

# Les Remarquables

## VICTOR HUGO

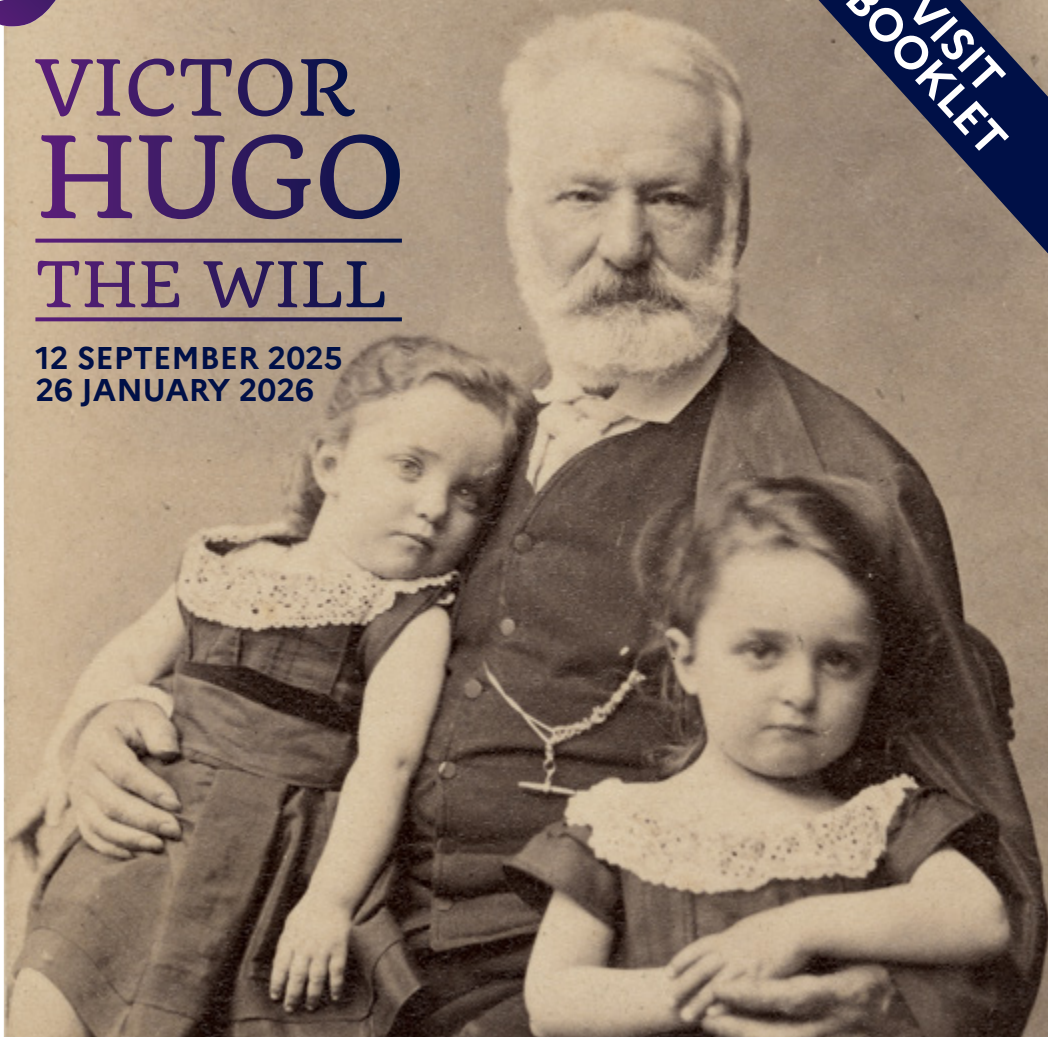
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### THE WILL

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12 SEPTEMBER 2025  
26 JANUARY 2026

VISIT  
BOOKLET



ARCHIVES NATIONALES

60 rue des Francs-Bourgeois  
75003 Paris



[www.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr](http://www.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr)



# Les Remarquables



Since 2023, the *Remarquables* cycle has unveiled iconic documents held at the National Archives to the public. It will resume in autumn 2025 with an exhibition presenting the will of one of the most famous figures in French history. Victor Hugo, often referred to as *l'Homme siècle* ('Century Man'), definitively shaped his era, the 19th century, through his political and artistic activism. A poet, playwright, novelist and draughtsman, he was a committed and consummate artist. A commitment which resulted in him spending nineteen years in exile.

