

## EXILE TIMELINE

*Taken largely from Evelyn Blewer's summarized life of Victor Hugo written for [The UNESCO Courier](#) in 1985, with some additions. (The Courier is also available in French and Spanish.)*

**1850** On 15 January a bill aimed at granting the clergy the monopoly of public education was rejected by Hugo as being a monstrous retrograde step. In his view the ideal consisted of free secular and above all else *compulsory* education where the gates of knowledge would be wide open to all brains. The forcible language of the discourse on the freedom of education was followed by other stands which ultimately alienated Hugo from the conservative parliamentarians. These included declarations on the restrictions placed on voting rights, against deportation, and in favour of the freedom of the theatre and the press. His drawings became more ambitious. He published an open letter addressed to the meeting of the International Peace Congress in Frankfurt and continued, albeit at a much slower pace, his poetic activity. Liszt's symphonic poem *What is heard on the mountain*, based on poems by Hugo, was performed in Weimar.

**1851** Besides being increasingly criticized by the government majority in the assembly, Hugo was also going through a serious crisis in his love life. Juliette Drouet discovered his relationship with Léonie Biard and the two women insisted that he choose between them. Fortunately for him events intervened. His family life was convulsed by the imprisonment of his sons for having written newspaper articles on capital punishment and on the right of sanctuary for foreign refugees. On 2 December Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état found Hugo in the front rank of the Republican resistance, but his efforts were powerless against the might of the army and the passive attitude of the civilian population. Nine days later on 12 December Hugo went into exile, under threat of arrest, under a false name and using a false passport provided by Juliette Drouet. Juliette followed on the 14 December with a trunk containing Hugo's manuscripts. Established in **Brussels**, he lost no time in starting *The history of a crime*. Verdi's opera *Rigoletto* based Hugo's *The King is amused*, was given its first performance in Venice. Hugo was not very amused - he received no payment from it.

**1852** Decree exiling Hugo from France. He had to sell his house in Paris and all his effects. Writing was to become the only form of political resistance ‘the inkstand versus the cannon,’ as Hugo was to put it in a letter to his wife. His work *The history of a crime* progressed, substantiated as it was by the increasing number of testimonies provided by Frenchmen who had been expelled or had escaped, and his *Napoleon the Little* took shape within weeks. Having been warned by the Belgian government that he would be liable to exposure if he published a book on the ‘prince president’ Hugo left Brussels in early August for Jersey, where his family and Juliette joined him. *Napoleon the little* was published in London and put on sale in Brussels the same day. The Hugo family moved into Marine Terrace in **Jersey** and the Exile devoted himself to his poetry. On 29 November Hugo made a speech in commemoration of the anniversary of the 1830 revolution in Poland in which he hailed the Poles as being ‘the first born of persecution.’

**1853** Publication in Belgium of a volume of Hugo’s collected speeches. In Jersey he continued to pour out satirical poems. The family took up photography and decided to publish a book with photographs used as illustrations – this would have been one of the very first ever to be set up in that way – but this was not published and became instead Francois-Victor’s *La Normandie*. The Hugo family was introduced to table turning. Although they were initially sceptical, they became addicts following a communication which seemed to come from Léopoldine. Over a two-year period they received messages from more than 100 spirits, including Dante, Jesus Christ, Mozart, Rousseau, Socrates, Shakespeare and Luther. Son Charles was the ‘medium’. In November *Les Châtiments* was published in two editions, one complete and the other expurgated and the collection was thereafter smuggled into France. Hugo began to make collages.

**1854** There was no let-up in the messages received through the table. In January a death sentence passed on the neighbouring island of Guernsey prompted the exiled poet to address an appeal to the inhabitants of Guernsey calling them to abolish a punishment that was out of key with the times. He started work on a long poem which was eventually to become *The end of Satan*, and on the anniversary of the 1848 revolution made a lyrical and a utopian speech in which he affirmed that the emergence of the united states of Europe and indeed of the universal republic would see the end of poverty

and ignorance, and the birth of an educated and balanced civilization. The Spanish Junta de Salud, (Committee of Public Safety), invited Hugo to settle in Spain, an offer which he was very tempted to accept. The anniversary of the Polish revolution afforded him an opportunity of publishing a pamphlet denouncing the Crimean war.

**1855** Death of Abel Hugo, the poet's eldest brother. Hugo again wrote a number of brilliant pages on the occasion of the anniversary of the 1848 revolution, as well as a host of poems, many of which were included in *The contemplations*. On October 3 French exiles were expelled from Jersey. Hugo supported them by issuing a declaration which was to be signed by 35 other exiles from France, Germany, Poland, Hungary and Italy and was, in the days following, to give rise to an order expelling all exiles. Hugo moved on to **Guernsey** and settled with his family in Saint Peter Port, renting 20 Hauteville from Thomas Domaille.

