God

AND

The End of Satan

Dieu

ET

La Fin de Satan

SELECTIONS: IN A BILINGUAL EDITION

VICTOR HUGO

Edited, Translated, and with an
Introduction by R. G. SKINNER

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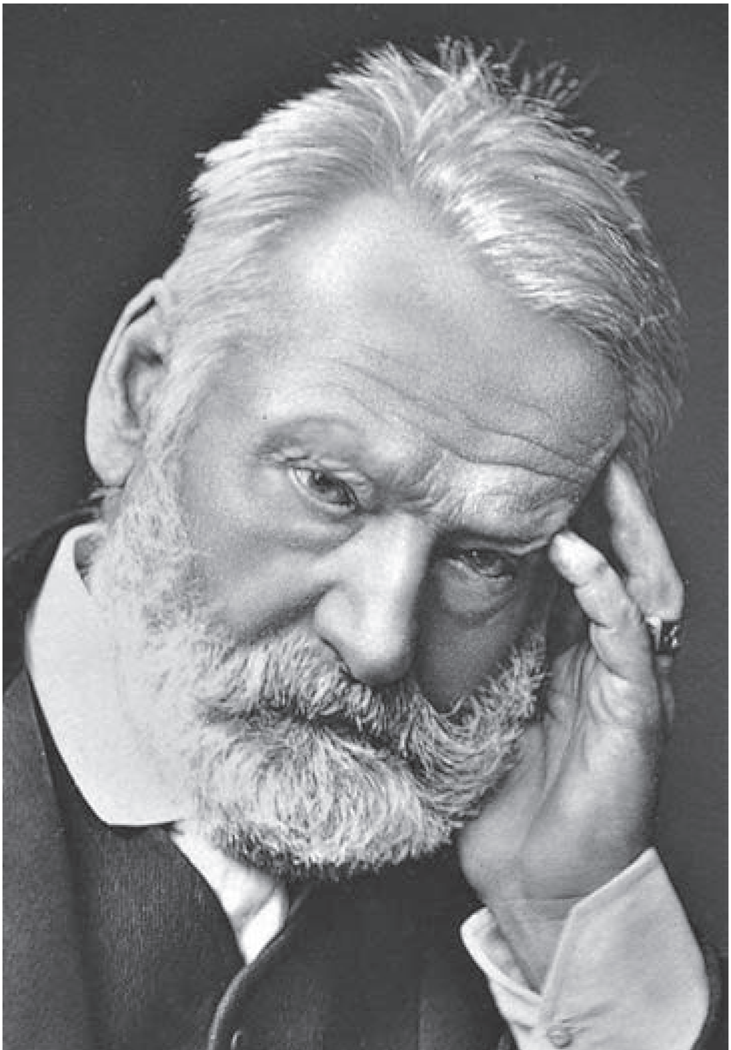

Victor Hugo Assis, by Walery, detail, 1876,
Musée Victor Hugo-Maison Vacquerie

God

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La Fin de Satan

Victor Hugo

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an Introduction by R.G. Skinner

VICTOR HUGO (1802–85) was a great French poet, novelist, playwright, and statesman. Living in exile on the islands of Jersey and Guernsey for eighteen years, the author of *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* wrote some of his most influential work during that time. Highly esteemed for his poetry, *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan* were works in progress at the time of his death and published posthumously.

RICHARD G. SKINNER is an independent scholar and poet.

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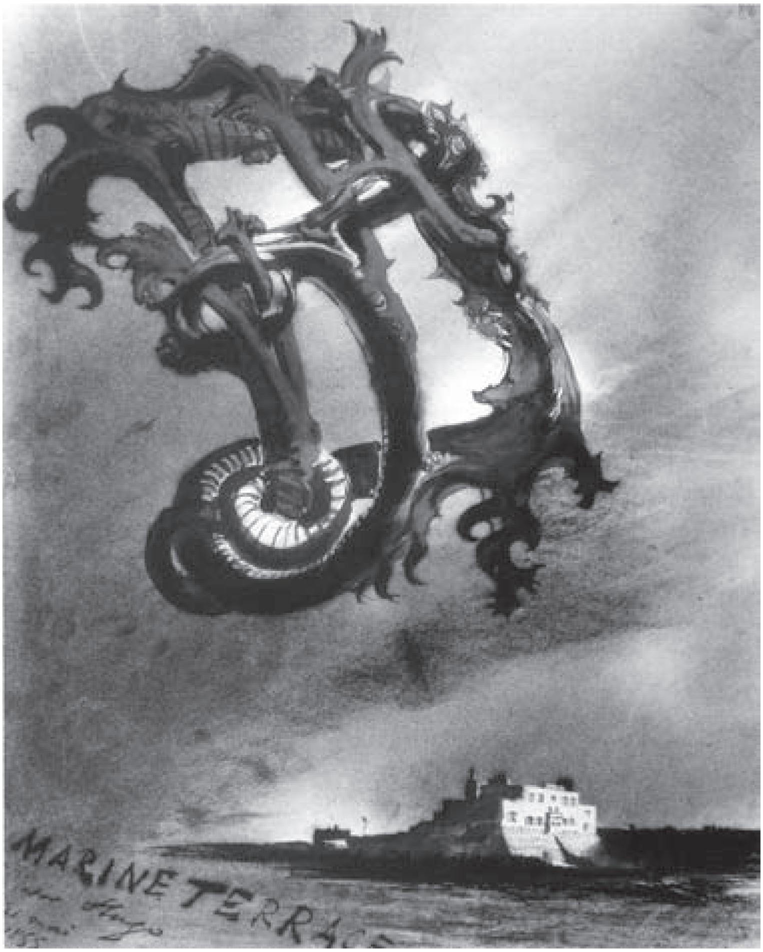

MARINE TERRACE

Victor Hugo, *Marine Terrace with Initials,* 1855 May 21, private collection

FOREWORD

VICTOR HUGO WROTE many books, but none more adventurous—or more challenging—than *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan.* He drafted them at the very height of his powers, between his two spells of work on *Les Misérables.* When they were first published after his death, as the master's final masterpieces, they amazed and deeply influenced a whole era of French poets (including Mallarmé, Valéry, and Claudel). Today, *Dieu* is often considered Hugo's single finest achievement. There is nothing quite like it in our language. Its first English readers compared it to the strange late poems of Blake; and that is probably still the closest analogy.

Hugo never quite finished either of these books. Yet, in both cases, their incompleteness has often been regarded as a strength rather than a weakness. The main body of *La Fin de Satan (The End of Satan)* was to be a three-part narrative tracing the rise and fall of evil in prehistory (a Central Asian legend about Nimrod), ancient history (the crucifixion of Christ), and modern history (the French Revolution). Hugo completed the first two-thirds of the narrative—but there he stopped, apart from a few sketches. Yet many French readers have felt that he was wise to do so, and that the existing sections' consistent linguistic brilliance and mastery of storytelling would have been tarnished by an attempt to go further.

Dieu (God) is both closer to, and further from, completeness. It consists of two main parts. In the first part—"Le Seuil du gouffre" ("The Threshold of the Abyss")—the narrator's quest for God is blocked by the Human Spirit, a creature speaking with many voices, all but one of which deride any attempt to venture beyond the mainstream and the conventional. (The solitary exception—Voice XI, placed last in Hugo's papers—encourages him to press ahead regardless.) In the second part—"L'Océan d'en haut" ("The Ocean of the Heights")—the narrator soars upward and encounters eight successive winged creatures proclaiming eight successive notions about God. Each of these views, while it is being uttered, seems to express at least some truths; but each is quickly supplanted by its successor.

Until the very last line of its second half, *Dieu* seems to be a work of a familiar nineteenth century kind: a work like Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion,* in which various incorrect views of the subject are exposed before the writer reveals the correct view. Sure enough, the eighth and last speaker—"La Lumière" ("The Light")—seems to present Hugo's own ideas about God. But when the Light has stopped speaking, yet another winged creature is glimpsed beyond it—and two rows of dots show that the series is to continue endlessly. The notions expressed by the Light were just as finite and limited as all their predecessors; and the reality remains forever at an infinite distance ahead, no matter how far the narrator travels toward it. The poem's deepest convictions are that its deepest convictions are not only short of the truth, but *infinitely* short of the truth.

In Hugo's manuscripts, the second half of *Dieu* is absolutely complete, and the first half seems virtually complete; only a few lines here and there remain to be filled in. (In fact, most of his revisions to that half were cuts rather than additions. He had written far more for it than he needed.) So, whereas we have only the first two-thirds of *La Fin de Satan,* apparently we have all but a few lines of *Dieu.*

However, the existing text of *La Fin de Satan* can be read as a coherent narrative, whereas it is far from clear how the existing sections of *Dieu* should fit together. The crucial link between its two great masses of material remains tantalizingly elusive. According to overlapping drafts in Hugo's papers, the narrator cries out in protest against the Human Spirit, insists on knowing more, is granted his request—in the form of death—but then finds himself still at an infinite distance from his goal. This looks like a single episode—but is it? And if it is, where should it be placed? As an alternate ending to the Human Spirit episode (replacing the Voices)? Between the work's two main halves (so that the second half—"L'Océan d'en haut"—becomes a posthumous quest)? Or at the end of the entire work? No answer yet given to these questions has met with general acceptance. One thing is certain: for a book that celebrates with boundless zest and in multitudinous ways the intangible and inaccessible, nothing could be more appropriate than a central incompletely resolved mystery.

Richard Skinner's carefully edited texts and clear, easily readable translations allow the overall structure of both books to be followed in a single volume, for the first time in our language. This volume rightly claims to offer only "Selections," but the selections are large and representative of the whole; and nearly all the omitted sections can be found elsewhere in English in other volumes. Indeed, English-language readers now have access to everything that Hugo finally earmarked for publication in *Dieu* and nearly everything that he earmarked for publication in *La Fin de Satan*—as well as a considerable amount of material that he drafted for these projects but published in other forms or not at all. The most serious gap in English translations of Hugo has now been filled.