Following his death, his will was lodged with Maître Cotellet, a notary in Paris. In his unmistakeable style, Hugo put his final wishes down on paper, organising both his family legacy and his literary posterity with utmost precision. The intimate exhibition showcases the testamentary provisions of Hugo the people's champion, Hugo the writer, but also Hugo the family man. It allows visitors to view the various versions of the will, alongside the records issued by Hugo's heirs or will executors.

I would like to extend a big thank-you to the commissioners of this *Remarquable* exhibition, Pauline Antonini and Jérôme Séjourné, and wish everyone a wonderful visit.

**Marie-Françoise Limon-Bonnet**  
*Director of the National Archives*

# INTRODUCTION

**B**etween 1864 and 1881, Victor Hugo drew up five wills whose provisions are a reflection of different concerns. Twenty years before his death, as a family man, his primary concern was about what he would leave his children. In 1875, with his only remaining heirs being his daughter Adèle and his two grandchildren, Georges and Jeanne, he made arrangements for his entire family estate.

A specific will from that same year reveals his focus on organising his literary legacy, bequeathing his manuscripts to the Bibliothèque nationale and publishing his posthumous works.

These testamentary provisions are evidenced in the famed codicil of 31 August 1881, a lyrical document that has become the best known and most representative of the poet Hugo's final wishes. In a single page, it covers his instructions for his funeral, his literary oeuvre and his family.

The National Archives house a large number of documents sourced from his will executors which allow us to see how his final wishes were carried out over the course of several decades.



The hearse  
(Rue Soufflot),  
anonymous  
photograph,  
1 June 1885

Maison de Victor Hugo -  
Hauteville House, 2695

CC0 Paris musées /  
Maisons de Victor Hugo  
Paris-Guernesey

# THE HEARSE OF THE POOR

Victor Hugo took care to leave precise instructions regarding his funeral arrangements. In two separate documents – a brief undated will and the 1881 codicil\* –, he ‘refuses the funeral orations of any church’ and wishes to be ‘carried to the cemetery in the hearse of the poor.’

The original plan was for him to be buried in the family vault at the Père Lachaise cemetery. But the government had begun thinking about his funeral arrangements well before the announcement of his death, which occurred on Friday 22 May 1885.

The committee for Victor Hugo’s funeral met for the first time the very next day, on 23 May. The following day, the Chambre des députés (members of Parliament) approved arrangements for a state funeral, with 415 of 418 members of Parliament voting in favour.

And a week later, this funeral would end up being a major event for the Third Republic, a true state celebration of the ‘Century Man’, all while still respecting Victor Hugo’s wishes regarding the hearse and his refusal to have a religious ceremony.

2 juin 1875

propos amicaux

31

Je donne cinquante mille francs aux  
pauvres de Paris.

Je veux être porté en civière dans leur  
cobillard.

Je refuse l'raison de toutes les églises;  
je demande une prière à toutes les âmes.

Je crois en Dieu.

Victor Hugo

Signé par moi Président du Tribunal  
de Première instance de la Seine, Paris  
le Deux Juin mil huit cent quatre  
vingt cinq. /

Julien

50  
57.50  
44.38  
71.88  
11.80  
83.68

Enregistré à Paris 10<sup>e</sup> Bureau  
le 24 juin 1875 n<sup>o</sup> 4487  
Reçu 20 francs 25 c. pour  
Pauvres de Paris, 10<sup>e</sup> Bureau  
Paris 10<sup>e</sup> Bureau, 10<sup>e</sup> Bureau  
Paris 10<sup>e</sup> Bureau, 10<sup>e</sup> Bureau  
Paris 10<sup>e</sup> Bureau, 10<sup>e</sup> Bureau

Hug



The funeral committee decided to use the 'simple hearse used for the poor of the 16th arrondissement, drawn by two horses'. On the other hand, the rest of the carriages in the procession were to be magnificently decorated, creating a contrast that would serve as the 'grandest of finales'. An imperative part of the committee's work was to ensure that the funeral had a triumphal character.