**1856** Hugo wrote extensive fragments of *God*. The collection *The contemplations* was published in April and was such a success that Hugo decided to protect himself from further expulsion by becoming a property owner for the first time in his life, when he bought a house at 38, Hauteville from William Ozanne. The decoration of the house which was completely designed and supervised by Hugo himself would take years to complete, but the family was able to move into it in autumn. Juliette eventually moved into La Fallue, which belonged to the Allez family. The exile launched two further appeals by way of encouragement to embryo nations: these were to Italy and to Greece.

**1857** Hugo devoted himself completely to poetry. Among other things he wrote to several 'minor epics', which were subsequently brought together in *The legend of the centuries*, *The revolution* and a good part of *Supreme pity*.

**1858** In the hope of finding a husband for daughter Adèle, Hugo's wife took her to Paris for several months and from then onwards she was never again to live at Hauteville House on a permanent basis. The poet completed *Supreme pity*, *The back of the page*, and *The donkey*. His work on 'minor epics' was interrupted at the end of June with a carbuncle on his back and he was only able to start working again in October.

**1859** Hugo went on a two week visit to the isle of Sark with his eldest son and Juliette, this being the first time that the two had met. In August he replied to the amnesty decree by issuing a declaration that he arranged to be printed in the English press and in which he stated, 'when freedom returns, so shall I.' However most of the political exiles living in Guernsey returned to France. The first part of *The legend of the centuries, History - the minor epics*, was published in September. Hugo forsook the epic style to write several poems which were included in the collection *The songs of the streets and the woods*, but then returned to it by taking up *The end of Satan*, which he had abandoned five years earlier. He made a public appeal to the United States of America in a bid to save the life of the abolitionist John Brown, who had been sentenced to death.

**1860** Hugo wrote to *Le Progrès*, the newspaper of the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince, conveying his hopes for the brotherhood of man, stating 'on earth there are neither blacks nor whites there are only minds.' Hugo continued to work on *The end of Satan* until April when he returned to *Les Misérables*, a work he had discarded 12 years before. In June he returned in triumph to Jersey at the invitation of the committee set up to support Garibaldi and delivered a speech on freedom and the liberation of Italy. His friend Ribeyrolles, former parliamentarian and an exile, died in Rio de Janeiro, and Hugo sent to the Brazilian committee an epitaph in verse for his tomb.

1861 Hugo grew a beard. In Paris his brother-in-law Paul Chenay published the engraving 'John Brown' which was produced from Hugo's drawing of a hanged man, John Tapner. At the end of March the writer left Guernsey in the company of Charles and Juliet for a three month journey to the continent, first into Belgium, when he visited his wife and daughter in Brussels, stayed in the vicinity of the battlefield of Waterloo and completed *Les Misérables*. He then went on to Holland. Charles decided to settle on the continent. Hugo wrote two important open letters, one to the Congress of the Antwerp Artistic Missionary and Scientific Circle on Literary and Artistic Property, and another to the Associazione unitaria italiana, to thank it for having spontaneously made him a member and to encourage it in its work. He also ordered a room in glass to be built at the top of his house for use as a study. This was to be his 'look-out.'

**1862** Hugo wrote a letter to the Belgian newspapers on the prisoners condemned to death in Charleroi, and this was instrumental in having seven death sentences commuted. He organized a weekly meal in his home for the poor children of the island. The publication of *Les Misérables* started in Brussels on the 30 March and in Paris on 3 April, but the performance of a drama based on the novel by Charles Hugo and Paul Meurice was banned by the French government. In August and September Hugo travelled with Juliet in Belgium and along the Rhine. Journalists from many countries who were admirers of *Les Misérables* organized a banquet in his honour in Brussels, at which he took the floor to hail the Free Press and the contribution it had made to social progress. Since he was about to return to Guernsey, Hugo had to decline an invitation to speak at the International Congress for the Advancement of the Social Sciences, but he sent a letter announcing his membership which was published in the Brussels newspaper *The Times* and in which he stated 'there is nothing more pressing and urgent than free and compulsory education.' He was also successful in his appeal to the people of Geneva to reject a draft constitution upholding the death penalty. An album of 12 drawings by Hugo engraved by Paul Chenay, with a preface by Théophile Gautier and a portrait and foreword by Hugo himself, was published in Paris.

