



The Victor Hugo in Guernsey Society

The Intervention project

(Note from the Chair, September 2019: this document was composed in 2018 and used to support an appeal for funding from The Guernsey Arts Commission and other sponsors. It demonstrates the original concept and proposed structure of the project.)

Introduction to Victor Hugo and his Guernsey plays

Victor Hugo spent nearly 20 years in Guernsey. His output here was prolific, but much of what he wrote here, though very well-known in France and the rest of the world, is very little known in the UK or in Guernsey. The Society feels it is essential to make these very important works of world literature better appreciated and understood in the English-speaking world. So much more could be made of this link with Guernsey by demonstrating how the island inspired so much of his art, poetry, drama and literature.

Victor Hugo, a very successful and popular dramatist, was subject to censorship in France by his enemy, Napoleon III. During his banishment, therefore, he refused to have any of his plays performed in France, until 'Liberty' returned to the country. However, he did write plays with a social conscience while he was in Guernsey. These plays were not published until after his death, and are known collectively as Le Théâtre en Liberté – the Theatre in Freedom.

The very last of these plays to be published is the most accessible; it was written in 1866, in the most fruitful part of his exile, and is called The Intervention. Despite its eminent suitability for performance, this one-act play was only published in French in 1951 and has never been staged in English before anywhere in the world.

This is the play we aspire to translate into English and to perform here in Guernsey, the place it was written, as its world premiere in English.

The Intervention project

It cannot be stressed enough that it is extremely unusual for a play by Victor Hugo to be performed in English. This in itself will make the Intervention project noteworthy. It will position Guernsey as a location of artistic and academic innovation.

The Intervention project will be conducted with theatrical and academic rigour. Its approach will be a contemporary one, based on community and academic collaboration. This will involve the Society's extensive academic connections in the UK, the US and France, our academic colleagues having expressed their excitement about the project and their intention to take part, the participation of local members of the Society as translators, producers, and archivists, and the local actors and stage crew, and even includes the audience, as the nature of the audience reaction forms part of this type of collaborative study.

Copyright in the translation will be owned by the Victor Hugo in Guernsey Society. This will be clearly marked on all copies and media, as will the support of The Guernsey Arts Commission – we hope its sponsors.

The directors and performers of the play will maintain a blog on the Internet which will be supported by a strong social media presence.

Afterlife

We intend to make the translation and all the archival background material freely available to academics and performers. This is an integral part of the project.

1. Schools. It is an ideal play for performance in schools, having only five short scenes and a very simple set, but with some music and dancing. The social and political issues it raises are universal, easy to comprehend and thought-provoking, suitable for production and discussion by schoolchildren from Year 10 and above. The dialogue is light in tone, clear, and modern. The characters are straightforward. Drama, philosophy, history, literature and language students will all benefit from discovering this play, which particularly lends itself to workshop activities, as each scene can be viewed as a separate play.

2. Video and blog. We intend to upload the premiere to Youtube and for it to remain there. Videos of French productions of the play can already be found there and our performance will take its place alongside them as an equal. The blog forms part of the archival study material but will also serve as advertising for the play and the project, with a strong emphasis on Guernsey.

3. Strong academic afterlife. We expect there to be extensive academic follow-up to this project. Its collaborative nature is of particular interest to social scientists and the issues raised during its translation and production will be highly relevant to theatre studies, public engagement studies, and to linguists. UK academics, for example, can apply for higher education funding to study this play and its production, based on our archival material; interest has already been expressed in this; those studies will then be written up in academic journals and available to other academics on a world-wide basis. All collaborators and partners in the project of whatever nature will receive credit as an integral part of this approach, which will highlight the strong Guernsey participation.

4. Media interest. We also fully expect there to be British and French media interest in our production. We have the contacts in France to support this.

5. A series of Guernsey plays. We intend to follow this play with the others in the collection, possibly at two-year intervals. Subject to the same meticulous treatment, the Guernsey plays will become much better known, and through being accepted as part of the English repertoire will at last come to be clearly connected with Guernsey.

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Chairman

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