The body was solemnly laid in state at the Arc de Triomphe on Sunday 31 May before arriving at the Panthéon on Monday 1 June along a route specially designed to steer clear of working-class districts and potential rioting.

For this same reason, the day was not declared a public holiday, even though schools, theatres and shops were closed. A crowd of roughly over one million people surged along the route to pay one final tribute to the poet.

A few days after passing the law on state funerals arrangements, the government enacted a decree deconsecrating the Panthéon, then known as the Church of Sainte-Geneviève, so as to ensure that Victor Hugo's remains could be interred there. The monument, which had been a consecrated building up until only a few days prior to the funeral, went back to being a final resting place for prominent figures, as previously intended.



Victor Hugo's funeral, 31 May and 1 June 1885, oil paint on canvas, June 1885

Maison de Victor Hugo - Hauteville House, 756

CC0 Paris musées/Maisons de Victor Hugo Paris-Guernesey

# POSTHUMOUS WORKS

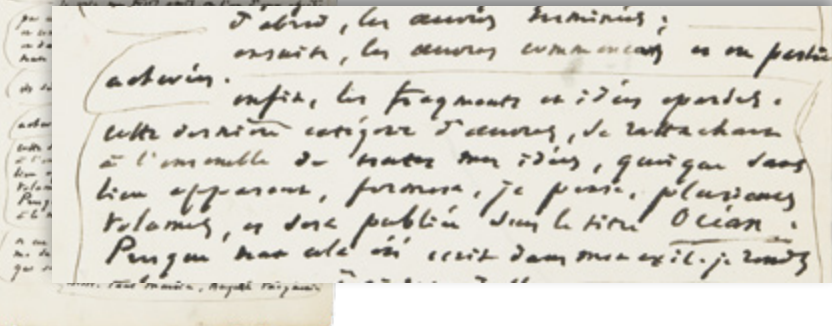
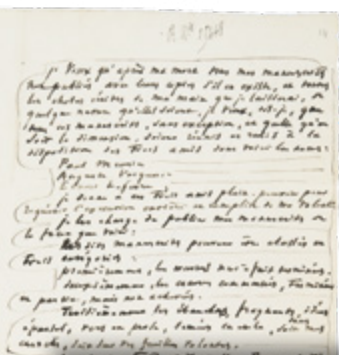
## The literary will

Victor Hugo was anxious to make arrangements for his literary legacy. He meticulously planned the fate of his œuvre/writings after his death in two wills drawn up in 1875 and in the codicil of 1881. The three documents addressed the interests of his family as royalty beneficiaries, and the important task of selecting and publishing unreleased works.

The latter was entrusted to his three publishers and friends, Paul Meurice, Auguste Vacquerie and Ernest Lefèvre.

He divided his œuvre into three categories: completed manuscripts, unfinished manuscripts, and fragments and first drafts. His only instruction was to publish the 'scattered ideas' under the title of *Océan* ('Ocean'). Hugo's island exile heavily influenced his literary and artistic works: 'I return to the sea what it has given me.'

The will also lays out practical and financial arrangements for publishing the posthumous texts – a task to which one hundred thousand francs were allotted. In addition, Victor Hugo stipulates percentages of profit to be allocated to his will executors for each type of œuvre, e.g. 50% for publishing the fragments and scattered ideas.



## Illustrated Victor Hugo

In 1875, the same year as his literary will, Victor Hugo, together with Paul Meurice, Auguste Vacquerie and Ernest Lefèvre, signed an exclusivity agreement on the publication of popular illustrated editions, including the posthumous works. One of Victor Hugo's main illustrated collections, known as the Hugues edition, was thus published from 1876 to 1897. The popular editions were published in the form of low-cost weekly deliveries, with a view to gaining a loyal readership.