—E.H. Blackmore & A.M. Blackmore

INTRODUCTION

MANY PEOPLE CONSIDER Victor Hugo (1802–1885) the greatest writer of his century. In America he is known as a novelist, author of *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame (Notre-Dame de Paris).* In nineteenth-century France he was also known for seven other novels as well as twelve plays. These plays included the popular *Hernani* and *Le Roi s'amuse* (The King's Fool), both turned into operas by Verdi ("Rigoletto" was based on the latter), as well as *Cromwell*, unproduced, but whose preface was a famous manifesto of the Romantic movement, encouraged in its writing by Nodier, Nerval, and others. Nonetheless, despite his great success in these areas, Hugo was first and foremost a poet. That is what he called himself and that is his reputation in France. By the age of sixteen an admirer had secured for him a royal pension, and when he reached twenty, Louis XVIII, himself, awarded him an annual stipend for his first volume of poetry. When only 25, he was called the "prince of poets" by Delacroix, Musset and the young romantics in the Cénacle group who recognized him as their leader.[1] As late as 1895, Mallarmé wrote in the chapter "Crise de vers" in his book *Divigations*, that Hugo was "poetry incarnate."[2] However, his reputation as a writer began to suffer for a number of years following his death in 1885. He was hardly taught in school, and in some circles was considered a *mauvais maître* (bad teacher). In 1923, in the Surrealist review *Littérature*, he was belatedly celebrated as one of the "French pioneers of the poetry of irrational insights,"[3] and in a later essay, as one of the "greatest poets of the nineteenth century,"[4] in the company of Nerval, Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Rimbaud, and

Mallarmé. By 1927 there was a Victor Hugo Chair at the Sorbonne, and in that year writer and poet Joseph Delteil said of him, “All the other French poets, Ronsard, Racine, Rimbaud, play the part of angels. He, alone, is god.” (Tous les autres poëtes français, Ronsard, Racine, Rimbaud, font figure d’anges. Lui seul est dieu).[5] Nearly sixty years after his death, in March of 1943, French poet and essayist Léon-Paul Fargue saluted Hugo as “a poet of the future” (un poëte d’avenir).[6] Today, Hugo is a major part of the curriculum in college departments of French and Romance Languages.

Although the years 1828 through 1843, the year his eldest daughter Léopoldine died, had been very fruitful ones for Hugo’s writing, after 1843 he was creating less, while becoming more involved in politics. He was made a Peer of France in 1845, and elected to the Constitutional, and then Legislative Assemblies in 1848 and 1849; in those forums he spoke out strongly against slavery, capital punishment, war, child abuse, and the ill-treatment of women. When a *coup d’état* occurred in 1851 resulting in the repressive Second Empire of Napoleon III and the dissolving of the National Assemblies, Hugo resisted, and then, December 11th, fled to Brussels. During his eight months there, he wrote *Napoléon-le-petit* (Napoleon-the-little), a harsh pamphlet denouncing Napoleon III, and began *L’Histoire d’un Crime* (The History of a Crime), a novel about the *coup d’état* which was eventually published in 1877. Officially expelled from France by a decree of January 9th, 1852, with a price on his head, and with the Belgian government becoming wary of his politics and in fear of the potential embarrassment upon publication of *Napoléon-le-petit*, he made a final move into self-exile, initially to the island of Jersey in the English Channel, 1852–55. When his politics became too controversial there, he moved to the neighboring island of Guernsey where he stayed until August of 1870, the year the Prussian army ended the reign of Napoleon III.

At midnight on August 4th, 1852, Hugo and his eldest son Charles left Southampton, England, for Jersey, aboard the steamer *Dispatch.* They experienced a stormy voyage, but unlike the other passengers, avoided seasickness by spending the night on deck. At dawn they passed the beautiful port of Guernsey, where the houses were arranged like an amphitheatre, admired the nearby islet of Sark, and arrived at Jersey by midday. There they joined Hugo’s wife Adèle, daughter Adèle, and Auguste Vacquerie, poet, family friend and one of Hugo’s future literary executors, who had preceded them by a few days.[7] Eleven days later, on August 15th, Hugo wrote to André van Hasselt, a Dutch poet living in Belgium:

> I am enveloped in poetry, dear poet, amid rocks, meadows, roses, clouds, and the sea, and naturally my thoughts turn to you.
>
> What fine lines you would write if you were here! They spring as it were of themselves from this splendid scenery. When the view is not grand, it is lovely.
>
> Tomorrow I take up my abode in a little den near the sea, which the newspapers of the island describe as a "superb house on the Azette shore."[8]

Hugo's daughter, Adèle, kept a journal during these Jersey years, to which Hugo, himself, sometimes contributed. An early journal entry reads, "[M]y father is pleased to have finally realized his dream: to be on an island and have the sea at his feet."[9] He called his house "Marine Terrace," after the street on which it stood.

Initially at loose ends, Hugo describes a pivotal conversation with his son, François-Victor, which occurred later that fall:

> One morning at the end of November (1852), two of the inhabitants of this place, the father and the younger son, were seated in the dining-room. They kept silence, like shipwrecked people who reflect. Without it rained, the wind blew, the house was as if benumbed by this angry noise outside. Both the two were plunged in thought, absorbed perhaps by this coincidence of a beginning of winter and a beginning of exile. Suddenly the son raised his voice, and asked the father, "What do you think of this exile?" "I think that it will be long." "How do you mean to occupy it?" The father answered, "I shall look at the ocean." There was a silence. The father broke it; "And you?" "I," said the son, "will translate Shakespeare."[10]

François-Victor shared his father's political views, and had been jailed for seditious writings. Delayed afterwards in Paris, joining his family in Jersey at a later date, he did eventually produce an excellent prose translation of the works of Shakespeare. Hugo, himself, far from the distractions of Paris, where, prior to his exile, it had been twelve years since he had published a book of poetry, eight since he had written a play, and seventeen since he had produced a prose work,[11] began to write with a renewed sense of urgency.[12]

Napoléon-le-petit was published and went on sale soon after Hugo's arrival in Jersey. He then began *Les Châtiments* (The Chastisements), a collection of scathing poems also critical of the Emperor, which was secretly published in 1853. In

1856, after the expulsion from Jersey to Guernsey, he finished and published *Les Contemplations*, a collection of personal and metaphysical poems, some written in the early 1830's (Hugo later altered many of the dates) but changing in tenor in 1843 following the drowning death of his eldest daughter, Léopoldine, and her husband Charles Vacquerie, brother of Auguste. In 1859 he published the first part of *La Légende des siècles* (The Legend of the Centuries), epic poetry telling the story of mankind's struggle through the ages upwards towards the light, towards the ideal, and during the next eleven years, continued writing for the theatre while publishing four visionary social novels, including *Les Misérables*, as well as three other books of poetry and essays. In *Les Contemplations,* Hugo's poetic epigraph to the work, written in 1839, contained the verses:

> Poet, you do well! Poet with the downcast brow,
> You dream beside the sea,
> And you draw from that ocean many things which lie
> Beneath her unfathomed waves![13]

It was during this time of exile that he began to write two of his last poems, the visionary epics that are considered by many to be his greatest literary work, *Dieu* (God), and *La Fin de Satan* (The End of Satan). *La Fin de Satan* was begun on Jersey during 1854, and stopped just short of completion during 1859–60 on Guernsey. *Dieu* was started on Jersey perhaps as early as 1854, and then taken up again on Guernsey during the years 1856–57, and again during 1869–1870, his last years in exile. It was brought to near completion in the mid-seventies, and then left untouched. Due to their incomplete state, as well as critical and commercial considerations, these two poems were left unpublished during Hugo's lifetime.

A year into his stay on Jersey, a seminal event occurred. Hugo began participating in a kind of séance, table-turning, in which messages from the dead were tapped out, in most circumstances, by a three-legged pedestal table. Still mourning the death of his daughter, Hugo was convinced, during one of the first séances, that Léopoldine had spoken to them. For the next two years he, his family, and friends communicated with as many as 110 entities from the past including Shakespeare, Socrates, Isaiah, Moses, Cain, Mozart, Jesus, and Galileo. These dialogues influenced his writing of *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan*. Earlier in his life, Hugo had spent over ten years studying occult matters; the secrets of the *Zohar* in particular—one of the foundations of Kabbalistic study—had been disclosed to him by Alexandre Weill, French writer and polemicist.[14] These séances reinforced that interest, and helped lessen his personal grief. Kabbalistic symbolism informs *La Légende des siècles*, and is found in great abundance in *Les Contemplations* and *Dieu*.[15] The influence of Éliphas Lévi, the famous occult Illuminist formerly known as the Abbé Constant, and whom Hugo finally met and befriended in 1873, is apparent, as well. Auguste Viatte relates how Hugo borrowed the idea of the angel Liberty for the last part of *La Fin de Satan* from Lévi's book *le Testament de la liberté,* published in 1845:

> A comparison between *La Fin de Satan* and *Testament de la liberté* seems even more instructive.
>
> Like Victor Hugo, the Abbé Constant shows us first of all the fall "of the angel who, when born, refused to be a slave" and who pulled down with him, into the night, "a shower of suns and stars, attracted by his glory"; but Lucifer, his Intelligence proscribed, gives birth to two sisters, Poetry and Liberty, and "the spirit of love assumes their features in order to subdue and save the rebellious angel!"[16]

An entry in Adèle's journal dated May 1st and 2nd, 1855, describes Hugo's late-night reading to family and friends of his early version of *Dieu,* the verses describing the history of religions that eventually became the last and main section of the poem, referred to by him in 1869 as "L'océan d'en haut" (The Ocean of the Heights). At midnight, after two hours of reading, his audience insisted he continue:

> My father speaks about revelations made by the Tables; then he arrives finally at his own religion, which is summarized in this great word: Love. This poem ends with a series of dots, that is, it only comes to an end on the brink of the Infinite.
>
> It was half past two when my father ended this poem of 1946 lines, this account of the religions which tried to find God without ever succeeding.
>
> [Family friend] Kesler, the atheist, begins nevertheless to believe in God, to whom this gigantic poem is the ladder of fire. He goes away saying: it is as beautiful as the *Book of Revelation*; and we all withdraw, moved and lost in wonder….My father remains alone, clambering up to his room to search the sky for the moonlight, the friend who has sat near him in this poor room of exile. He gazes at the moon.[17]

In a letter of January 4th, 1855 to Delphine de Girardin, an influential French author, and the friend who had introduced the Hugos to the turning tables over a year earlier, Hugo wrote:

