me pleasure. So much pleasure it hurts. She's like one of those fantastic flowers whose perfume is fatal.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

(aside) I am jealous of this loom. It's like another woman.

Edmond Gombert

Madame...

MADemoiselle Eurydice,

(staring at the loom)

Like a beloved woman.

Edmond Gombert

Madame...

MADemoiselle Eurydice

A virtuous woman.

Edmond Gombert

Mademoiselle....

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Oh, I am jealous of her.

(Out loud) I told you to call me Eurydice. Edmond, do you want my bouquet?

Edmond Gombert

Your bouquet!

MADemoiselle Eurydice

I'm giving it to you. Take it.

Edmond Gombert

Oh! I will keep it always!

(He presses it to his heart and puts it in the jug of water)

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Isn't he funny, putting it in water! Goodness, what a simple lad he is! (She laughs)

Edmond Gombert

Have I done something stupid?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Not at all. You're a good boy. (She gives him a tap on the cheek)

Edmond Gombert

(aside) The fact is, if I was foolish enough to fall in love with that woman, that love in me would look like this bouquet in the jug. She must take me for a fool. I need to show her that I am a craftsman from Paris who knows how to use the French language. By Jove, that's a fact because once I even spoke at a political meeting at the Charonne Street working man's club.

(Aloud, stuttering badly)

I...You see, madam...the first time there was a commotion in the street...no, that's not what I meant to say ..you see, there,..there are things... Anyway I wouldn't be the one who.. you understand, mademoiselle..

MADMOISELLE EURYDICE

You are a good boy.

EDMOND GOMBERT

(Listening at the little door through which Marcinelle has gone out)

Oh! My God, I hear someone coming. It must be her. I must get away. (aside) Right now, I actually feel a bit afraid of my wife!

(aloud to Eurydice) It's my other half. She is coming back. She's a little jealous. If she finds me with you, she will start up a quarrel. I'm going to make myself scarce for a bit. I'll come back. If she is surprised to see you here, tell her that you found the key in the door, that you came in, say whatever you want - that you came for the shawl.

(He goes out through the door at the back of the room)

MADMOISELLE EURYDICE

(alone) His other half... I don't like that on his lips. He didn't say my wife. She is his mistress. Bah! one mistress has to make way for another. It's the way things are. The other day, I was watching a tragedy at the National Theatre when I heard a line which applied to me. "I am on course for the abyss." (Day-dreaming) Oh! I wish I could have an honest life again!

(The little door opens. Marcinelle enters)

Scene Three

MADMOISELLE EURYDICE MARCINELLE

(Marcinelle, without seeing Mademoiselle Eurydice, enters, places her bag on the table, and notices the bouquet. She hurries up to it)

MARCINELLE

(aside, talking to herself) A bouquet! What on earth is that doing here?

(She picks it up, throws it on the floor, kicks it, then picks up the broom and sweeps it to the back of the room)

That's rich! He's buying bouquets for the women on the balcony opposite. That's obvious ! But with what? He doesn't have any money to give to me. Oh! I'll get my own back on him now!

(aside, seeing Mademoiselle Eurydice) Who is this Madame? What is she doing there?

(aloud) What brings you here, Mademoiselle?

MADMOISELLE EURYDICE

Excuse me, Madame, I am here to collect my shawl. I have just arrived.

MARCINELLE

Oh! the shawl. Here it is. That will be ten francs. (pause) Was no-one here when you came? Didn't you find anybody in?

MADMOISELLE EURYDICE

I found the key in the door so I entered. I have just come in.

MARCINELLE

(aside) He's gone out. Where's he gone? And the bouquet? I must get to the bottom of this. There must be ways for a woman to make a man sorry, and I shall find them! That's it, he's in for it this time!

(Looking carefully at Miss Eurydice who, to gain her composure, seems absorbed in examining the repaired shawl)

What an outfit! That's more like it! That's what I call properly dressed. She could not help but be pretty in that. And she really is! (Aloud) Is Madam satisfied with the repair work?

MADMOISELLE EURYDICE

(aside) How beautiful she is in her simple cotton dress.

(aloud) I was admiring it. You have done a marvellous job.

(She stares at Marcinelle) Oh, it's you!

MARCINELLE

Madame?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

You are Marcinelle!

MARCINELLE

Yes, I'm Marcinelle.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Marcinelle Barvin.

MARCINELLE

Do you know me?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

From the village of Hupriaux, near Valenciennes.

MARCINELLE

That's where I'm from.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Well, I never!

MARCINELLE

I don't understand...

MADemoiselle Eurydice

(Looking at her straight in the eyes)
Gros-Jeanne!

MARCINELLE

Madame...

MADemoiselle Eurydice

I am Gros-Jeanne. Don't you recognise Gros-Jeanne? I am from Hupriaux.

MARCINELLE

Madame...

MADemoiselle Eurydice

What! You don't recognise me, Gros-Jeanne who used to go barefoot when it was raining, carrying her clogs to save them from wearing out!

MARCINELLE

It's not possible. It can't really be you !

MADemoiselle Eurydice

It's me.

MARCINELLE

(bursts out) You of all people!

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Me.