The importance of illustration in 19th-century literature is evident in the publishing contracts signed after Victor Hugo's death.

In 1898, Paul Meurice assigned the rights to the company Jules Rouff et Cie, resulting in Adèle Hugo retaining intellectual property rights to her father's œuvre, as well as ownership of etchings and drawings in the illustrated edition. This material was then sent to publishing house Ollendorf in 1902, in accordance with the rights-assignment contract signed by Paul Meurice in his capacity as co-owner of the œuvres of Victor Hugo and guardian of Adèle Hugo.

## The manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale

Victor Hugo left instructions for preserving his manuscripts after his death. While his 1875 will made a distinction between published works and unpublished texts, his codicil of 1881 stipulated that all his manuscripts and drawings be bequeathed to the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris.



Poster by Jules Chéret advertising *Les Misérables*, published by Jules Rouff, 1886

BnF, ENT DN-1 (CHÉRET, Jules /8)-FT 6

© Gallica / BnF

*M. Manuscrits publiés  
rapportés par M. Meurice qui en était dépositaire*

*Bug Jargal*

*Cote quatre vingt-treize*

*La pièce unique de cette cote est le manuscrit  
du roman intitulé Bug Jargal, lequel se compose  
de quatre vingt quatre feuillets tous remplis à l'exception  
du verso du feuillet numéro 19 qui est en blanc. Ces feuillets  
sont compris en un volume relié recouvert d'une enveloppe  
de parchemin.*

*Laquelle pièce ainsi analysée a été cotée et  
paraphée par M<sup>e</sup> Gaston puis par M<sup>e</sup> Meurice  
sous la présente cote quatre vingt-treize.*

*Cote quatre vingt-treize*

*Notre Dame de Paris*

*Cote quatre vingt-treize*

*Pièce unique*

*La pièce unique de cette cote est le manuscrit  
du roman intitulé « Notre Dame de Paris » lequel  
se compose de deux cent soixante onze feuillets écrits  
de la main de Victor Hugo. Ces feuillets sont  
reunis en un volume cartonné et recouvert d'une  
enveloppe de parchemin.*

*Ces feuillets ont été cotés et paraphés par  
premier et dernier par M<sup>e</sup> Gaston sous sa  
leur analyse hindra lui de la présente  
Cote quatre vingt-treize.*

Victor Hugo's post-mortem inventory: Description of manuscripts of Bug-Jargal  
and Notre-Dame de Paris (The Hunchback of Notre-Dame), 3 March 1886

National Archives, MC/RSJ/587

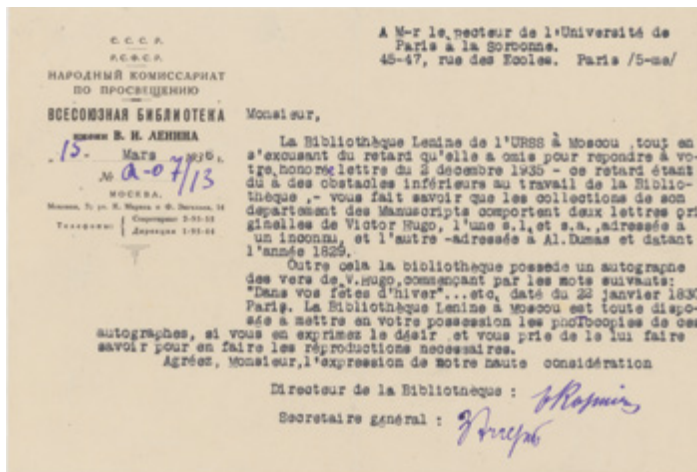
Upon Hugo's death, the manuscripts held at the home on Avenue Victor Hugo were sealed and inventoried by Maître Gâtine, a notary in Paris. The Bibliothèque nationale's management were also involved in the inventory process, making sure the bequests were duly made.

The will executors moved slowly, holding onto the manuscripts for some time. They were finally sent to the Bibliothèque nationale in 1889. However, given their vast number, many of the manuscripts were kept within the family or by Juliette Drouet's heirs. Over the years, they have scattered far and wide, and indeed even been stolen and sold to French or foreign booksellers or collectors.