> The tables do in fact tell us some surprising things. How I should like to talk with you, and kiss your hands, your feet, or your wings! Did Paul Meurice tell you that a whole quasi-cosmogonical system, hatched by me and half committed to paper for twenty years, had been confirmed by the tables with splendid amplifications? We live in a mysterious landscape which opens out prospects, and we think of you, to whom we owe this glimpse into another world.
>
> The tables enjoin on us silence and secrecy. You will therefore find nothing from them in the *Contemplations*, with the exception of two details, of great importance, it is true, for which I have *asked permission* (I underline these words), and which I will indicate by a note.[18]

The sometimes brooding, sometimes exhilarating seascape as viewed first from his Jersey cottage, where he wrote most of *La Fin de Satan* and the main body of *Dieu,* and then from the high vantage point of his studio atop Hauteville-House on the Guernsey shore, where he lived and wrote the prologue to *Dieu*, as well as most of *Les Misérables*, was also a contributing factor, as was the effect of the eighteen year exile in this isolated part of the world (his wife and children were eventually to leave for the allures of Brussels and elsewhere, his daughter Adèle later institutionalized following a prolonged and fruitless pursuit of a British soldier met on Jersey. Hugo made extended visits to family during the last years of exile, or traveled, usually in the company of his mistress, Juliette Drouet, a constant presence over many years). In a letter of January 14th, 1855, to Émile Deschanel, a poet also forced into exile and living in Brussels, Hugo wrote from Jersey: "[All is] rosy for you, somber for me. . . . *I* have wedded the sea, the hurricane, a vast sandy shore, sadness, and the starry canopy of heaven."[19] Over a year later, on April 10th, 1856, Hugo, now moved to Guernsey, was to write in a different vein to Franz Stevens, a young Belgian poet:

> Try to realize the state of my mind in the splendid solitude in which I live, perched as it were on the summit of a rock, with all the grandeur of the waves and the sky before me. I dwell in this immense dream of the ocean. I am gradually becoming a somnambulist of the sea; and in face of all these stupendous phenomena and all this

> vast living thought in which I lose myself, I end by being only a sort of witness of God.
>
> It is from this never-ending contemplation that I arise to write you.[20]

His daily writing routine at Hauteville-House, that great domicile on Guernsey that Hugo was able to purchase due to the extreme popularity of *Les Contemplations,* never varied. He awoke before dawn, bathed quickly in cold water, and after having coffee, wrote for most of the morning standing at his foldout desk, facing east towards France. This house was also a refuge for other writers and exiles. Hugo set aside a guest room near his studio for fellow countrymen in need of a haven. He called this guest room "the raft of the Medusa."[21] Loyal family friend and writer, Hennett de Kesler, who had been present at that initial midnight reading of *Dieu*, was staying there when he died, in 1870.

Many fellow political exiles corresponded with Hugo, as did many fellow writers. On April 30th, 1857, he wrote Baudelaire to praise *Les Fleurs du Mal*, which had just been published and condemned as immoral: "I received your noble letter and your beautiful book. The art is as the azure, it is infinite terrain: you have just proved it. Your *Fleurs du Mal* shine and dazzle as stars. I shout bravo with all my might to your powerful spirit."[22] Alexis Lykiard, translator of the enigmatic Isidore Ducasse's long prose-poem *Les Chants de Maldoror*, written under the pen name le Comte de Lautréamont, quotes a letter Ducasse wrote to Hugo at Hauteville-House in 1868: "For ten years I cherished the desire to come and see you…I who in this century am nothing yet, while you, you are its Everything."[23] Hugo's return letter has been lost.

In their final form, these two poems were originally meant to form a trilogy with *La Légende des siècles.* When the first version of the latter was published in 1859, he spoke of this future trilogy in the preface:

> It is an attempt towards the ideal. Nothing more.
>
> …[W]hen several other parts of this book are published, one will see the bond which, in the design of the author, links *La Légende des siècles* to two other poems, almost finished at this hour, and which are, one the denouement, the other the crowning-piece: *La Fin de Satan*, and *Dieu.*
>
> The author…outlined in solitude a kind of poem of a certain scope wherein reverberates the single problem, Being, under its three-fold aspect; Humanity, Evil, the Infinite; the progressive, the relative, the absolute; in what one could call three songs: *La Légende des siècles*, *La Fin de Satan*, *Dieu.*[24]

In a letter written from Guernsey on June 7th, 1856 to Barthélemy (Prosper) Enfantin, social-reformer and co-founder of Saint-Simonism, Hugo had spoken, earlier, of these two poems:

> The ideal is the real. Like you, I live with my eyes fixed on a vision. To do my best so far as my strength will allow to help mankind, that hapless crowd of brothers we have there who are walking in darkness, and I endeavor, bound to the chain myself, to aid my fellow-travelers, by my example as a man in the present, and by my writings as a poet in the future….
>
> In those two books, *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan*, you may be sure that I shall not pass over woman; I shall go even further, just as I shall go beyond the things of this world. These two works are almost finished; nevertheless, I want to leave an interval between them and the *Contemplations*. I should like, if God gives me some measure of strength, to carry the crowd to certain altitudes; yet I'm well aware that there is little air there which it can breathe. I therefore wish it to rest awhile before I make it attempt a fresh ascent.[25]

Dieu narrates the plight of a human protagonist who is searching for God. He imagines a flight into the heavens, where he meets a multi-faceted creature called the Human Spirit, who reveals to him the many aspects, good and bad, of human nature. In Hugo's final conception, this is followed by thirteen separate, distinct 'Voices' emerging from the Human Spirit, reminiscent of the entities from the séances, all but one warning him of the many obstacles lying ahead in his search. The final part, read to family and friends that late evening in early May of 1855, consists of symbolic, winged creatures—bat, owl, raven, vulture, eagle, griffin, Angel, and Spirit of Light—tracing the stages of humanity's conception of the Divinity, from primitive earth gods, through Manichaeism's perpetual conflict of good and evil, ancient Greece's polytheistic myths, Christianity's doctrine of the fall and redemption, etc., which become increasingly enlightened, but which Hugo ultimately rejects one by one as well as the systems of religion that espouse them[26], or, as he wrote sometime around July 15th, 1856, "…each religion an improvement on the preceding one, and rebutting it, the spiritualization increasingly freed until its arrival and disappearance as pure spirit."[27] One reaches at last the Spirit of Light representing Hugo's ideal sphere, where all are pardoned, and where compassion is the essence of a God who "…has only one countenance: Light! and only one name: Love!"[28] However, even in death will that light never be revealed in full.

Dieu having been announced in the 1859 preface to *La Légende des siècles,* in 1869 Hugo wrote part of a new preface with the apparent intention of publishing some of it soon:

> It will be one of the splendors of this great nineteenth century to have posed in a kind of immense free and open debate, with every latitude allowed, negative or positive, inside and outside of religion, the supreme question: *God*.
>
> We are the ones who entreat and who embrace this formidable question mark, unceasingly seen on the horizon, obscure by day, luminous by night.
>
> From there this poem, of which we publish the first part today, *Le Seuil du gouffre*—The second part will appear later and will be entitled *L'Océan d'en haut*. The first part tackles the question. The second resolves it.[29]

When *Dieu* was published in 1891, it was at last the realization of this vow, expressed in verse around 1856:

> Embrace the Vastness, seize Eternity,
> Restrain, wrench out, take hold this fleeing shadow,
> Divulge the secret of the abyss, reveal the enigma of
> God, in spite of the mystery and despite the Infinite.[30]

Written in the prophetic, visionary tradition, these late poetic works have been compared to the late work of William Blake by such poets and critics as Anthony Hartley:

> Of all the Romantics, Hugo is without doubt the greatest, but his greatness has been hidden by the insufficient attention paid to the last part of his work. . . . [He is] a poet more akin to Blake, filling his works with monstrous cosmologies, where the terror of the abyss draws the poet's mind cascading from void to void in unending vertigo. . . . Wherever Hugo took his cosmology from (the Kabbala or Swedenborg? It does not much matter), he made it peculiarly his own, and embodied it in a series of poems which, for epic sweep and primitive strength, have hardly their equal.[31]

The French Catholic poet, Paul Claudel, compared Hugo to Blake as well when he wrote of Hugo, in 1925, "No one can contest the sincerity of the great poet, nor the fact that he was really and truly a seer, in the manner of the Englishman Blake."[32] But noting that in this work Hugo spoke less of God than of the absence of God, Claudel wrote:

> And I also think that Victor Hugo was not the only grieving soul from this moor full of ruins and excavations which is the literature of the 19th century. Other great moonstruck beings are staggering about in this graveyard dug by the spirits of the dead: Blake, Goethe of the *Second Faust*, Michelet, Carlyle, Ibsen, Wagner who was the first to be illuminated by a redemptive light, and finally Nietzsche who was devoured whole by this monster by which the others were only pursued.[33]

In 1894, three years following its publication, A. C. Swinburne, England's premier poet of the time, successor to Tennyson and Browning, published his thoughts on *Dieu*. Swinburne, a correspondent of Hugo, almost single-handedly introduced contemporary French literature (especially Hugo, Baudelaire, and Gautier) to England. He also saw the prophetic function of the poet and he, himself, wrote in the tradition of Blake, Shelley, Baudelaire, and Hugo. His reaction to Hugo's *Dieu* is as informative today as it was then:

> But it is rather of Blake than of Tennyson that an English reader will be usually reminded by the passionate and apocalyptic utterance of horror and of hope, of anguish and of faith, which rings and thrills through every line of this incomplete yet perfect poem....[To] Blake as to Hugo these sufferings and these wrongs were the ciphers or the figures of a problem insoluble except by faith, and unendurable to contemplate unless by the eyes of faith. Not Blake himself is more extravagant, excessive, outrageous to the instincts or the inductions of common sense and practical reason...than the greatest and most inspired writer of our own day....
>
> The adoring reverence of Hugo for the sacred name which is used here to express the ideal of divine or glorified humanity stands out singularly in contrast with the apparent aversion excited by its association with creeds and churches....[W]e hear again an unconscious echo of the spirit and indeed the very voice of William Blake....
>
> Of this great new song which comes to us from the grave of Victor Hugo...[t]hose who would know what it contains and what it conveys—its dramatic force,