**1863** At the beginning of the year Russia crushed a popular uprising in Poland. Hugo responded to the appeal of the Polish newspaper *Kolokoi* by writing an address to the Russian army which was reproduced in the press throughout Europe. In Puebla, the Mexican city besieged by French troops, a bilingual newspaper published daily 'banner' headlines consisting of extracts from *Napoleon the little*, and taunted the invaders with the slogan 'you have a Napoleon but we have Victor Hugo.' Hugo responded by writing a stirring essay on the Mexican war. His daughter Adèle fled from the family home and set out for Canada. Hugo's wife published *Victor Hugo's life recounted by an eye-witness* and came back to Guernsey for 10 days in the summer. Hugo and Juliette went on a seven week trip to Germany. The writer started to work on essay on Shakespeare and wrote *Promontorium somnii*.

**1864** Publication of *William Shakespeare*, the crowning genius of all time. Hugo was invited to officiate at a ceremony in Paris commemorating the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, and it was agreed that he would be

represented by an empty chair. The imperial government banned the event. Hugo wrote a preface for the new translation of Shakespeare by François-Victor Hugo and began work on *The Toilers of the Sea*. His annual tour took him to Germany, Luxembourg, and Belgium.

**1865** **Death of Emily De Putron**, François-Victor's fiancée. FV left Guernsey and his father delivered the funeral oration. Hugo made several declarations on capital punishment and agreed to be a member of a committee established for the purpose of erecting a statue to Beccaria in Italy. He wrote a letter to the Gonfaloniere of Florence to commemorate the 600th anniversary of Dante. In June he wrote *La Grand'mère*, a one-act comedy, and then left with Juliet for four months on the continent. He wrote a letter to the Student Congress of Liège, in which he stated that the brotherhood of education was the precursor of the brotherhood of peoples. *The songs of the streets and the woods* was published in both Brussels and Paris. He completed *Toilers*. Charles Hugo married Alice Lehaene.

**1866** Publication of *The toilers of the sea*. The novel was dedicated Guernsey, 'my present retreat and my likely grave.' Hugo wrote a drama entitled *1000 Francs reward* and the one-act comedy *The intervention*. In Brussels, where he lived for two months in the summer, he met his wife and sons again. Hugo started work on a new novel, *The man who laughs* and on the introduction to *Paris-Guide*, a collection of essays intended for publication on the occasion of the Universal Exhibition. He published an open letter in response to the appeal launched by the inhabitants of Crete, who had risen up against the Turks. He also became an honorary member of the Central Committee for the Polish Cause.

**1867** He issued a further letter to the people of Crete as well as a letter to England on the Irish independence movement. He also wrote a two-act comedy *Will they eat?*, and published his essay on Paris in which he extolled its history and conjured up a majestic version of its future whereby, in the 20th century, it would become the capital of a united Europe and in the centuries that after the capital of United mankind. He addressed an appeal to Benito Juarez, president of the Mexican Republic, asking him to spare the life of the Emperor Maximilian 'by the grace of the republic'. He had a moving exchange of letters with a Portuguese correspondent on the occasion of the abolition of

the death penalty in Portugal. Their correspondence was published in *Le Courrier de l'Europe*. He addressed a letter to the Congress of the Peace League taking place in Geneva. He spent three months on the continent, firstly with his family in Brussels, when he saw his first grandson Georges, and then in Zeeland. Publication in booklet form of *The voice of Guernsey*, a set of verses address to Garibaldi on the occasion of his defeat at Mentana. He likewise addressed a letter to the members of the republic of Puerto Rico, in which he proclaimed 'the freedom of the world is composed of the freedom of its individual peoples'.

**1868** Hugo addressed a letter to the International League of Peace and Freedom which was published in the Washington newspaper *Public opinion* as well as a letter to the Venetian patriots on Manin, whose ashes were about to be transferred from London to Venice. Death of Georges Hugo. Hugo spent two months in Brussels. Birth of his second grandson, also named Georges. Death of his wife, buried in Villequier alongside Léopoldine. Hugo accompanied the funeral cortège as far as the French border. He completed *The man who laughs* and addressed to letters to Spain following the fall of that country's monarchy.

**1869** Hugo wrote *L'épée, Les Deux trouvailles de Gallus* and *Torquemada*, which became part of The Theatre in Freedom. He launched an appeal to America calling on it to support Crete and visited Geneva to chair the Congress of the International League of Peace and Freedom. He spent several weeks traveling in Switzerland and one month in Brussels where a granddaughter Jeanne had just been born. Publication of *The man who laughs*. Letter to the chairman of the American committee of London on the philanthropist George Peabody. His poetic output stepped up sharply.