MARCINELLE

I beg your pardon, madam, but you spoke to me as if you knew me.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Well, talk to me like a friend then! Are you snubbing me just because I appear to be wealthy? You think I'm fortunate. That's it, we don't recognise our friends in their good fortune. If I had wanted to, I could have repaired that lace myself. All of it, just as well as you did. I am a lace maker too, I'll have you know.

(pause)

All right then: You place the pattern behind the row of pins; you only ever work four bobbins at any one time; should you use eight, you work them two by two, that makes four doubles. You take the bobbins from the pile on the right hand side you bring them across to the middle, you throw them to the left, twist them, and you carry on until you get to the last two, sticking in a pin after each stitch.

(pause)

There's a different technique for the network, another for the bar, another to make the flower. Now when it comes to Belgian 'Mechlin' lace, you can't be taught how to do it past the age of seven, because your fingers are too big. You could easily spend fifteen months, even twenty months on a single piece of lace! You are given a set weight of thread and you had to produce the same weight of lace. When you consider that thread can cost anything between one hundred francs and eighteen hundred francs! I also used to do Alençon lace; for that you need a pair of tweezers. There is also the footside, the tuck, the padding, the looping, the point de gaze, lifting the lace away from the backing, the assembly, the making good...

(pause)

Do you remember our priest? How funny he was! We could hear him cough during mass and saying: "I should have stayed in bed and looked after my asthma." He was such a kind man. Did he ever chuckle you under the chin?

...and there are even more stitches such as the mignon, the spindle, the picot, goodness knows, according to the manufacturer's preferences...

What fun the village fête was, and the squabbles during the processions at Corpus Christi, when the folk from the Hupriaux came across those from the Quiévrain, on the main road to Paris, and the two processions would battle it out with their banners!

MARCINELLE

Oh, bless me it's true, it really is you, Gros-Jeanne!

MADemoiselle Eurydice

At last, you see! That's good. Holy mother of God! She's recognised me! She welcomes me!

MARCINELLE

So how came you here in Paris?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Quite simple. I came to earn fifty thousand francs a year.

MARCINELLE

Gros-Jeanne! dressed like the Duchess of Berry. Well, fancy that! What on earth has become of you!

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Nothing. I earn fifty thousand francs a year.

MARCINELLE

Doing what?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Singing.

MARCINELLE

Singing what?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Songs.

MARCINELLE

What songs?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Our songs.

MARCINELLE

Go on, I can't believe that!

MADemoiselle Eurydice

And by dancing.

MARCINELLE

Dancing what ?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Dances.

MARCINELLE

What dances?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Our dances.

MARCINELLE

You are just saying that to make me laugh.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

That's very true, I'm certainly not trying to make you cry!

MARCINELLE

Our folk dances! Our folk songs!

MADemoiselle Eurydice (singing to accompaniment)

“Oh lovely creature, if we were in your pool,
Oh lovely creature (so fresh and cool)
We'd put some little ducks in to swim so happily,
We'd put some little ducklings in to swim so free.

Fa la la, Fa la la la,
Fa la la la, Fa la la la,
Fa la.

We'd put those little ducklings in to swim so happily,
To swim so free!”

(She dances an 8 bar minuet, then resumes her singing)

“Oh lovely creature, if we were in your glade,
Oh lovely creature (and never strayed)
We'd sing there in the evening and in the morning too,
We'd sing there all the live long day, just me and you!

(MARCINELLE takes over the Fa la las as a solo)

Fa la la, Fa la la la,
Fa la la la, Fa la la la,
Fa la.

(MARCINELLE and EURYDICE in duet)

We'd sing there in the evening and in the morning too,
Just me and you!”

(They dance a 16 bars minuet together)

EURYDICE

You see! You haven't forgotten our songs and our dances! What we have just done is worth a hundred and fifty francs. Fifty thousand francs a year!

MARCINELL

Fifty thousand francs!

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Per year. I am a singer and dancer at the Orpheus theatre. (Music) They call me Eurydice. I am all the rage in fashionable society. I perform my bourrées, my minuets and my folk dances. I teach fashionable ladies my graceful movements. I give lessons on how to kick their heels to those who like the German style and I give lessons on how to sway their hips to those who like the Spanish style. Hip-swaying is fun but the heel-kicking is serious. (dances to Tyrolean music) The hip swaying movement, not everyone can do that! (dances to Spanish music)

MARCINELLE

(looking out of the window)

Did you come in that coach and horses over there?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Yes.

MARCINELLE

Nice carriage.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Not mine; but would you like to go in it?

MARCINELLE

You are so funny! I don't understand what you mean!

MADemoiselle Eurydice

It is an eight spring carriage. It belongs to the Baron who is inside, who brought me, you see him sitting at the front waiting for me reading the horse racing notices, he's the grandson of a general killed at the battle of Wagram. I have an eight spring carriage more splendid than his. So I'm asking you, would you like that carriage there ?

MARCINELLE

I don't understand.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

To start off with, you could have that carriage there. Would you like it?

MARCINELLE

This'll be some sort of charade you're playing with me! You must be playing some sort of game with me? If I want to have this carriage? ..

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Yes, why not? Wait! (She leans out of the window) Psst ! Baron, Come up here. (to Marcinelle) He's a very well- to-do man. He's the grandson of a general who was killed....where was it now ?