> its philosophic insight, its evangelic passion—must be content and thankful to study it reverently and thoroughly for themselves.[34]

Swinburne was as great an admirer of *La Fin de Satan,* published prior to *Dieu,* in 1886, a year after Hugo's death, as he was of *Dieu.* In a long, detailed review, he referred to "ET NOX FACTA EST" (And then there was night), the opening section describing Satan's ten thousand year fall from heaven:

> More than thirty years have elapsed between the announcement and the appearance of the great religious poem which has done for the nineteenth century what was done for the thirteenth by the *Divina Commedia* and for the seventeenth by *Paradise Lost*....Only the poet's matchless mastery of language, his incomparable command of radiant symbol and rolling music, could make a western student not all unwilling to accept this more than Cyclopean or Titanic architecture of fancy without a sense of incredulous distaste for incongruous or inconceivable conceptions. But all demur, all question, all doubt is swallowed up in wonder and delight at the glory and the beauty of the indefatigable song. The flight of the fallen archangel towards the dying sun through chaos is given with that all but unique effect which Dante alone could hitherto achieve by alternation or combination of the very homeliest with the very sublimest images or comparisons.[35]

In one of his manuscripts, in a brief outline of *La Fin de Satan*, below the title "ET NOX FACTA EST" and above the words "Antres noirs du passé" (Dark caverns of the past) that begin the last stanza, Hugo had penned in, then cancelled, the phrase "Words of the dreamer writing this book."[36]

From a November 3rd, 1854 entry in Adèle Hugo's journal, in which she speaks of an after-dinner reading by her father in the parlor, we get an insider's view from someone who was there at the inception of this poem:

> My father read a piece of verse from his poem *Satan Pardonné.* It was called "Nimrod." The poem is meant to denounce the three scourges of the Old World: War, Capital Punishment, and Prison. War came from the spike that Cain, the first criminal, drove into the skull of his brother Abel. The spike served as the sword for Nimrod, who embodied war. Capital Punishment would be represented by the Cross of Christ....The Prison is incarnate in the Bastille. The Revolution destroyed the Prison through the capture of the Bastille.[37]

We learn from this entry that *Satan Pardonné* (Satan Forgiven) was, at one time, Hugo's provisional title for what ultimately became *La Fin de Satan.* In the final version, the poem was divided into eight parts: "Le Glaive," "Le Gibet," "La Prison," a four-part "Hors de la terre," and "La première page." The stanzas entitled "Satan Pardonné," written in 1860, became the unfinished ending to the poem. One of the inspirations for this poem was an event that had occurred earlier, pre-exile, in 1851. Hugo's son Charles, like his brother, was also sentenced to months in jail and fined, he for advocating the abolition of the death penalty. As Adèle tells it, an indignant Victor Hugo, for twenty years an opponent of the death penalty, spoke passionately in Charles' defense at the trial, bringing to the attention of the jury the irony of having a large painting of Christ on the Cross hanging behind the presiding judge, dominating proceedings that upheld the use of capital punishment:

> [T]his law from before which the human conscience recoils with an anxiety every day becoming deeper, is that which sanctions the infliction of the penalty of death.
>
> Well, gentlemen, it is this law which has provoked the trial which we have now in hand. It is this law that is our adversary. I am sorry for the advocate-general, but I perceive this law just behind him! (Strong sensations in the audience).[38]

One of Hugo's subsequent reactions was noted by his daughter: "The death of the Man-God is, in my father's opinion, an admirable subject for a poem."[39] Adèle makes the further observation:

> Contrary to all the classic Satans who do not love God and who, consequently, far from suffering from his absence, must be very happy to be rid of him, the romantic Satan of my father's poem loves God, and his suffering is a result of being separated from him.[40]

Hugo was, in fact, continuing a French Romantic tradition of transforming Catholicism by creating myths more in tune with nineteenth century ideas of progress and evolution,[41] as well as redefining the feminine as the embodiment of redeeming compassion through the intervention of a female angel, a tradition begun with de Vigny's *Éloa, ou La Sœur des anges* and found as well in the work of others such as George Sand, Edgar Quinet, Alexandre Soumet, and, as we've seen, Alphonse Constant.[42] In exile, in that setting, and from the fruits of his brooding introspection, Hugo gave this view its most fully developed expression not only in *Dieu*, but in *La Fin de Satan,* that the most advanced form of spirituality, beyond organized religion, is that represented by forgiveness and love.

Although not Catholic dogma, per se, Hugo's resolution consisting of mercy and *bonte* (goodness, kindness, benevolence) is akin to Christian conception, just as "Le Griffon," describing Christianity's doctrine of the fall and redemption, is not strictly an indictment of Christian thought. It is also representative of Leibniz's and Huxley's idea of the Perennial Philosophy, as well, and thus of universal concordance. In the end, it might be said that the theme of *La Fin de Satan* is an accord rendered between evil and good. As stated above, when Satan falls from heaven, one of his feathers is left behind—and from that feather God creates the angel Liberty. The arrival of that angel, the daughter of Satan and God equally, anticipates an eventual pardon and rehabilitation of Satan; and despite the poem's fragmentary ending, this rehabilitation does appear to be realized following the poem's alternating episodes showing Satan's work on earth and those showing Christ's work and death. In Hugo's view, humankind eventually inherits this liberty through the French Revolution, and must live with the implied dichotomy and the struggle inherent in it.

In 1921, Madame Duclaux, English poet and essayist living in France, and long a connoisseur of French letters, wrote:

> On the morrow of the death of Victor Hugo a light cloud passed across his solar glory. Men were tired of calling Aristides the Just. He had left the stage free for lesser men, the pupils of Baudelaire and of Sainte-Beuve: Parnassians and Symbolists on the one hand, on the other Intimists, like the delicious Verlaine and the insipid François Coppée. And these too had their day.
>
> Meanwhile the works of Victor Hugo still came pouring from the Press—the brilliant *Choses vues*, the exquisite *Théâtre en liberté*, the admirable rhythms of *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan*. . . . Only one voice in France could utter all we felt, *had* uttered it, had voiced all the courage, intensity, fury, patience, and burning pity of our souls:
>
> *La grande âme d'airain qui là-haut se lamente!*[43]
>
> And France, more than ever entranced, enchanted, listened in gratitude and glory to the voice of her unique, supreme lyric poet—Victor Hugo.[44]

In *Situation de Baudelaire,* French poet and philosopher Paul Valéry, whom some consider the greatest poet of the first half of the twentieth century, wrote of Hugo's late poems in 1924:

> In *Corde d'Airain*, in *Dieu*, in *Fin de Satan*, in the piece on the death of Gautier, the septuagenarian artist—who saw his followers dying all around him, who could see his influence on a whole new generation of poets, even profiting from the invaluable lessons that the disciple can give the Master if the Master lives long enough—the very illustrious old man reaches the very heights of poetic power and of the versifier's noble art.[45]

In 1927, writer and critic Erneste Seillière said of Hugo: "His apogee, as artist, is at the beginning of the exile…." (Son apogée, comme artiste, est au début de l'exil….).[46]

As to the relevance of this late work of Hugo today, it, along with the poetry of Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Lautréamont, is seen as a precursor to the freedom of expression of 20th Century poetry. Some would even say that all of the poetry of those poets, as well as Baudelaire and Verlaine, can be found in Hugo's verse.[47] Florian Rodari, poet, art historian, and author of, amongst others, the 2007 book *Victor Hugo, précurseur a posteriori*, and the catalogue for *Victor Hugo, dessins visionnaires*, Fondation de l'Hermitage, Lausanne 2009, wrote in the catalogue to the 1998 exhibition *Shadows of a Hand: The Drawings of Victor Hugo* at The Drawing Center in New York City that, in addition to Mallarmé's "Un coup de dés," Rimbaud's sonnet "Voyelles," and Lautréamont's *Maldoror*, verses from *La Fin de Satan* and *Dieu*

> …ushered in a new way of seeing and reading in which the poetic norms of the day were redefined by the range of the questioning and the anguish of a response that never seems quite capable of being uttered; Hugo's prosody forces the reader who wishes to enjoy to the full the disturbing nature of this splendid yet worrying vision to participate almost physically in the torment that carries his lines along.[48]

Victor Hugo died in 1885. He left in manuscript two book-length poems, each nearly 6000 lines in length, with more than an equal amount in fragments.

When J.C. Ireson published his comprehensive *Victor Hugo: a companion to his poetry* in 1997, he concluded his introduction with these apposite words:

> On his likely standing with posterity he has remained silent, though it is not difficult to guess at his assumptions. He envisioned an art integrating a conspectus of human life with intuitions about the cosmic mystery within which it evolves. He had seemed at one stage (1854–9) to have established a vast poetic plan tracing the evolution of an individual life (his own), the uncertain movement of progress visible through history, and a divine principle working through the confusion and violence of historical events towards a distant redemption. Its completion demanded the spiritual epic of which he left two unfinished parts, ultimately preferring to order his work according to the issues and pressures of time, and leaving its coherence and scope to be judged in the perspectives of a future age.[49]

JERSEY AND GUERNSEY

This is as much a tale about two islands—with their coasts and bays, vast horizons, profound skies, their ancient ruins and prehistoric dolmens, their charming countryside, and the solitude they provided—as it is about two poems written in exile. Philip Stevens' book *Victor Hugo in Jersey* captures some of what it was that bound Hugo to this part of the world, and so inspired his poetry:

> The Hugos felt, especially in the Jersey countryside, that they had never left France. Hugo often alluded to the fact that the island was once joined to Normandy, and for him it was a morsel of France stolen or gathered up by England. "In its rocks [it] is like Brittany, in its fields...like Normandy," say both Adèle and Vacquerie, and Hugo was probably the source of these similes for we find him saying: "Normandy in the South, Brittany in the North, for us [Jersey] is France." Both Jersey and Guernsey have "pleasant interiors and harsh, brooding coasts, but Jersey is neater than Guernsey, prettier but less beautiful. In Jersey the forest has become a garden, in Guernsey the cliffs stand colossal. More grace here, more majesty there." Jersey, where all is scent, sunshine and pleasantness, is an "idyll in the midst of the sea."[50]