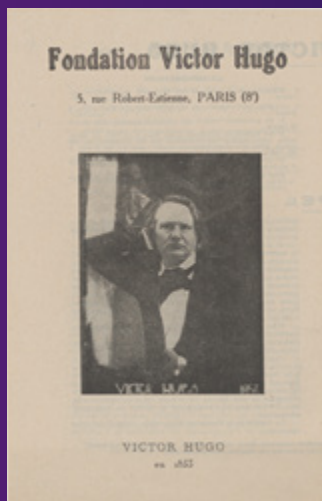
Cécile Daubray, a colleague of Paul Meurice, was put in charge of classifying the manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale. She oversaw the publication of the Imprimerie Nationale edition by publishers Ollendorf and Albin Michel, and spent two decades collating Victor Hugo's letters, before setting about creating a scholarly edition of his correspondence.

This required considerable research in private collections and museums and libraries both in France and abroad, with a view to piecing together not only the poet's epistolary life, but also a part of 19th-century literary, artistic and political history. The final volumes of this correspondence were published in 1952.

Mail from the  
director of  
Moscow's Lenin  
State Library  
regarding the  
Victor Hugo  
manuscripts  
housed there, 15  
March 1936  
National Archives,  
AJ/16/7026



# The Victor Hugo Foundation



The Victor Hugo Foundation's call  
for registrations for the Victor  
Hugo Chair [1926]  
National Archives, AJ/16/7024

Created in 1925 on the initiative of Gustave Simon, one of Hugo's final will executors, the foundation's aim was to promote the works of Victor Hugo. After establishing a Victor Hugo Chair at the Sorbonne, the foundation ambitiously sought to become a vehicle for sharing Hugo's œuvre around the world.

Its objective was to spread the great man's poetry and prose far and wide via all possible means: creating prizes or scholarships, theatre productions, conferences, publications on Hugo's life or works, etc. In doing so, it thus supported efforts to publish unreleased œuvres, particularly the Imprimerie Nationale edition initiated by Paul Meurice and continued by Gustave Simon and Cécile Daubray.

He was to France what Dante was to Italy, Goethe to Germany, Shakespeare to England and Cervantes to Spain.

Excerpt from the  
call for registrations  
for the Victor Hugo  
Chair

# HUGO'S PRIVATE, FAMILY LIFE



Victor Hugo with his family in Bad Ragaz, Switzerland [Victor Hugo in the middle, his granddaughter Jeanne on the left, his grandson Georges behind him, and Alice Lockroy], photograph by Fischer Frères, summer 1884

Maison de Victor Hugo - Hauteville House, 2645  
CC0 Paris musées/Maisons de Victor Hugo Paris-Guernesey

page promisee /  
149 - 1882

R Mte 1882



Ceci est mon testament.

Je dois laisser pour seuls héritiers 1<sup>re</sup> ma fille Et Dele Hugo, actuellement dans une maison de santé à cause de son état mental. 2<sup>e</sup> mes deux petits enfants Georges et Jeanne, issus du mariage de mon fils Charles, aujourd'hui décédé.

I. Comme ma fortune se compose presque en totalité en dehors de mes œuvres littéraires, de valeurs mobilières étrangères et comme il importe, dans l'intérêt de mes enfants, d'assurer l'emploi régulier de ces valeurs avant qu'ils soient soumis à l'administration de la tutelle de mes petits enfants ou à l'administration des biens de ma fille, je dispose, à titre de mesure préalable, que la totalité de mes valeurs mobilières étrangères, à l'exception des rentes anglaises, sera convertie dans l'année de l'ouverture de ma succession en rentes françaises ou actions de la Banque de France conformément aux emplois admis en matière de biens de mineurs. A cet effet, je voue que mes exécuteurs testamentaires, à qui je confère la saisine de tous mes biens, procèdent pendant le temps de leur saisine aux opérations de vente et de rachat nécessaires pour réaliser les emplois que je prescris.