MARCINELLE

Fifty thousand francs!

MADemoiselle Eurydice

You will earn that whenever you like.

MARCINELLE

And how would I do that?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

With my repertoire. You know it by heart. Our songs and dances!

MARCINELLE

Those we used to do in the village?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Of course. Dance those.

MARCINELLE

(staring towards the little wall cupboard containing the dress she made for her deceased child)

I don't dance any more.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Sing them, then.

MARCINELLE

I don't sing anymore.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Well do me the favour then of putting on this shawl for a while so that I might see how it looks.

(She removes Marcinelle's peasant cape beneath which her bare neck and shoulders are revealed. She throws the shawl over her shoulders. The shawl, which is very full, completely covers her dress)

Do you know that really looks good on you. Lace shawls really suit you?

(Marcinelle admires herself in the mirror) This is a just a cheap thing. It only costs twelve hundred francs.

(aside) She is really very beautiful. Here's a woman who doesn't need one of Monsieur Worth's corsets!

(Pointing to the mirror) Do you usually look at your reflection in that?

MARCINELLE

You don't expect me to have a full length looking-glass on a swivel?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Why not? I have. But do you remember in the old days when we used to admire our reflection in the spring water?

(Baron de Gerpivrac enters wearing a high collar, a cravat, a monocle, long, thick sideburn moustaches, a hat trimmed with green voile and carrying a fashionable walking stick, made in Great Britain)

Scene Four

MADemoiselle Eurydice, Marcinelle, Baron de Gerpivrac

(Baron of Gerpivrac, with a young footman seen waiting outside on the landing through the half-open door)

BARON DE GERPIVRAC,

(entering wearing a hat on his head)

I've been thinking a lot about this, so now here are the names of all the current jockeys.

(He takes a notebook out of his pocket and reads):

Pratt, Watkins, the two Grimshaws, Salter, Goater, Jordan, Walter—not to be confused with Salter-, Daley, Covey and Cannon. Well, I am convinced that Salter belongs to Lord Hastings, and Cannon belongs to the Duke of Beaufort. It's Salter who rides Primate and Cannon who rides Ceylon. I favour Primate for his hocks and for his hindquarters, but he has blinkers that do not inspire much confidence in his character.

My dear, do you use almond-based cream? I don't have confidence in anything other than almond cream. Skin is very delicate. Extract of Benzoin is good for perfuming a bath; the soap made of lettuce juice is good enough for the hands, Althea extract is suitable for the nails, but for the face you need almond based cream. It is far better than all your cold creams. If diluted in a little warm water you get a white cream which is pleasant to the eye and to the nose.

But what do you make of the latest event at the racecourse at Chantilly? It all went horribly wrong. That poor Piccadilly bolted at the start and came in lame. When I think that Charlie Pratt, the greatest jockey of the century, was riding Exhibition, and did not win the Ponds Prize, I just can't believe it! (Noticing Marcinelle) Ah! the beautiful shawl! (He ogles Marcinelle). A nice little filly!

MARCINELLE

(aside) He called me a 'filly'.

(Baron of Gerpivrac greets Marcinelle, then replaces his hat and keeps it on)

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Madam, I have the honour of presenting you with my humble greetings.

MARCINELLE,

(aside) At last, a bit of respect. That makes up for it.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Baron, you should wait for me to introduce you...

Baron de Gerpivrac

... should have waited.... you need the conditional perfect, my dear. Other than that, I don't care at all.

(to Marcinelle)

Ah, lovely lady, shawls are no longer fashionable: people are wearing pelerines.

(To Eurydice) Yes, I would have had to wait to be presented if we were at Chantilly, at the Marche, at the Croix de Berny, on the race-course, on the 'turf', that's to say, in England. But not here!

Ah! A strange thing: I have just seen the Duke Achille going past, that little fellow, you know. He was carrying the very latest umbrella from de Fox's. But all the same, he showed a lack of taste.

Eurydice, I don't like your hat too much either, it hides your hair too much. You should wear a sailor hat with a rosette which matches the one on your dress. And then your scarf does not do much for me either. The nineteenth century scarf must be shaped like a wide rounded tapering collar at the back and cross over at the front over the shoulders and chest like braces do.

Marcinelle

(aside) He is so charming! Say what you like, white hands on a man are attractive!

Baron de Gerpivrac

Or else wear a Swedish cape. You might say it is more for winter than for summer, but I would reply

(he whispers in her ear) that the Empress herself has made the Swedish cape fashionable.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Gerpivrac, you are wrong about the shawl. A shawl made of Brussels lace is always in fashion. But you know baron, I am collecting for the fire victims, poor unfortunate people, orphans..., widows ...

Baron de Gerpivrac

Et cetera. There you are, five francs.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

(aside) That poor worker gave me twice as much as that.

Baron de Gerpivrac

I have seen some diaphanous silk capes this season, the Pongée cape is still 'in'.