During Hugo's free afternoons when he would go off to write, Rozel Bay, on the northeast coast of Jersey, with its ancient dolmens, was one of the places he would revisit for that purpose. "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre" (What the

Mouth of Shadows Says), the concluding poem of *Les Contemplations,* greatly influenced by the séances and written in the same visionary style as *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan*, was written there, as was "Un spectre m'attendait" (A specter awaited me), also from *Les Contemplations*, and "Nous nous promenions parmi les décombres a Rozel Tower" (We walked amidst the ruins of Rozel Tower), from *Les Châtiments*. In *Les Mages* (The Magi) Hugo tells of "The dark cromlech, scattered in the grass...on the silent hill."[51]

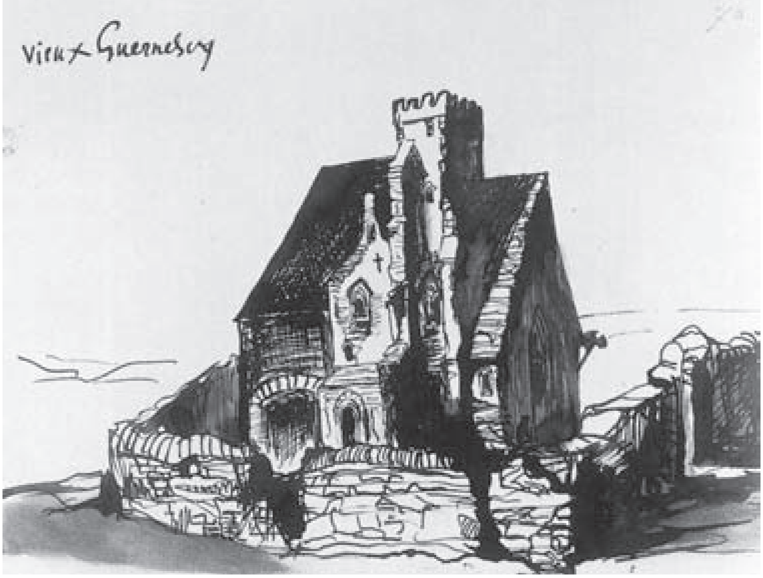
St. Brelade's Bay, on the southwest coast, "surrounded by jagged hills and rocks," was also a favorite place for excursions, as was Queen's Valley, "the valley where I go every day...."[52] On Guernsey, the turreted Victoria Tower, with a spectacular view of the island, was a place Hugo visited often. It was there, April 11–15, 1860, that he wrote "Chanson des oiseaux" (Song of the Birds), translated in this edition.

Stevens quotes Hugo's reaction to the charms of Jersey, as conveyed to Jules Laurens, an artist who was visiting him in March of 1855:

> When you have seen the bay of St. Aubin (the second of the island), the admirable granite cliffs of the north, Grève de Lecq with its tunnel traversable at low tide, the cape of Mont Orgueil; when you are sufficiently amazed by the southern appearance of certain plants, holm-oaks, fig-trees, due to the effect, even at this latitude, of the warm currents of the Gulf Stream, but with an underlying freshness always in the air, well, why don't we go to Guernsey, the archipelago of Alderney, Sark, Herm, Jethou, in the full roughness of the Ocean? Terrible and sublime equinoctial effects are found there in particular.[53]

He did make an excursion to Sark, which he had admired on the original trip from Southampton to Jersey, and had found it a "fairy castle, full of wonders."[54] Hugo could not have known that a mere eight months after this conversation, he would embark on a boat trip to Guernsey, not to visit, but to make a new home in exile for another fifteen years, the island to which he dedicated this poem:

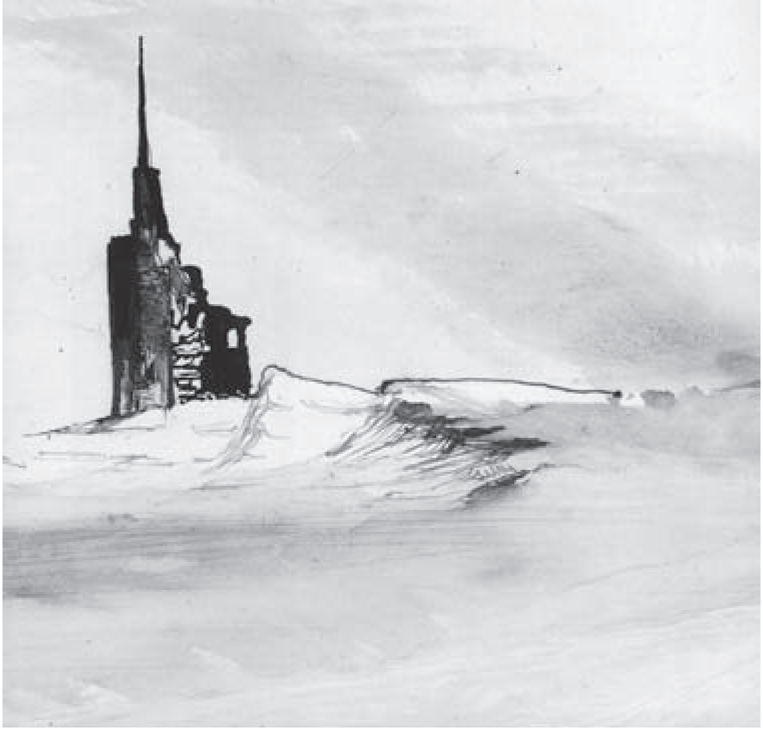
> These rocks of the ocean encapsule everything, terror and grace,
> Heavens, seas, escarpment behind which all pass,
> Somber sound which sometimes seems a blessèd hymn,
> Patience to bear the weight of the infinite;
> And, in these proud deserts which a frightening order rules,
> One feels one's wing grow, and the Soul becomes an Eagle.[55]



Victor Hugo, *Vieux Guernesey* (Old Guernsey), date unknown, Bibliothèque nationale de France

A NOTE ON HUGO'S ART

We are beginning, in this generation, to rediscover from exhibits like *Shadows of a Hand,* that Hugo was an artist of immeasurable talent as well. He was considered a master by those of his friends and contemporaries who knew his work, which was compared to that of Goya or Dürer. Much later, van Gogh called Hugo's drawings "astonishing things"[56] in a January 3rd, 1890 letter from Saint-Rémy to his brother Theo, and elsewhere as grand, immense, and infinite; but Hugo's own estimate of his art was less laudatory, in part because he did not want it to compete with his writing. On April 29th, 1860 he wrote to Baudelaire of the "… things I call my pen drawings…[that] amuse me between verses."(…des choses que j'appelle mes dessins à la plume….Cela m'amuse entre deux strophes).[57] In a letter from Hauteville–House dated October 5th, 1862 to André Castel, who wished to publish an album of his drawings entitled *Dessins de Victor Hugo*, he called them "…these insignificant pen strokes dashed more or less clumsily down on paper by a man with other things to do…."[58] Another time he called them "a bit wild" (un peu sauvages).[59]



Victor Hugo, *Clocher dans la dune* (Steeple in the Dunes), detail, 1870-71, Musée Maison de Victor Hugo

In truth Hugo was a superb draftsman, and did many extraordinary drawings from his imagination as well as in his travels. At the same time, he loved to experiment, and relied on unorthodox techniques to free his imagination. Just as his poetry anticipated that of the twentieth century, so some of his graphic techniques anticipated those of the surrealists and abstract expressionists. In that April 29th letter to Baudelaire he also described his method: "I end up combining pencil, charcoal, sepia, coal, soot, and all kinds of bizarre mixtures."[60] Philippe Burty, one of the more progressive French art critics and writers of that time, who coined the term "japonisme," and was an early champion of the Impressionists, wrote of Hugo's technique:

> Victor Hugo has done hundreds of drawings, and has used every conceivable process, all shades of colour, all kinds of paper—common ink, the coffee left at the bottom of

> his cup at dessert, a charred lucifer-match, the feather of a goose-quill, a handkerchief applied to half-dry portions of the paper.[61]

He was as prolific in his artwork as in his writing during those years spent on the Channel Islands—"[Hugo] pursued, from sketch to sketch, the grand impossible project of *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan*."[62] "His exile inspired compositions which are tinged, some with the bitterness that runs through the *Châtiments*, others with the melancholy that pervades the *Contemplations*."[63]—but as Burty wrote in 1875, five years after Hugo's repatriation: "Since his return to France he has only done one—a series rather, of arabesques....The yearly deprivation of such a precious gift makes me often tell him that I wish him as many more years of exile as there are empty places in my portfolio."[64]

Twelve years after Hugo's death, the artist Pierre-Georges Jeanniot visited Hauteville-House on Guernsey and wrote:

> There is only one other man who possessed to so great a degree this faculty for creating the fantastic and visionary; this was Gustave Doré; but the fantastic of Doré is commonplace and without dignity, whereas that of Hugo is superb and original. And why? Without doubt because Hugo was transmuting his own particular dreams, while Doré realized those of all the world. There is no scientific skill in the vulgar sense in Hugo's drawings, but a spontaneous creativeness, contemptuous of all rule and of everything ever seen before....These observations seem to me to explain why Victor Hugo, in his manifestation as a graphic artist, remains an inimitable master, and of a power equal to that which he displayed in a literary direction.[65]

André Breton named his daughter Aube (Dawn) in tribute to one of his drawings.[66] Would that Hugo had done as William Blake, and illustrated his own poetry.

