



Maison

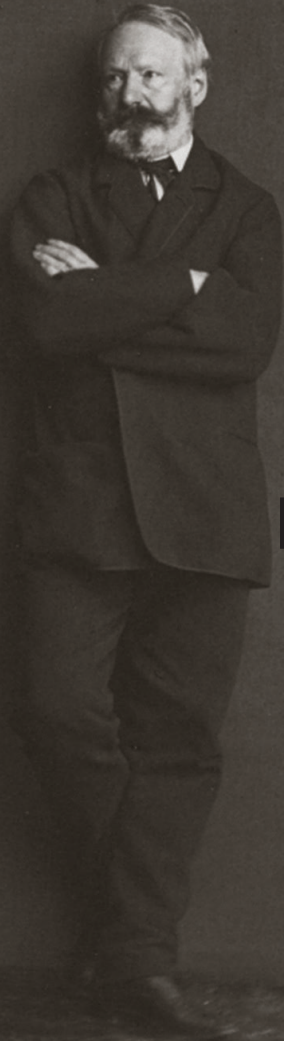
Victor Hugo



THE BIRTHPLACE



Ville de
Besançon



VICTOR HUGO

1802 - 1885

THOSE WHO

ARE THOSE

WHO F

Victor Hugo
G. Basset 1864



« Je suis une pierre de la route où marche l'humanité. »

"I am a stone on the road trodden by humanity."

A place open to the contemporary world



THE COMMITTED MAN



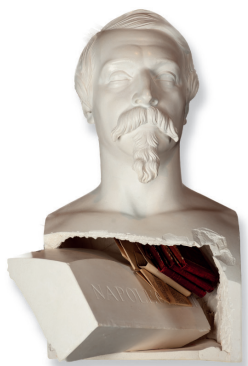
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IGHT!

On 26 February 1802, a house at 140 Grande-Rue, Besançon saw the birth of a world renowned writer, Victor Hugo.

Unlike other houses in which he lived, Victor Hugo's birthplace is neither a museum nor a memorial. In a contemporary setting with an emphasis on multimedia, the causes that this committed man fought for are presented in spaces that explore different topics.

The ground floor displays the tributes paid to him by the people of Besançon and the links he had with the town of his birth. On the first floor, a permanent exhibition of four themed spaces is entirely devoted to the struggles of this writer who was committed to freedom of expression, human dignity, the rights of children and the freedom of peoples.



« Quand la liberté rentrera,
je rentrerai. »

*"When freedom returns,
I will return."*

For freedom



For the freedom of expression

Using topical texts, videos and images, the contemporary part of these four spaces has been given over to partners whose recognised local, national or international commitments represent a continuation of the humanist struggle led by Victor Hugo. From the first publication of his early plays, Hugo consistently fought against censorship. He continued to argue for press freedom in his speeches to the French Assembly as a political representative, and in his writing and in newspapers. His exile to the Channel Islands for nearly 20 years during the Second Empire was the most significant event in this struggle. His political pamphlets crossed borders, thwarting the censors. The exhibition shows some of these newspapers and pamphlets, which were published in a very small format so that they could be transported in secret. Reporters sans Frontières (Reporters without Borders) gives an account of the fight for press freedom in today's society.

A virtual newspaper examines the various campaigns by Reporters sans Frontières, comparing them with Victor Hugo's texts and with the anti-censorship caricatures published in the 19th century.

For human dignity: against poverty, inequality and injustice

From 1849, in his speeches to the National Assembly, Hugo spoke out on behalf of the poorest in society. With the aid of characters from *Les Misérables* reproduced on panels, the exhibition tackles this theme in Victor Hugo's work. An original edition and objects from the Franche-Comté Museum are used to enrich this topic. ATD Fourth World is the natural choice of partner in this struggle. The topic of prisons and the death penalty is also covered in the exhibition; we hear from the museum's sponsor, Robert Badinter, whose message in favour of abolition of the death penalty resonates with the views held by Hugo.



« Chaque enfant qu'on enseigne est un homme qu'on gagne. »

"He who opens a school door, closes a prison."

For human dignity



Children's rights

This alcove room, which retains its original timbers, was undoubtedly the room where the writer was born. In the collections of the Maison Victor Hugo in Paris, a fragment of wallpaper from his birthplace was found. It is reproduced here along with the portraits of his parents and his Besançon godmother. In a display case you can see the register in which Hugo's birth was recorded. A few toys and objects lent by the Franche-Comté Museum, such as a rare doll like the one owned by Cosette, complete the scene. Victor Hugo was one of the first political representatives to speak in the Assembly about "Children's rights". He defended the idea during his speeches, in his works and through his actions in favour of deprived children. Education is the remedy for poverty and injustice, and the key to freedom. UNICEF addresses a few words on this topic, with a report on children working in Benin.