My dear, I must say, at the Chantilly races, there were only three prizes up for grabs, the Paddock, the Courtesy and the Morlaye. I was just thinking earlier. They lost their race for the colts and fillies, I must add that all the handicaps were decided at random. They allowed the first comers to run. One isn't born a horseman, you know. It is easier to be born a prince than to be born a jockey. A true jockey is a masterpiece. You don't achieve that overnight, it's not a matter of trial and error, you need to know what you are doing. I'm not in fan of cowboys. Drinking is a science, smoking is an art, racing is in the blood. Something in your destiny. The day when I was able to tell the difference between wines from Savoy flavoured with raspberry, Moselle wines tasting of violets and those from Montélimart which taste of nougat, that was the moment I felt I'd become a man.

I do recommend to you the Pongée silk factories. Do you know the best thing to wear at home? A cashmere dressing gown with Pekin bands of gold stripe, iridescent taffeta linings and a coat with straight panels. Oh! and another thing, you should only buy your capes at the Indian stalls.

Marcinelle,

(aside) Well, at least this one doesn't talk politics.

MADemoiselle Eurydice,

(aside) He has no brains; his head is as empty as a ringing bell. What a fraud! We are obliged to impress him. These people make or break us. We depend on them for our success, we have to please them. What sad, smiling women we are, forced to look happy our whole lives!

Baron de Gerpivrac

A bit of gossip for you, Eurydice. You know, that fat Papal banker, the Marquis Guzzi, he is getting married. He is marrying into a good family, Mademoiselle Humières-Lauraguais, sixteen years old, pretty and not a sous to her name. He's worth twenty million.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Oh, that ugly monster Guzzi to marry that beautiful young girl!

Baron de Gerpivrac

Why not? Racine indicates that the monster Theramène is married. (cuckolding gesture)

Monsters don't have to remain single.

(noticing the bouquet on the floor) So that's what you do with my bouquet?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

It's only fallen on the floor.

MARCINELLE

(aside) Well, well, well, so it's his bouquet. It's his bouquet to her. What are those two playing at? What if I were to take her Baron off her? I'd be killing two birds with one stone. It would ricochet off my unfaithful man onto this treacherous woman. Take note, husband of mine, men have mistresses, so women have lovers.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Fallen, yes. Just as you like, Eurydice. Speaking of falls, I had a narrow escape the other day. We went to the home of some Russian prince, – you know, one of those Koffs, this year's Russian prince, the fashion for Russian princes changes every year, - we had a friendly little Derby race in the park he rents by the month. I rode my mare called 'Flat on her back.' This name almost proved unlucky for me! Anyway I got away with it, jumping two fences, one five feet high, another seven feet, then the ditch and the Irish Bank, my dear, which was twelve feet in height!

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Oh ! twelve feet

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

You women don't understand all that. It is beyond...

MADemoiselle Eurydice

...belief!

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

You are a tease, Eurydice, You seem to have it for me. But I know why. Here, take your twenty louis!

MADemoiselle Eurydice

What twenty louis coins?

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Didn't you ask me for twenty louis the only the other day?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

I don't know.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Neither do I. Here they are all the same.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

I must say your gold smells good.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

My gold is laundered in Eau de Cologne.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

I'll take the twenty louis coins for my fire victims.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Oh no! I protest, no, I can't do that !

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Why not ?

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

It would be a good deed.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Well?

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

I don't do good deeds. Good deeds prevent one winning. It's a well-known fact.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Are you afraid of doing something good? Where is the harm in doing a good deed ?

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

It's unlucky, that's what it is. It brings gamblers bad luck. I'd do good things otherwise, I'm not a bad sort of chap...

MADemoiselle Eurydice

But you gave me five francs just now.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Because I was fed up with carrying around a hundred sous coin. Giving one of those isn't charity, it is simply like taking a bit of dirt out of ones pocket.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Right.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Every age has a different ways of doing things. Our way is not to do charitable deeds. There are times for sentiment. We are more serious. We want to know what we're getting in return. Gothic ideas are old Ideas. I am not forced to take pity on foundlings like saintly Vincent de Paul or make sentimental gestures to all and sundry like my great grandmother used to do, playing Lady Bountiful with her Pompadour hairstyle and her little Gainsborough hat perched on top. Perhaps we are no better than her generation but we are different. We have our own ways of going about things. Listen, give me some white Spanish cotton, number four and five and some red marking cotton, and I will make you a crocheted bib. But I do have my superstitions, you know.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Let us say no more about it: I will write it on my list: ten francs from a worker, five francs from a baron.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

So you can write, Eurydice?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Why shouldn't I? You can crochet.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

My dear, our ancestors, the colonels of a hundred years ago, did raised-satin stitching.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

And what's more, they won the battle of Fontenoy!

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

(aside) I have had enough of Eurydice. We've taught her too much and she's getting too big for her boots. It's annoying. She's a revolutionary at heart, that girl. She speaks like a rabble rouser! Oh! if I were in charge, I would do away with the freedom of the Press. That Eurydice there, she's one of the Opposition!

(aside, looking at Marcinelle) This one here on the other hand is brand new. Suppose I were to ditch that old one? This little one would suit me very nicely.

(moving towards Marcinelle) This shawl has a fault.

MARCINELLE

What kind of fault?

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

It hides your shoulders....

MARCINELLE

(blushing). Sir!

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

The most beautiful ones in the world.

(drawing up her shawl)

Sir!