II. Par ces présentes, je lègue à mes deux petits enfants Georges et Jeanne, issus du mariage de mon fils Charles, toute la quotité disponible des biens et valeurs qui composeront ma succession au jour de mon décès, conformément à l'article 913 du Code civil.

J'entends et je dispose que ce legs de la quotité disponible porte à la fois, et sur les valeurs acquises, immeubles, meubles et valeurs mobilières de toute nature.

V. H.

PROCEDE DE LA  
XXXXX  
RS/586  
V. H. n° 1

1882

## Bequeathing of assets

Victor Hugo confirmed the inheritance for his direct line of descent in three of his wills. In 1864, his first will reiterated the clauses of the Civil Code and the notion of an estate shared equally among his heirs. But Léopoldine's death in 1843 deeply distressed him, and he included a clause covering a scenario in which his direct descendants, excluding any indirect relatives, predeceased him.

The loss of his sons Charles and François-Victor in 1871 and 1873 resulted in his sole heirs being his daughter Adèle and his grandchildren Georges and Jeanne, Charles' children. In 1875, he drew up a very detailed will containing arrangements for his assets to be shared among his three heirs.

The poet's estate was quite substantial, comprising foreign annuity bonds, real estate and royalties. And most of it was bequeathed to his grandchildren, due to Adèle's ill health. The will stipulated that the bequests also include his two homes in Guernsey. (Hauteville House and Hauteville II, Juliette Drouet's house).

## In memory of Léopoldine

In 1843, Léopoldine drowned in the Seine with her husband, Charles Vacquerie, after having been married for only six months. Victor Hugo, who was travelling at the time, learned of the tragedy in the newspapers. He wasted no time in writing a brief letter to his wife, expressing his profound sorrow. The Hugos' lives would never be the same again.



*Léopoldine reading*, a drawing by Madame Hugo in April 1837, framed by a fragment of dress fabric and two phrases handwritten by Victor Hugo, after 1843

Maison de Victor Hugo - Hauteville House, 597 ; CC0 Paris musées/Maisons de Victor Hugo Paris-Guernsey  
This document, which was stolen and subsequently included in the fake *Les Contemplations* ('The Contemplations') collection, is now housed at the Musée Victor Hugo.

Léopoldine's personal belongings and correspondence were kept safely by her mother in a small box known as 'the reliquary'. Following Victor Hugo's death, these family memories were passed into the safekeeping of Alice Lockroy, mother of Georges and Jeanne Hugo.

During the 1920s, the items were stolen from the Hugo family. They were put up for sale and described in a bookseller's catalogue as 'handwritten texts and memories of Léopoldine'. They included her childhood letters, an excerpt from her birth certificate, the famous letter written by Victor Hugo to Madame Hugo the day he learned of his daughter's death, and even a piece of red fabric with a handwritten annotation by Victor Hugo reading 'Young Didine's dress, 1834'.

These family archives were included in a compendium of *Les Contemplations* proofs, setting her marriage announcement next to the poem composed by Victor Hugo for the religious ceremony.

In preparation for legal proceedings, the family proved that the documents had been stolen from Madame Lockroy by one of her close relations, and that this copy of *Les Contemplations* was fake. To add to the scandal, this volume turned out to have been supplemented with letters from Juliette Drouet and an etching by artist Georges Hugo, Victor's grandson.

In a bid to avoid these types of publications, which were more focused on the poet's private life than his literary œuvre, the Hugo family appointed themselves guarantors of the poet's final wishes and family memories.

## Adèle Hugo, the 'forbidden' heiress

Adèle Hugo was the only one of Victor Hugo's children to survive him. During exile on Jersey, she fell in love with a British lieutenant. Hoping to marry him, she ran away from her family in Guernsey in June 1863 and spent several years following him on his successive postings in Halifax and Barbados. Eventually, her mental health declined. She was brought back to her father in 1872 and sectioned for the rest of her life. As a result of her mental illness, Adèle was unable to exercise her rights and was placed under guardianship.

Her successive guardians were forced to have any decision relating to her inheritance approved by the family council. As heiress and owner of her father's œuvre, Adèle Hugo's interests needed to be protected.