LOUIS MORÉRI

Hugo was often accused, in some quarters, of making up names when he needed a rhyme; the word *Jérimadeth,* from "Booz endormi," is a well-known example. However, scholars have shown these accusations to be primarily false.[67] Instead, just as Mallarmé and Valéry used the long-forgotten meanings of common words culled from a dictionary for poetic effect, so Hugo sought out and used obscure proper nouns not only for their literal meaning, but for their allusive quality. Aside from the Old Testament, his favorite source was *Le Grand Dictionnaire historique*, subtitled: *ou le mélange curieux de l'histoire sacrée et profane* (or the curious anthology of sacred and secular history); published originally in a single folio volume by French priest and encyclopaedist Louis Moréri, and eventually changed in emphasis and expanded by later editors to ten folio volumes in 1759, it was first published in Lyon in 1674 by Jean Girin et Barthélemy Rivière. In it were found rare, odd terms, as well as names of places or characters little known or unknown. French critic and man of letters Émile Faguet wrote in the July 16th, 1911 issue of *Le Temps*:

> Moréri is the mine where Victor Hugo descends every day and several times per day. Moréri gives him the history, which he is given the responsability to make picturesque, especially the odd proper names, strange, and worrying, which awaken one's attention and draw it to them, as a bright color attracts the eyes.[68]

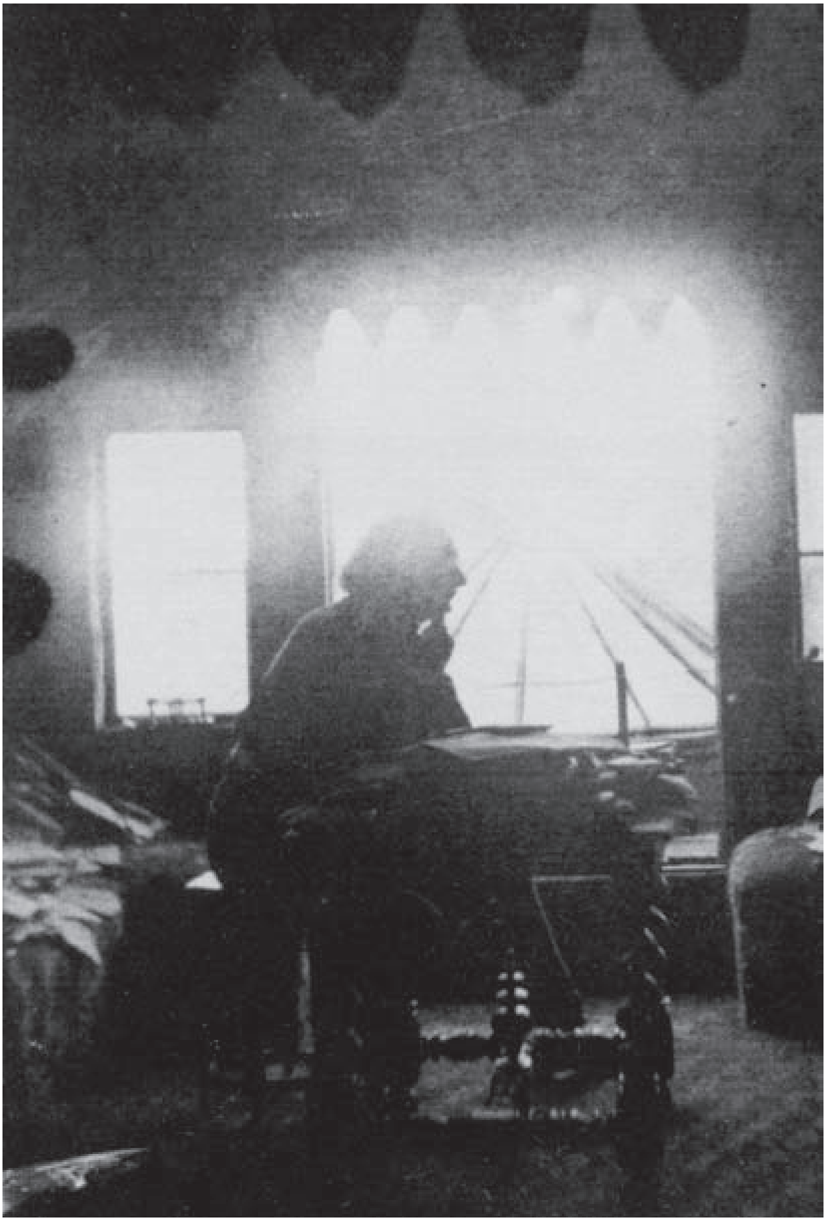
Thanks to research done by René Journet and Guy Robert in their edition, *Dieu (Le Seuil du gouffre),*[69] we know that in "L'Esprit humain" and the thirteen 'Voices' of the prologue, alone, there are over forty references from Moréri's dictionary.

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

The text of these selections is that of Victor Hugo's original manuscript, and thus adheres closely to the work of René Journet and Guy Robert in their editions, *Dieu (L'océan d'en haut)*, 1960, *Dieu (Le Seuil du gouffre)*, 1961, and *Contribution aux études sur Victor Hugo: vol. 2. Le texte de "La fin de Satan" dans le manuscrit*, 1979, which editions, along with their 1969 three volume *Dieu (fragments)*, I will refer to as the JR. This work consisted of careful transcriptions of the MSS that established the text for later scholarly editions such as *Œuvres complètes,* Édition chronologique, vols. IX and X, 1968–69, edited by Jean Massin (hereafter the CF), and *Œuvres Complètes:* Poésie IV, 1986, edited by Jacques Seebacher and Guy Rosa (hereafter the RL). As well as some stanzaic changes, my *Dieu* text differs from that of those editors in my choice of variants. When Hugo left one or more alternative words or phrases, I made subjective choices, whereas the above chose Hugo's initial word or phrase, and other important editions usually chose his second. Unlike the JR and RL, but in accord with the CF and other important earlier and later editions, I adhere more closely to the manuscript of *La Fin de Satan* by placing chapters XIII–XVI of Satan's monologue after "L'Ange Liberté" and "La Prison," and entitle them "Satan Pardonné," as indicated by Hugo on the verso of folio 232r of the MS. The former two place them before "L'Ange Liberté." (Although "La Prison" was not entirely finished, of all these editions, only the CF chose not to include it in the main text.)

As did the JR and the RL, I chose to use, for the ending of *La Fin de Satan*, the fragment entitled "Dénouement," found on folio 279r, beginning with the lines "Voix à travers l'infini / Non, je ne te hais pas." The other editions, including the first three early editions, chose the text of the dénoûment, as well, but replaced the first two lines with those written upside down atop folio 198r, "DIEU PARLE DANS L'INFINI / Non, je ne te hais point!..." For some reason, the first two editions of this poem, *Œuvres inédites de Victor Hugo*: *La Fin de* Satan, 1886, (which, along with the 1891 Hetzel-Quantin *Dieu*, will hereafter be referred to as the HQ), and the Imprimerie nationale edition *Œuvres complètes de Victor Hugo, Poésie XI, La Fin de Satan. Dieu.*, 1911 (hereafter the IN), left out the last line of the denouement, whereas the next Bibliothèque de la Pléiade edition, *La Légende des siècles. La Fin de Satan. Dieu.*, 1950 (hereafter the BP), included it. I added, as an epilogue, the poems "Le Point du Jour," "Les Grands Morts," and a two-verse fragment, all verses that Hugo indicated he wished placed at the end of the poem, and all published in the notes or the appendices of the earlier editions of this work.[70] Unlike the first four important editions of *Dieu*, I did not include the poem "Le Jour" as epilogue. After much study of the MS and the critical literature, I felt, as later editors, that the poem was an invention of the literary executors, and chose to return the verses, of which it was mostly comprised, to their original place in the MS.

The first excerpts are from the prologue to *Dieu* entitled "Le Seuil du gouffre" (The Threshold of the Abyss) by Hugo in 1869. They include the section entitled "L'Esprit humain" (The Human Spirit), as well as eight of Hugo's original thirteen 'Voix' (Voices). Following the prologue, I include excerpts from the second part of *Dieu* entitled "L'ocean d'en Haut" (The Ocean of the Heights).[71] The three excerpts are "I. La Chauve-souris" (The Bat), "VI. Le Griffon" (The Griffin), and "VIII. La Clarté" (The Light). The second part of this book includes excerpts from all eight parts of *La Fin de Satan* beginning with "ET NOX FACTA EST," the wonderfully high-wrought telling of Satan's



Anonymous, *Victor Hugo dans son cabinet de travail, avant la création du look-out,* (Victor Hugo in his study, before the creation of the "Look-Out "), 1859-61, Musée Victor Hugo-Maison Vacquerie fall from heaven referred to above. In an attempt to condense the combined twelve thousand lines of these two poems into one volume of almost one-half that length, I have had to select parts that I believe best represent the whole.

To illustrate the scope of Hugo's writings, the difficulty of constructing a cohesive edition of this poetry given the ocean of verses written for these projects, to hint at the byways these poems might have taken, and the wealth of poetry still left to discover amidst the unpublished verses, I include a selection of other fragments, published in the IN, that could just as well have been included by those given the task of preparing this work for publication.

I chose not to translate Hugo's verse as rhymed couplets, a precedent set by previous translators, allowing his inherent imagery to hopefully carry the day. Given that Hugo's poems are narrative, and even thought of by some as reading like novels, my translations are essentially prose translations bordering on prose poems, organized as verse or free verse, and closely approximating Hugo's syntax and grammar. As prose translations, they follow the tradition of such editors of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century French and German poetry anthologies as Anthony Hartley, Elaine Marks, and Patrick Bridgwater, of Oliver Bernard in *Arthur Rimbaud–Collected Poems*, and even of François-Victor Hugo in his translation of Shakespeare.

A PUBLICATION HISTORY OF *DIEU*

Pierre-Jules Hetzel was a Paris publisher and fellow exile who met Hugo in Brussels in 1851, following the *coup d'état*. He became his literary agent, traveled to London to help arrange for translations, and facilitated the publication of his work in Brussels and Paris. At great personal risk, he worked tirelessly to make Hugo's anti-imperialist writings available to the public. In 1852 he arranged for the denunciatory *Napoléon-le-petit* to be published secretly by Baptiste Tarride. In order to protect Tarride from any retaliation by the French or Belgian government, the London publisher, William Jeffs, had agreed to have it published under his name, with some persuasion by Hugo. In 1853, Hetzel arranged for the secret release of *Les Châtiments*, initially entitled *Les Vengeresses*, published by Antoine Mertens and printed by Henri Samuel,[72] also in Brussels. That year, through the Librairie Marescq and the Librairie Blanchard in Paris, he published the two volume *Œuvres Illustrées de Victor Hugo,* with Victor Lecou began an English edition of the complete works of Hugo, and with Tarride, the *Œuvres* *oratoires.* He remained in exile until a general amnesty allowed his return to Paris in 1859, frequently corresponding with Hugo and periodically visiting him on the islands (Hugo refused to return to France until Napoleon III was deposed, and so stayed on Guernsey for another eleven years, much of the last five years spent traveling or writing in Brussels, near his family, as noted above).