(As she draws up the shawl, the hem of her dress is revealed)

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

(aside) A simple linen dress! Under a shawl worth fifty pounds sterling, a sixpenny skirt! She's a working girl. Unworldly, simple, naïve. I think I am falling in love with her.

It was Eurydice put that shawl round her.

(whilst looking at himself in the mirror) In love, the woman must have beauty and the man wit. We could be a couple. That doesn't mean to say that I am bad looking...

(Aloud) Eurydice, you who are interested in politics, what's the latest news? Do we have peace? Are we at war?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

The Lyon exchange has been in a state of flux; trading has gone down to six hundred and seventy five; the property market is holding its own at eleven thirty-five. They say the English Stock Exchange is in melt-down.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

(to Marcinelle) Fit this little foot into a fine Russian leather riding bootee, a white silk stocking, put on a skirt of Hindu crêpe in a shade of pearl, with Geneva blue taffeta pockets, and a French soldier-suit made of white goat's wool, with a taffeta waistcoat, and a Havana leather belt studded in matt silver. You will be a jewel, people will marvel at you.

MARCINELLE

(aside) I am feeling dizzy. How well they talk in that world of theirs! I don't understand the meaning of the words, but they are music to my ears.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

(in a low voice to Marcinelle) You know. The eight spring carriage is yours.

MARCINELLE

(whispers) What do you mean?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

(whispers) Don't be embarrassed. The Baron is trying to seduce you. Take it off him.

MARCINELLE

This man.....

MADemoiselle Eurydice

(in a low voice) Well! He is my Baron! That is to say that I belong more to his baronial title than to him. You might ask what is he a baron of? and the reply would be 'Baron of Mademoiselle Eurydice'. Do you want him? You know you do! Would you like some of that? Take him. I am giving him to you.

(aside) I'd be only too happy to change places with her. I don't mind her man's work smock.

MARCINELLE

(aside) Oh dear! Bad thoughts are passing through my mind.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

At Baden Baden, there is an alms box for the poor outside the entrance of the Kursaal casino. They gamble millions of francs and do you know what they find in the box for the poor at the end of the season, in the charity box? Seven francs fifty. Oh, the gamblers know their business, you know. They don't go to play roulette to win the Nobel prize. Eurydice, if you go to Baden Baden, you must wear a Hust cap.

MARCINELLE

(aside) I am afraid. I want to. It is a terrible thing to feel your conscience slipping away.

(She falls into a deep daydream)

MADemoiselle Eurydice

(whispers to Marcinelle) He has fallen madly in love with you. I know from experience.

(aside) If she leaves her place, I'll swap with her, I have a foolish yearning to live in a garret. Where I am living now, the air is becoming more and more unbreathable. She is living a real life. Oh, I am envious of her round bonnet, her linen dress, her fingers pricked by the needle, her daily work, her innocent face, her poverty. Oh! how wonderful to love, to be loved, to be free, without much money, faithful to one's working man. To be faithful again would be to become virtuous again.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

What are you thinking about then, Eurydice?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

About you.

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

(aside) Poor old Eurydice! She is besotted with me, but I am leaving her. What a shame for her!

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Hey, on that point. I was forgetting my rehearsal! It is at midday. I've almost missed my rehearsal. What time is it? Baron, have you got your racing watch?

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

My watch made of wood? Yes. Only those will do. Thirty five minutes past eleven.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Quick, quick, let's hurry then and be on our way. Or I'll have to pay a fine. Take me there, baron.

MARCINELLE

(removing the shawl and giving it to him)

What about your shawl?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Quite right.

(calling) James !

(The footman is still on the landing, she half-opens the door and throws him the shawl)

Take that and put it in the carriage.

(The footman takes away the shawl)

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

(to Marcinelle whose shoulders are now bare) Oh, stay a woman! Never become an angel. What a shame it would be if you had wings! We would no longer see those shoulders.

MARCINELLE

(aside) Oh God! It's true! My cape?

(She hastily puts back on her little cape)

BARON DE GERPIVRAC

Like a cloud that covers the perpetual star.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

(to Marcinelle) What are you afraid of? Have you have never been to the ball?

(aside) She's an inspiration!

(aloud to Baron of Gerpivrac) You are a poet, baron.

(aside) Even if we don't much care for these idiots, we'd rather they didn't drivel on to others in front of us.

(aloud) Good bye, Marcinelle.

MARCINELLE

Are you leaving ?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

Yes, I'm galloping off in a rush again.

MARCINELLE

My husband is going to return. Are you not going to wait for my husband ?

MADemoiselle Eurydice

You're a married woman!

MARCINELLE

You know very well I am, since you gave your bouquet to my husband.

MADemoiselle Eurydice

How stupid to be married! You're a legally married woman ! Can it be true?!... That doesn't have to stop us though..... Monsieur Baron of Gerpivrac, say good-bye to Madame, and come and join me. I will go on ahead. I cannot miss my stage entrance. Time to say farewell.

(She goes out)

(Marcinelle and Baron de Gerpivrac remain alone)

Baron de Gerpivrac

(to Marcinelle) Let it not be farewell. I will return.

Marcinelle

Sir...

Baron de Gerpivrac

You are adorable. I adore you. I have two hundred thousand francs to my name. I will return.

Marcinelle

Sir...