**1870** Hugo responded to the appeals made to him from across the Atlantic by delivering an address for Cuba and a letter to the women of Cuba who had taken refuge in New York. He continued his political activity and planned the organization of the collection the four winds of the spirit. In June his son Charles and family came to stay at Hauteville house. On 14 July he and his grandchildren planted *the acorn of the Oak of the United States of Europe*. In view of the impending fall of the empire Hugo left Guernsey with Juliet on 15 August and went to Brussels, where he impatiently awaited the news from Paris. The republic was proclaimed on 4 September and on the 5th Hugo returned to France after almost 19 years of exile. No sooner had he returned than he turned his attack on the foreign enemy and addressed a letter to the

Germans followed by letters to the French people and to the Parisians. Publication of the first French addition of *Les Châtiments*, from which public readings were given in aid of the defence of Paris. Other public meetings were given in aid of war victims. The dreadful year began to take shape in the light of these events.

**1871** The French and the Germans signed an armistice in January and legislative elections were held in February. Hugo was elected to the national assembly and set off at once for Bordeaux, where it was in session. 3 weeks later when he spoke in a debate on the validation of Garibaldi's election he was so violently heckled that he resigned. His son Charles' sudden death compelled him to return to Paris on the very day that the uprising of the commune broke out. He went on to Brussels to arrange his sons affairs. His horror at the harsh repression of which the 'Communards' were victims prompted him to offer sanctuary to all the exiles of the commune. On account of the stand he took he was attacked in his home in the night and was expelled from Belgian territory. He and his entourage sought refuge in Luxembourg, after which he settled in Vianden. The poems comprising *The dreadful year* continued to increase in number. At the end of September, learning of the conviction of Henri de Rochefort, Hugo rushed back to Paris to plead in his favour and in that of other Communards.

**1872** Adèle, Hugo's daughter was brought back to Paris where she had to be placed in a nursing home. She was to die in 1915. Publication of a collection of speeches and open letters entitled *Deeds and words 1870-72*, followed by publication of *The dreadful year*. In May the people of Rome sent an address to the people of France through the person of Victor Hugo, who in turn drafted a response to the Romans. He also sent letters to the chairman of the society of non-denominational schools and to the chief editor of *The Future of Women*, in order to encourage them in their work. Hugo likewise addressed a letter on the future of Europe to the peace Congress in Lugano. Hugo returned to Guernsey and started work on the new novel '93.

**1873** While still in Guernsey Hugo became friendly with Blanche Lanvin, a girl working for Juliette. This was to be the last great love of his life and it was to last for a number of years. He wrote poems, completed first version of his novel, and then having spent almost one year on the island returned to France. The death of his son François-Victor in December.

**1874** Publication of '93. Completion and publication of *My sons*. Letter on the

centenary of the 500th anniversary of Petrarch. Letter to the Peace Congress meeting in Geneva. Letter to the Italian Democrats. Prolific poetic output.

**1875** The letter to The Society for the Improvement of the Life of Women in which he asserted ' half of humankind is beyond the balance of equality and has to be gathered in again'. Hugo returned to Guernsey for one week to collect the notes files and manuscripts he had left behind. Publication of the first volume of *Deeds and words* entitled *Before exile* and the second volume *During exile*. Letter to the Peace Congress.

**1876** Hugo was elected a senator and militated in favour of an amnesty for the Communards. A speech on the Philadelphia exhibition. Publication of the last volume of *Words and Deeds* called after Exile. Address for Serbia castigating massacres perpetrated by the Turks. A further letter to the peace Congress in Geneva. Ponchiell's opera, *La Gioconda*, based on Hugo's *Angelo* was given its first performance in Milan.

**1877** The publication of a new series of *The legend of the centuries*. Charles's widow married Edouard Lockroy, but Hugo continued to live with his grandchildren. Publication of *The Art of being a grandfather*, which is dedicated to George and Jeanne. Hugo went back to work on the history of a crime which he had sent set aside since he first went into Exile, and published the first volume. Letter for the ceremony commemorating the anniversary of Mentana.

**1878** Publication of the second volume of *History of a crime*. Publication of *The Pope*. Address on the hundredth anniversary of the death of Voltaire. Hugo attended the International Literary Congress at which he made several statements, including the opening address and a speech on literary property. At the end of June the poet appears to have suffered a cerebral haemorrhage which virtually brought his creative work to an end. He spent four months resting in Guernsey with his family. Publication of *Supreme pity*. Further statements on behalf of the Communards, as a result of which a partial amnesty was granted. In May Hugo presided over a banquet commemorating the abolition of slavery and delivered a speech on Africa. He visited Villequier to meditate on the graves of Léopoldine and his wife.