It was following the publication, in Paris and Brussels, of the popular *Les Contemplations* in late April of 1856, arranged by Hetzel and a team organized by Hugo, that Hetzel wrote to Hugo offering a fifteen year contract for the purchase of all his written work. Hugo's favorable response in a May 20th letter from Hauteville-House on Guernsey highlighted his works in progress, *Dieu*, *La Fin de Satan*, and the *Petites Épopées* (Minor Epics), as being part of the bargain.[73] Yet, within the next three weeks Hugo decided to delay publication of the former two poems, after all, as he explained in the June 7th letter to Prosper Enfantin, quoted above. Despite this hesitation, Hugo scholars René Journet and Guy Robert found a fragment of Adèle Hugo's journal which they date most likely from July 2nd, 1856, indicating, once again, a change of heart:

> My father speaks this morning to us about his project of publishing the poem *Dieu* at once; [he] fully responds to what Mme. Sand calls for, a sequel and continuation of the *Contemplations*; one must strike while the iron's hot.[74]

Apparently, in spite of following Auguste Vacquerie's advice to remove, from Book VI of *Les Contemplations* (where it was meant to follow the verses "Solitudines Terræ"), and print separately, the poem "Solitudines cœli" (The Lonelinesses of the Heaven *or* Deserted Spheres of the Summit[75]), later renamed *Dieu*, and aside from the approval of George Sand, some of his friends and family did not want what they considered its continued somber mood perpetuated, a mood exemplified by its concluding verses, "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre," equally influenced by the turning-table séances of 1852–53. Hugo could not help but be affected by the attitude of his entourage, and even that very same day, July 2nd, Adèle noted that her father later "…[suggested] creating a contrast of style, by publishing some prose,"[76] a view shared by his son François-Victor that day, as well.

Working in tandem with Hetzel was Paul Meurice, a writer and younger friend of Hugo, who had introduced the two in Brussels at the beginning of exile, and who was handling Hugo's affairs in Paris. In the autumn of that year he wrote Vacquerie for news of activity on Guernsey. Vacquerie wrote back on October 7th:

> What are we doing? *He* is finishing *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan*; at present he reads us nothing; but he wakes up at five o'clock in the morning to write. The immense success of the *Contemplations* has put him in great form; you probably know that Hetzel just bought 5 thousand more copies of it from him. That translates into balconies and fountains in the new house.[77]

Over six months later, in a March 17th, 1857 letter, Hetzel, to whom Hugo was now bound by contract, further postponed the possibility of publishing *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan*. He suggested that the success of *Les Contemplations* had aroused some envy, and that more pure poetry would invite a critical response:

> Your volumes of *Dieu* and *Satan* for example would find lain in ambush all the enemies that *Contemplations* had put to rout.
>
> Remembering what you told me in Guernsey, I imagine that you have in portfolio something to dismay all those who await you with articles already written for your announced works *Dieu* and *Satan*, I wish to speak of the *Petites Épopées*. If you are ready with these two volumes or one of the two, for which *le Revenant* is a marvellous advertisement, I am sure of a second triumph.[78]

September 11th of that year Hugo and Hetzel signed a contract to publish *Petites Épopées*. As Hugo continued to write, influenced by his current mystical and philosophical inspiration, he began to see the potential for this new work being the human part of a poetic system comprised of *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan*, a development of which Hetzel was wary. In the summer of 1858, a serious illness tempered Hugo's zeal, poems more to Hetzel's liking were written, and one year later, after Hugo had changed the title to La Légende des siècles (The Legend of the Centuries), subtitled *Petites Épopées*, the work was published. Hugo still maintained his plan to add *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan* in a future edition, in order to comprise a trilogy, and, as we recall from above, announced the immanent appearance of one or both of these poems in the preface to that first 1859 edition, and again in an 1869 draft of a preface for the next edition. Yet despite these announcements, despite speaking of *Dieu* in a May 21st, 1869 letter to the publisher Lacroix,[79] and once again advertising them both, this time on the back cover of volume I of the 1869 inaugural edition of *L'Homme qui rit*, they were never published. At Guernsey Hugo had moved on to other poems, plays and novels, such as the continued writing of *Les Misérables*, and upon returning from exile in 1870, had set aside his writing to again engage in urgent political matters. In 1967 René Journet and Guy Robert wrote a paper giving an account of Hugo's last times spent with this work:

> ...[B]efore leaving for France in August of 1870, Hugo stores the poem *Dieu* in two trunks which he deposits in a Guernsey bank [the Old Bank—Trans.] on the 13th. He will only reopen these trunks in April of 1875, during a brief stay in Guernsey. During that interval, he had not thought about publishing *Dieu*, and subsequently he will hardly think of it again. One notices here and there a slight trace of interest shown in this work: in 1876, for example, the poem *À l'Homme* carries the heading: "For the poem *Dieu*"; but this reference was crossed out, and the poem added, in 1877, to the Second Series of *La Légende*.[80]

This paper, published by L'Association internationale des études françaises, was accompanied by a transcription of a subsequent discussion by Hugo scholars, presided over by the Association head, Maurice Piron, who pointed out that the publisher Lacroix had wanted novels, Hetzel had said outright that *Dieu* was not a good commercial venture, and the public, after much poetry, would certainly have preferred a novel. Recognizing this, but still wishing to continue in this apocalyptic vein, Hugo had resorted to publishing a lesser poem, *Le Revenant* (The Ghost), "...a cheap, vulgar kind of Apocalypse" (...de l'Apocalypse à bon marché, vulgarisée).[81] As time went by, Hugo, more withdrawn and bereaved due to the loss of most of his family, admitted that he had too many projects, and too little time.[82] Piron then concluded:

> Later, he will pursue the work on one of the parts of his poem *Dieu*, but numerous projects will intervene, and it is true to say that his creative power will be less and less worthy of the great poem *Dieu*.[83]

*

Hugo did wish that all his work be eventually published, including the smallest fragments, and had intended to leave his manuscripts, for that purpose, to his sons. On Sept. 23rd, 1875, both sons having died, he wrote a new Literary Testament, in which he named Paul Meurice, Auguste Vacquerie, and Ernest Lefèvre, Vacquerie's nephew, his literary executors, charging them with the task of publishing everything in his unpublished manuscripts. He subsequently contracted with Hetzel to publish his complete works, including the unpublished work, with notes and variants. From 1880 to 1889 forty-eight volumes[84] of the previously published work were released under the supervision, at Hugo's request, of Meurice, who was effectively assuming his literary executor's duties as absolute textual authority. When Hugo died unexpectedly in 1885, Meurice, perhaps joined by Auguste Vacquerie, began work on the posthumous work. Vacquerie's nephew, Ernest Lefèvre, who died in 1889, seems never to have been involved in the project.[85] From 1886 to 1892, nine of these volumes appeared, including *La Fin de Satan,* in 1886, and *Dieu,* in 1891, and this entire fifty-seven volume edition published by Hetzel-Quantin (HQ) became known as the "ne varietur" (definitive) edition.

Auguste Vacquerie died in 1895. By the turn of the century, Meurice began another edition of Hugo's complete works, this time from the presses of what had been the official Royal printing house and later became that of the French government, the Imprimerie nationale (IN). This publishing project was to continue from 1904 through 1952, first under the auspices of the publisher Ollendorff and from 1933 on, Ollendorff-Albin Michel. Although later supplanted as a scholarly work by future editions, it still gives the best account of the reception of many Hugo works. On December 11, 1905, after publishing *Notre-Dame de Paris*, *Les Contemplations*, and an edition of plays, Paul Meurice died, just short of his 88th birthday, while working at his desk. Meurice's younger friend and protégé, writer Gustave Simon, became Hugo's literary executor and keeper of the manuscripts. He would continue publishing this edition through 1914 and then take it up again in 1924, until his death in 1928.[86] Mme. Cécile Daubray, who had worked with Meurice and Simon for many years, would undertake the completion of this work from 1933 through 1952, applying the same dedication as her two predecessors, and according to scholars, publish volumes that are still considered philologically sound today, due to her "…more scrupulous return to the letter of the manuscripts." (…un retour plus scrupuleux à la lettre des manuscrits…)[87]

Six months after Meurice's death, Simon wrote a long tribute to him in *La Revue de Paris*, portraying his mentor's feelings regarding this work:

> And he felt joy reading and rereading these manuscripts that he would draw from a Breton cupboard beside his bed. They were dear treasures unknown to the public and it was a pleasure thinking of the endless surprises that he was preparing for the readers....[88]
>
> —I especially want to produce the more difficult volumes and those of which I have the most personal memories, but I will not finish the job. Just think, forty or forty-one volumes! *Le Rhin* will appear; after that there will be *La Fin de Satan* and *Dieu*...I have found some unpublished fragments of *Dieu*, of such great beauty.[89]

In 1911, following publication of several volumes beginning with the 1906 *Le Rhin*, Simon published *POÉSIE XI, La Fin de Satan. Dieu.,* for the first time uniting both poems in a single volume. This IN edition was to be a true *édition critique* of this work, and we begin to get the first inkling of the state in which the MS was left. Simon spoke of finding a dossier containing:

> "...nearly a thousand fragments of all sizes, some rare full pages, others on the back of an envelope, a newspaper wrapper, a summons, a circular, or a handbill; when letters addressed to his wife or children came into his hands, he used the blank spaces; some verses are placed in an area a mere centimeter high. This ocean of verse bore the title: Dieu. Rather than publishing this dossier as *Reliquat* [Remainders, remnants, left-over verses, originally either Meurice's or Hugo's term—Trans.]... we have extracted passages suitable to the text published in 1891, and inserted them throughout the volume...."[90]

We gain insight into the earlier approach of Meurice and perhaps Vacquerie when Simon explains that in 1891 it was thought

> ...preferable, in the interest of the work, to present it as much as possible as a finished work; rhymes had to be matched, whole passages deleted. Wouldn't lines of dots in the middle of an interesting passage distract and confuse the readers of the original edition?
>
> In this edition, which has a quite definitive, documentary character, and which is addressed to students and researchers, we believe we have restored in full all of Victor Hugo's verses.