Baron de Gerpivrac

If you allow me to return, I am going to pass by again soon in the street below, leave your window open, that will mean that you are saying yes to me.

(He goes out leaving the door at the end of the room half-open showing the landing and the stairs. A moment after he has left, Edmond Gombert comes into view, leaning over the banisters before entering and seeming to watch the staircase)

Marcinelle

(alone) He told me to leave the window open. I am trembling. I have not done anything yet except in my head. Thinking is dreadful. If my window is open, that will mean yes. I see a luxurious life beckoning to me. Jealousy is urging me on from behind. I feel myself being pulled as if by a mighty hand...

My poor Edmond! But I do still love him. It is him that I love. Oh, who will come to my aid?

(Edmond Gombert enters)

Scene Five

MARCINELLE EDMOND GOMBERT

Edmond Gombert

What's that idler doing hanging about down there?

Marcinelle

Ah! It's you! So we have bouquets, do we! It seems we have bouquets here.

Edmond Gombert

Has that rascal been up here?

Marcinelle

(pointing to the bouquet under the broom in the corner of the fireplace)

That's what I do with your bouquets. Look where I'm putting them, your bouquets of flowers.

Edmond Gombert

That rascal must be a marquis. I demand to know if that popinjay came out of your room?

Marcinelle

Yes. He's your mistress's lover.

Edmond Gombert

My mistress?

Marcinelle

Gros-Jeanne!

Edmond Gombert

Gros-Jeanne!

Marcinelle

Mademoiselle Eurydice !

Edmond Gombert

Eurydice?

Marcinelle

The singer, the peasant, the woman with the airs and graces, the rosy-cheeked, conceited creature with the bouquet!

Edmond Gombert

Just tell me what that fine monsieur was doing here !

MARCINELLE

But anyway, I've still got my broom.

EDMOND GOMBERT

I want to know....

MARCINELLE

I am sweeping my room. Too bad for things that are there and ought not to be.

EDMOND GOMBERT

That man was in here with you. You are going to have to explain this to me...

MARCINELLE

You come home with your bag, having delivered the handiwork you've spent several nights labouring over, not expecting to find anything of this sort. Oh yes! I have got over all my stupid trustfulness! You love a man, you give him all your youth, and this is where it leads to, all those feelings you have in your heart, only to find bouquets in your house carefully arranged in water. – Oh my God, it's going to wilt, so be careful. A bouquet from a whore! Be an honest woman, so yes, I am an honest woman.

(She goes to the window and closes it) and I'd really like to know what good it does, being poor, only having dry bread to eat, having no shoes to put on your feet, only to find that your man can play around and leer at all the women passing by, and can't resist a bouquet of flowers from the clutches of a hussy? When I came in, I said: there is something that smells bad in here. So what is it then that has such a bad smell?

(Pointing to the bouquet) It was this item of shopping from the flower stall. I don't have to explain anything. A woman comes here for the lace shawl. She is accompanied by the man who keeps her. She invites him up. Has that got anything to do with me? She seems to be madly in love with her man, your madame..

EDMOND GOMBERT

Benjamin Constant was right to warn the Bourbon kings not to go too far: it will end badly. Oh! The rich do not want to leave poor folk in peace. Are we, by any chance, still living in feudal times when the Seigneur had his rights? That fine fellow is one of those seigneurs. Oh, if you fellows come into our homes, we'll put up the barricades! The revolution will be terrible. I know all about those bloody September days.

Believe whatever you want, madam, it is all the same to me. Am I responsible for people's bouquets? A woman has a bouquet, there's the jug of water. Can I prevent the jug of water being there? Remember, ladies, that the effects of your beautiful skirts, your feathers, your velvets, your jewels and your chiffons are not long-lasting on us men; we know what they cost us, and that if it isn't us who give them, it's us who pay for them. When we have bouts of drunkenness, they don't last long either.

What matters far more to me is the beautiful but poor woman who possesses virtues of honesty and courage. We are two people sharing adversity, with poor clothes,

with fingers hardened by manual work and our eyes reddened with close work! Now, because you are angry, Madam, I must be a good boy and hold my tongue and allow myself to look ridiculous. I must explain a bouquet of flowers. Is there a bouquet? Leave me alone. Go on then, let us part.

MARCINELLE

Yes, let's separate. You said it before I did, but I was thinking about it before you.

EDMOND GOMBERT

I have no intention of sleeping here tonight.

MARCINELLE

Let us divide up all that we have. We'll each keep what's ours.

EDMOND GOMBERT

You stay here. I will go away.

MARCINELLE

You mean straight away?

EDMOND GOMBERT

Straight away.

MARCINELLE

And let that be final. Let it be for good.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Separation for ever. Do you understand?

MARCINELLE

I hope so.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Then, let's divide up our belongings.

MARCINELLE

I don't have much, and dividing up our things will not take long.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Each of us will take our half. Keep what's yours, I'll take what's mine. The man with his cart is there around the corner and can strap things on his cart. He will carry away what I am taking.

MARCINELLE

In ten minutes.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Five if it's possible. Quick.

MARCINELLE

Let's divide everything.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Let's divide everything up between us.

MARCINELLE

(starting to divide up the furniture) Two chairs. One with the badly worn seat.