In 1896, following the death of her guardian Léon Trébuchet, she was placed under the guardianship of Paul Meurice, who was accountable for all his decisions relating to Victor Hugo's œuvre.

The family council thus confirmed an increase in Adèle's annual expenses to 50,000 francs as a result of the increased earnings from Victor Hugo's œuvre. Paul Meurice also secured approval for the assignment of publishing rights, such as the sale of the popular illustrated editions to Rouff et Cie in 1898.

The decisions made by Adèle Hugo's family council are interesting on many levels; not only do they enable us to follow the lives of the other family members – such as Jeanne's remarriage to Jean-Baptiste Charcot, the son of the famous physician, in 1896 –, but they also reveal the developments in her father's literary legacy.



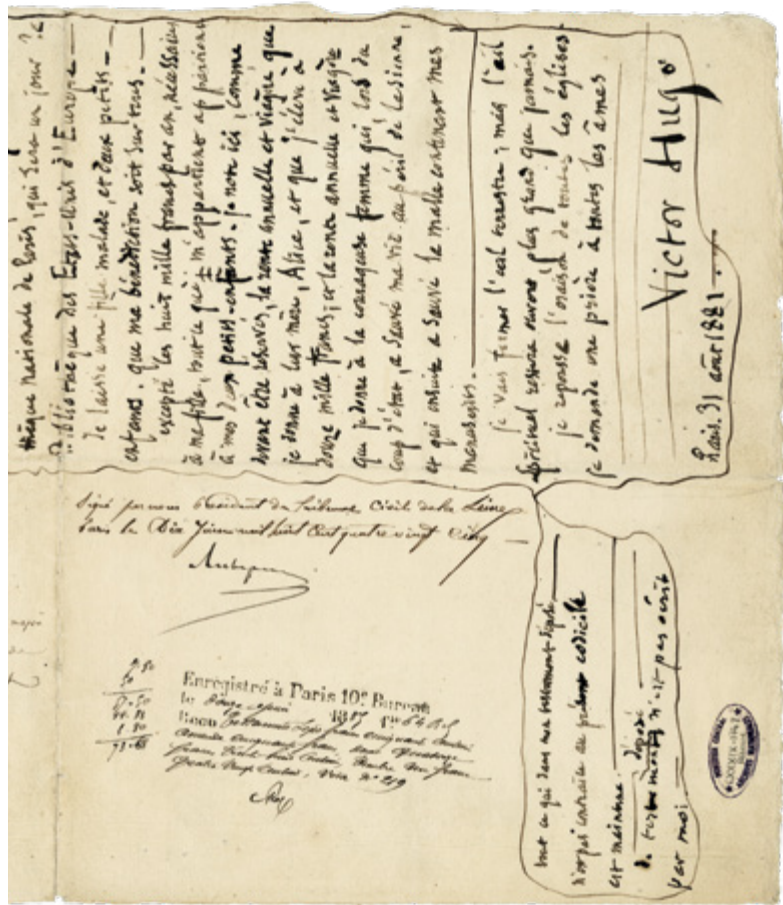
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Mademoiselle Adèle  
Hugo in Guernsey,  
photograph by  
Edmond Bacot,  
summer 1862

Maison de Victor Hugo -  
Hauteville House, 3824

CC0 Paris musées /  
Maisons de Victor Hugo  
Paris-Guernesey





[in the margin:]  
Anything set forth in my will that  
does not contradict this codicil  
shall be retained.  
The will lodged has not been written  
by me.

# Glossary



Envelope from Victor Hugo's first will, 5 May 1864  
National Archives, MC/RS//586

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**AUTHENTICATED WILL:** A will drawn up by a notary, as dictated by its author.

**HOLOGRAPHIC WILL:** a will that is entirely in the handwriting of the testator.

**MYSTIC WILL:** A testament that has been closed, stamped and sealed. Mystic wills are not necessarily handwritten.

**CODICIL:** A document meeting the same formal requirements as the will it supplements or modifies.

# Exhibition

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Avenir APEI,  
ESAT La Roseraie  
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## LSF TRANSLATION

Urapeda Sud

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