> …[T]oday it is considerably longer and, in a way, complete; it was not bound yet when it came into our hands, we added entire pages bearing the word: DIEU, or the title of one of the sections….[91]

Because Victor Hugo's MSS remained exclusively with Simon's successor, Mme. Daubray, no independent scholarship on *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan* had been possible until the late 1940's when others were finally allowed access to them.[92] As a result, the next critical edition of the two poems was not published until 1950, when the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (BP) edition was released, edited by Jacques Truchet, the first editor to be openly acknowledged as being responsible for a publication of this work. The volume was entitled *La Légende des siècles. La Fin de Satan. Dieu.*, and was the first publication of the trilogy as Hugo conceived it.

Each important edition of this work appeared to improve upon its predecessor in terms of accuracy of scholarship. More verses were added from the MS, finer distinctions were made dealing with fragments or variants, and attempts were made to define some of Hugo's obscure terms, discussed above, each editor rationalizing what he considered these advances in scholarship. Starting in 1960, due to this new access to the MS, Hugo scholars René Journet and Guy Robert began publishing their aforementioned editions, *Dieu (L'océan d'en haut),* 1960, *Dieu (Le Seuil du gouffre),* 1961, and *Dieu (fragments),* 1969, considered veritable variorum editions of this work.[93] There would be a supplementary volume, *Boîte aux lettres*, published in 1965, as there would later be twenty-seven pages of *Dieu* rough drafts published in their 1979 *Contribution aux études sur Victor Hugo: vol. 1*, as well as 367 pages of *Dieu* fragments presented by Journet and Hugo scholar Evelyn Blewer in the 1990 book *Chantiers*. As before, I refer to these editions as the JR.

Dieu next appeared in the earlier discussed 1968–69 Club français du livre edition, *Œuvres complètes*: Édition chronologique, volumes IX and X, edited by Jean Massin (the CF), followed, in 1972, by a version published in *Poésie*, tome 3 (Éditions du Seuil), edited by Bernard Leuilliot (the ES), and in 1986, a Robert Laffont edition, *Œuvres Complètes:* Poésie IV, edited by Jacques Seebacher and Guy Rosa (the RL). The ES was greatly influenced by the scholarship of the JR, as evidenced by its notes and commentary, and by the Journet and Robert paper, "Pourquoi Victor Hugo n'a-t-il pas publié son poème 'Dieu'?." The editor, Leuilliot, also contributed extensively to the CF and the RL. As noted above, a close scrutiny reveals that the CF and the RL, considered, to this day, the most scholarly and accurate editions of Hugo's work, appear to have duplicated the JR's painstakingly transcribed text of *Dieu*, to the letter (and the RL that of the JR's *La Fin de Satan*, as well), thus paying the highest form of tribute to the JR, and reiterating the praise that the editors of these two editions had lavished on Journet and Robert elsewhere in prefaces and scholarly journals.

Guided by the portfolio and piece numbers stamped on each MS folio or fragment by Hugo's notary,[94] Journet and Robert were able to establish the state of the MS at the time of his death, thus revealing how the HQ and IN had rearranged the order of folios prior to the IN's pagination[95] and binding of it. They discovered the thirteen 'Voices' in Hugo's original conception, and pointed out the seemingly contrived nature of the poem "Le Jour," placed as epilogue to *Dieu* by the three previous editions and reluctantly but with strong reservations by the JR, itself. They returned the forty-two verse section, verses 375–416 of our text, beginning with "O méditations! oh! comme l'esprit souffre," not included in the main text of the three earlier editions, to where Hugo indicated he wished them placed, in a left-hand marginal note on folio 22r. Moved by the IN and placed as folios 230r and 231r, their piece numbers 127 and 128 reveal that they were originally placed by Hugo between folio 21r (piece 126) and folio 22r (piece 129).

As brought to our attention by the Hugo scholars and translators E.H. and A.M. Blackmore, Journet and Robert discovered through inspection of the piece numbers that Hugo had written two versions of "L'Esprit humain," one introducing the 'Voices,' and another ending in an early death of the protagonist, precluding an encounter with the 'Voices.' The HQ had torn in two the first bifolio of the version introducing the 'Voices,' set aside the first folio, the introductory verses of that version, and added the rest to the second version, thereby utilizing the verses of both versions, and enabling them to successfully incorporate the 'Voice' section. Where this fusion of the two versions caused inconsistancies (due to Hugo's indecision as to what direction to take the text), as well as an overlapping of text, the HQ or both the HQ and the IN used variant verses to remedy those inconsistancies, the creation of "Le Jour" perhaps being one example, and, prompted by another of Hugo's marginal notes, the verses "After the Voices" perhaps being another. One assumes this was all done in the spirit of trying to create a "finished work."

Of the fifteen hundred and seven fragments identified as belonging to *Dieu*, only the approximately twelve hundred and fifty in the MS at the Bibliothèque nationale de France were included in the three volumes of the JR's 1969 *Dieu (fragments)*, and were divided into three sections: those from portfolio 106, all connected to *Dieu*, those not found in portfolio 106, but clearly belonging there by virtue of their contents, and those that in some way seemed a product of the same inspiration that produced *Dieu*.[96]

In the 1990 *Chantiers*, Journet reveals in more detail the general state of Hugo's MS, giving us a final look at the mass of papers that Hugo had saved for posterity, and the difficulties facing those taking on the task of publishing them. After the IN had created their version of *Dieu*, with the accompanying fragments, they then faced, according to Journet:

> …an imposing residue that they organized as methodically as possible: hence the thirty-five manuscript volumes entitled *Océan* or *Tas de pierres*: smaller and smaller fragments classified by genre or by subject. The final volumes of the series…are truly a catch-all: scraps barely legible, notes of all kinds, sometimes practical, or intimate….The material was overflowing….Subsequent publications have pecked through what was left, without exhausting it….[97]
>
> …By examining the contents of certain portfolios in Guy Robert's concordance notebooks, or in the Extract of the Inventory made by Jacques Seebacher [see note 94—Trans.], we have the impression of a kind of shambles, the notary, or one of his clerks, extracted, sometimes at random, an armful of papers….[f]ragments of verse….[f]ragments of prose for the greater part without visible link…. [m]anuscripts of all kinds without visible link….[98]

After spending much time with the MS and the published editions of *Dieu*, one could argue that the poem *Dieu*, as we know it, is a fiction, a product of Hugo's literary executors, and a fiction maintained by future editors, albeit a fiction not only encouraged by Hugo, but mandated by him. One could maintain that, given the ocean of unused fragments, there are as many potential *Dieu*'s as there are potential editors, or conclude, as did Jean Gaudon, that a certain poem written by Victor Hugo entitled *Dieu* may not, in fact, exist at all.[99] However, until someone accepts the task of putting himself in Hugo's shoes, and studying all the related texts for possible incorporation into the current text, we can be but grateful to the literary executors and eminent scholars who have devoted much of their professional lives to heroically transforming these incomplete works into the masterworks they are today.[100]

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WHEN I STARTED THIS project in 1998, I could find neither poem translated into English, and so decided to begin the task myself. While in the process some years later, I discovered that in the period 2000–02, new translations of Hugo's poetry had been published by E.H. and A.M. Blackmore, Brooks Haxton, and Steven Monte, celebrating the bicentenary of Hugo's birth in 1802. These translations included excerpts from *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan*. I hope that my contribution can begin to approach the high standard they have set.

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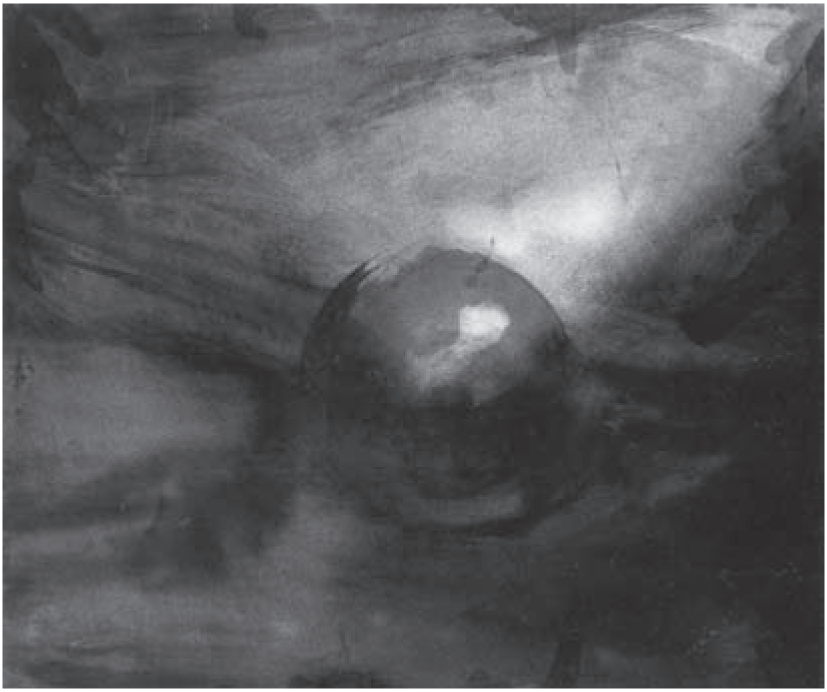
—*R.G. Skinner*



Victor Hugo, *Planète* (Planet), ca. 1854, Collection Krugier-Poniatowski *from* GOD

from DIEU

Que ce poème au vol de feu
Effleure le siècle où nous sommes,
Qu'il passe vite et brille peu,
Et qu'a travers l'oubli des hommes,
Sombre, il s'en retourne vers Dieu.

Le Seuil du gouffre

L'ESPRIT HUMAIN

…
Et je voyais au loin sur ma tête un point noir.

Comme on voit une mouche au plafond se mouvoir,
Ce point allait, venait; et l'ombre était sublime.

Et l'homme, quand il pense, étant ailé, l'abîme
M'attirant dans sa nuit toujours de plus en plus,
Comme une algue qu'entraîne un ténébreux reflux,
Vers ce point noir, planant dans la profondeur blême,
Je me sentais déjà m'envoler de moi-même