EDMOND GOMBERT

That's mine. (He takes the chair with the badly worn straw seat.)

MARCINELLE

(emptying pottery / china from the sideboard) Three plates for you. Three for me.
(He puts the plates on the worn straw seat of the chair. She puts hers in the fireplace.
Each put their share on their side)

MARCINELLE

Your fork, your knife. (She gives them back to him) Here are mine. There's only one glass.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Keep it.

MARCINELLE

There's only one table and only one mirror.

EDMOND GOMBERT

I'll take the table. You take the mirror. (He puts the table near to the chair. She unhooks the mirror and puts it against the fireplace. Marcinelle opens the chest and empties out the drawers. She makes up two parcels)

MARCINELLE

This parcel contains your clothes. Take it.

EDMOND GOMBERT

(showing her the other parcel) Is this yours?

MARCINELLE

Yes.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Fine.

MARCINELLE

Here are your tools. (He piles up the tools near the chair.)
Here is my loom. (She places her loom near her parcel of clothes)

(Marcinelle opens the cupboard and pulls from it a little white dress with lace sleeves.)

MARCINELLE

For me.

EDMOND GOMBERT

No! for me. (He seizes one of the sleeves of the dress. She holds onto the other)

MARCINELLE

Don't pull. You're going to tear it.

EDMOND GOMBERT

I am taking it.

MARCINELLE

I am keeping it.

EDMOND GOMBERT,

(letting go of the dress) Alright then, yes. Keep it. I will be alone when I leave. Our daughter's dress will remind you of me.

MARCINELLE

No then. You take it. Take it away. I give it to you. It will stop you forgetting me.

EDMOND GOMBERT

Go on, keep it.

MARCINELLE

Take it, I say.

EDMOND GOMBERT

There is a way that you could keep it and that I could have it.

MARCINELLE

And what's that?

EDMOND GOMBERT

If we stayed together, if we don't part from each other, let's not ever leave each other, Marcinelle!

MARCINELLE

Edmond !

EDMOND GOMBERT

Let's love each other ! Is that what you want?

MARCINELLE

Well it's obvious that's what she wants too!
(They fall into each other's arms, the little dress held tightly between their chests)

END



Translator's Notes

Margaret Jones

The script printed in this book is adapted for performance and will vary from Margaret's and so her references may not always match.

*Margaret's translation will soon be in **The Intervention Archive** on the Society website.*

Having volunteered to translate the play into English, I began by reading and re-reading the text in French to try to get under Hugo's skin. I also had discussions with native speakers most of whom had never heard of the play. I came to the conclusion that the definitive translation should take full account of Hugo's intentions when he wrote the play. As with many of his writings, he was determined to champion the human spirit and explore the power of love whilst making comment on current social issues. My aim was to try not to lose his underlying meanings or messages and to translate the play to make them easily understood by an English audience. I considered my task a big challenge especially as there was a short time to complete the translation with Christmas and New Year intervening! Nevertheless it has been an interesting experience.

I decided I should keep the language of the play as consistent as possible with the historical background, the costumes and the set. I decided to retain the original street names such as the 'Bois de Boulogne' and key recognisable French words like 'Madame' 'Mademoiselle' and 'Boulevard' in order to retain background authenticity. I soon discovered that Hugo's love of the 'double entendre' and his 'play on words' were challenging to replicate in translation. For example, the word 'femme' in the original French version may have had a different meaning at Hugo's time of writing as there is an obvious, important distinction made in the play between 'épouse' and 'femme', the latter having the connotation of 'mistress': such nuances needed to be tackled. There is also the Baron's clumsy use of the subjunctive which could confuse English audiences and their intended effects could be lost in translation so I had to find a way of retaining Hugo's intended contextual meaning. As I drew closer to the text, I began to appreciate his inclusion and use of song and dance. In following the dramatic fashion of 'vaudeville theatre' at the time, he demonstrates his genius in providing suggestive lyrics which echo and amplify the dramatic action and intrigue at appropriate moments. Consequently, I had to pay careful attention to translating and integrating the song to best possible effect in the English version of the play.

If Hugo's intentions are to be honoured, it is important to consider the dramatic devices he uses to achieve his satire. Traditionally, dramatists have poked fun at characters who display the vices they dislike in order to satirise and make social comment about human behaviour. Hugo is certainly able to move audiences from laughter to tears, hence *The*

Intervention being described as a tragicomedy. His social comments are achieved through his clever characterisations. For example, the Baron's exaggerated use of language and fashionable attire reveal his ridiculously rich lifestyle. This is put into sharp contrast with the plight of the honest and hard-working couple who are exploited by the rich and forced to live in poverty. Hugo's allusions to the discrepancies and social divide between the rich and the poor are vividly revealed by Marcinelle's and Edmond's poor clothes and their living and working conditions compared with those of the Baron and Eurydice. Such themes are universal and so it is important that an English audience can experience similar reactions to French audiences today. I tried, therefore, to ensure that the satirical and often amusing dialogues were translated as accurately and sensitively as possible. On a lighter note, an English audience might be amused to know that the French upper classes admired English fashions of the period! Such serendipity occurs only adding to the humour when the play is performed in English.