The freedom of peoples

The "return from exile" furniture bequeathed by the Hugo family to the City of Besançon is on display in the salon. It evokes the triumphant return of the writer to France. Entrusted to the custody of the City of Paris, until now it has been on display at Place des Vosges. In April 1874, Victor Hugo settled at 21, rue de Clichy, Paris. His daughter-in-law Alice and her two children lived on the third floor. At this time, when he returned from exile, he enjoyed great moral authority: all the main personalities in the Third Republic frequented his salon. An illustration by Adrien Marie, for the *Chronique illustrée*, is reproduced here (much enlarged), showing how the room would be furnished during an evening reception. It shows a settee, chairs and armchairs, some of which are on display here, a large gold mirror, a bronze elephant that fascinated his grandchildren Georges and Jeanne, and the chandelier made from Murano glass which is installed on the ground floor.

« ... Alors dans Besançon, vieille ville espagnole,
Jeté comme la graine au gré de l'air qui vole,
Naquit d'un sang breton et lorrain à la fois
Un enfant sans couleur, sans regard et sans voix... »

*"... It was then that in Besançon, that old Spanish town,
Cast like a seed into the flying wind,
A child was born of mixed blood, Breton and Lorraine
Pallid, blind and mute..."*

The restored pharmacy



The restored pharmacy

More than a century after its departure for Nice, the pharmacy has been restored to the house where Victor Hugo was born. Founded in 1738 by the apothecary Joseph Baratte, the "Pharmacie Maire" remained at 140 Grande-Rue until 1909, when the fittings were put on sale. The municipality wanted to purchase it, but the floods of 1910 prevented the transaction from being completed, as the available funds were diverted. It became, in turn, the property of the Parisian antiques dealer Bernard, then the company Pâris Singer, after which it was bought by the American businessman Frank Jay Gould, who donated it to the City of Nice in 1954. However, the "Renaissance du Vieux Besançon" association actively lobbied for its return. Part of the 18th century façade and the shop at 140 Grande-Rue have been restored. The layout of the premises has not changed and the pharmacy fits perfectly into its setting.



Rodin and Victor Hugo

Fascinated by the writer and politician, Rodin devoted a significant part of his work to Victor Hugo: around 100 drawings, sculptures, engravings and photographs. Auguste Rodin made this bust from a sketch taken from life in 1883. The first copy, which was given to Hugo, bore the dedication "To the illustrious poet".

In 2002, to mark the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty, the sculptor Ousmane Sow created a large statue of the poet Victor Hugo. It is displayed on the Esplanade des Droits de l'Homme in Besançon.

Victor Hugo

Victor Hugo and Besançon



Victor Hugo and Besançon

Victor Hugo did not stay long in Besançon: six weeks, according to some experts. However, the Franche-Comté region and its capital were very present in the writer's life: his paternal grandmother was born in Dole, for example. Although he never returned to the town of his birth, he retained a special attachment to the city and chose to evoke his birth in Besançon in a poem that became known all over the world.

Besançon, meanwhile, has not forgotten the man who so ardently fought for the great causes of his time. In 1879, the municipal council named a street after him and placed a commemorative plaque on the house where he was born. The plaque was inaugurated on 27 December 1880, and Hugo wrote a letter to the people of Besançon, to thank them. A second dedication was unveiled on 26 February 2002. It quotes a line from a poem addressed to the painter Louis Boulanger in 1846: "I want people to be great, and men to be free."

In 1902, the centenary of his birth, the city's students paid international homage to the poet, and in the presence of several government ministers, the City inaugurated the statue on Place Granvelle, the work of the Besançon sculptor Just Becquet. In 1952, the Museum of Fine Arts organised an exhibition and philatelists produced a commemorative stamp. In 1985, the City commemorated the centenary of his death under the patronage of Mr Edgar Faure, from the Académie Française, the former and future President of the Franche-Comté region.

In 2002, to mark the bicentenary of his birth, Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, accompanied by a number of personalities from the literary and arts worlds, unveiled a new commemorative inscription on the house where Hugo was born. In 2003, a bronze statue of Victor Hugo, by the sculptor Ousmane Sow, was installed on the Esplanade des Droits de l'Homme.

Opening times

Every day except Tuesday

- > 1 April to 31 October,
10.30am to 6.00pm
- > 1 November to 31 March
10.30am to 5.30pm
- > School holidays and weekends
10.30am to 6.00pm
- > Exceptional closings: January 1st,
May 1st, November 1st, December
25th

Admission

Full rate: €2.50

Concessions and group rates €1.50

Free entry upon presentation of
a valid document for:

- children under 18
- jobseekers and minimum welfare recipients
- ICOM card holders
- journalists

Audioguides are available free of charge

Contacts

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