Occasionally, when I was working on the translation, I stopped to investigate some of the characters' clever turns of phrase, in-jokes and allusions to places. I considered that these might amuse French audiences but may not have the same effect or be understood by English speakers. For example, Eurydice interrupts the Baron, who is about to boast about the height he has jumped with his horse, with the word 'Garonne'. At first, I thought this place name might have some significance. I concluded, however, that this reference to 'La Haute Garonne' is simply an association of words as both Eurydice and Marcinelle came from Valenciennes which is far from La Haute Garonne, a region not known for lacemaking in which the two women are clearly competent. I therefore offered a few options simply to make the English audience laugh.

The Translation Legacy

As the Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer for the Victor Hugo Society in Guernsey, I decided to prepare some resource materials which teachers might like to use to enable their students to get the most out of the play. My hope is that these resource materials will be a starting point for Schools and Colleges and will spark students' interest in Victor Hugo and his important place in their local heritage. It is hoped that students will be encouraged to participate in their own cross-curricular projects having enjoyed the play or video of the première performance.

The initial response from some schools and Colleges has been encouraging with interest so far from Drama, Photography, Art/Design, PSHE and Languages departments of Guernsey Schools. This project with its authentic Guernsey focus fits well into the new Guernsey 'Big Picture for the Curriculum' currently being developed in our schools. My ultimate aim in translating the play and creating resources for schools is to leave a legacy for future generations to enjoy as part of their heritage.

Margaret Jones

MA Modern Foreign Languages Education



Translator's Notes

Agnès Perry

The script printed in this book is adapted for performance and will vary from Agnès's and so her references may not always match.

*Agnès's translation will soon be in **The Intervention Archive** on the Society website.*

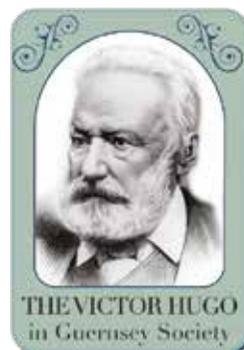
I had not heard of the play before The Victor Hugo in Guernsey Society decided to translate and produce it for their 2018 Victor Hugo in Guernsey conference.

When I volunteered to contribute to its English translation, I thought it would be a challenging but interesting process, especially as it was going to be a collaborative project. Regarding the translation of the original text itself, I was aiming to be faithful as much as possible to Victor Hugo's words and style, to the historical context, but at the same time I wanted the play to be understood by a 21st century audience of all ages.

Although at first glance the play appears to be rather frivolous, it also illustrates a wide range of notions such as aspirations, social issues, tension and temptation between the characters and the power of love. Also I have found that a lot of the themes alluded to in *L'intervention* are echoed in other works of Victor Hugo such as *Les Misérables*, *L'Homme qui Rit*, etc...

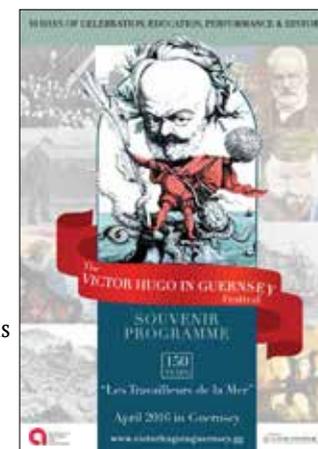
I am looking forward to seeing the play performed in English for the first time.

Agnès Perry



The Victor Hugo In Guernsey Society

Victor Hugo wrote many of his greatest works on the island of Guernsey, a small British dependency 20 miles off the coast of France. Hugo was in exile, but despite his grief for his family and his homeland he was inspired by the beauty of the rocky landscape and seas that surrounded him to produce magnificent novels – including *Les Misérables*, and *Travailleurs de la mer* – artworks, poetry, and theatre.



It was the 150th anniversary of *Travailleurs* in 2016 that inspired Gregory Stevens Cox and Roy Bisson to found 'The Victor Hugo In Guernsey Society' and with the help of friends from Guernsey and France, organise a celebratory week-long Festival. There were exhibitions, performances, lectures, stamps, tours and visits with Islanders and guests spreading the word about Hugo's creative exile in our island.

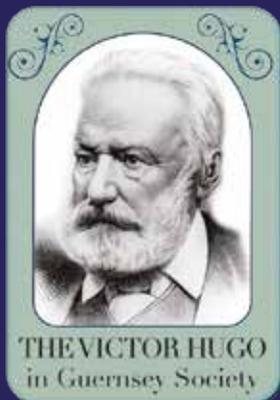
Since then, the Society has organised visits, lectures, exhibitions and new publications - all stimulating world-wide interest among children and adults in Victor Hugo. In spring 2017 twenty Islanders visited Paris - including Place des Vosges, La Bibliothèque Nationale, and Le Sénat where private collections were opened to members.



Now the Society has arranged for the translation of *L'intervention* into English and will perform the 1 Act comedy for the first time in the town where it was written. This will be part of a weekend conference where, once again, leading authorities on Victor Hugo will gather to present their recent studies on Hugo and discuss some of the many facets of the great poet.

The Victor Hugo In Guernsey Society thanks its many supporters and members and encourages you to visit its website where you can learn, participate and join in!

www.victorhugoinguernsey.gg



The Victor Hugo in Guernsey Society

www.victorhugoinguernsey.gg