

Les Djinns (The Jinn) by Victor Hugo

The Jinn

English Translation by Richard Stokes

Murs, ville Et port,
Asile De mort,
Mer grise
Où brise La brise
Tout dort.

*Walls, town And port,
Refuge From death,
Grey sea
Where the wind Breaks,
All sleep.*

Dans la plaine
Naît un bruit.
C'est l'haleine
De la nuit.
Elle brame Comme une âme
Qu'une flamme Toujours suit.

*In the plain
A sound is born.
It is the breathing
Of the night.
It roars Like a soul
That a flame Pursues.*

La voix plus haute
Semble un grelot.
D'un nain qui saute
C'est le galop.
Il fuit, s'élançe,
Puis en cadence
Sur un pied danse
Au bout d'un flot.

*The higher voice
Seems a shiver.
It is the gallop
Of a leaping dwarf.
He flees, he springs,
Then dances rhythmically
On one foot
At the end of a billow*

La rumeur approche,
L'écho la redit.
C'est comme la cloche
D'un couvent maudit,
Comme un bruit de foule
Qui tonne et qui roule
Et tantôt s'écroule
Et tantôt grandit.

*The murmur draws near,
The echo repeats it,
It's like the bell
Of a cursed convent,
Like the noise of a crowd
That thunders and rolls
And sometimes crumbles
And sometimes swells.*

Dieu! la voix sépulcrale
Des Djinns!- Quel bruit ils font!
Fuyons sous la spirale
De l'escalier profond!
Déjà s'éteint ma lampe,
Et l'ombre de la rampe..
Qui le long du mur rampe,
Monte jusqu'au plafond.

*God! The sepulchral voices of the
Jinn! The noise they make!
We flee down the long spiral
staircase!
My lamp has already died,
And the shadow of the ramp,
Which crawls along the wall,
Ascends to the ceiling.*

C'est l'essaim des Djinns qui
passe
Et tourbillonne en sifflant.
Les ifs, que leur vol fracasse,
Craquent comme un pin brûlant.
Leur troupeau lourd et rapide,
Volant dans l'espace vide,
Semble un nuage livide
Qui porte un éclair au flanc.

*It's the swarming Jinn
passing by,
Whirling and hissing,
Yew trees, stirred by their flight,
Crackle like burning pine.
Their herd, heavy and swift,
Flying in the void,
Seems like a livid cloud,
Ringed with lightning.*

Ils sont tout près! - Tenons
fermée
Cette salle ou nous les narguons
Quel bruit dehors! Hideuse
armée de vampires et de
dragons!
La poutre du toit descellée
Ploie ainsi qu'une herbe
mouillée,
Et la vieille porte rouillée,
Tremble, à déraciner ses gonds.

*They are so near! Let us keep
closed
the room where we flout them.
What a din outside! Hideous
army of vampires and
dragons!
The beam of the crumbling ceiling
Sags like drenched grass,
And the old rusted door
Trembles, as though its hinges
would snap.*

Cris de l'enfer! voix qui hurle et
qui pleure!
L'horrible essaim, poussé par
l'aquillon,
Sans doute, o ciel! s'abat sur ma
demeure.
Le mur fléchit sous le noir
bataillon.
La maison crie et chancelle
penchée,
Et l'on dirait que, du sol arrachée,
Ainsi qu'il chasse une feuille
séchée, Le vent la roule avec leur
tourbillon!

*Cries from hell! A voice that roars
and weeps!
The horrible swarm, driven by the
north wind,
Must now, O heavens, be assailing
my home!
The walls sag beneath the black
battalion.
The house cries out, staggers and
lists,
As though, ripped from the soil,
The wind were rolling and swirling
it along,
Chasing a desiccated leaf.*

Prophète! Si ta main me sauve
De ces impurs démons des soirs,
J'irai prosterner mon front chauve
Devant tes sacrés encensoirs!
Fais que sur ces portes fidèles
Meure leur souffle d'étincelles,
Et qu'en vain l'ongle de leurs
ailes
Grince et crie à ces vitraux noirs!

*Prophet, if your hand saves me
From these impure demons of the
night, I would prostrate my bald
pate Before your sacred incense
burners! Make their breath of
sparks Die on these faithful doors,
And the talons of their wings
Scrape and screech in vain at these
black windows!*

Ils sont passés! - Leur cohorte
S'envole et fuit, et leurs pieds
Cessent de battre ma porte
De leurs coups multipliés.
L'air est plein d'un bruit de
chaînes,
Et dans les forêts prochaines
Frissonnent tous les grands
chênes,
Sous leur vol de feu pliés!

*They have passed! - Their cohort
Takes flight and flees, and their
feet Cease beating at my door
With their multiple blows.
The air is filled with a sound of
chains,
And in the nearby forests
All the great oaks quiver,
Bent beneath their fiery flight!*

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De leurs ailes lointaines
Le battement décroît.
Si confus dans les plaines,
Si faible, que l'on croit
Oùir la sauterelle
Crier d'une voix grêle
Ou pétiller la grêle
Sur le plomb d'un vieux toit.

*The beating of their wings
Fades into the distance,
So indistinct in the plains,
So faint, that you believe
You hear the grasshopper
Cry with a shrill voice
Or the hail crackling
On the lead of an old roof.*

D'étranges syllabes
Nous viennent encore; -
Ainsi, des arabes
Quand sonne le cor,
Un chant sur la grève
Par instants s'élève,
Et l'enfant qui rêve
Fait des rêves d'or.

*Strange syllables
Keep approaching us,
And when the horn sounds,
It's like the chant
Of Arabs on the shore
Rising up at moments,
And the dreaming child
Dreaming of gold.*

Les Djinns funèbres,
Fils du trépas,
Dans les ténèbres
Pressent leur pas;
Leur essaim gronde;
Ainsi, profonde,
Murmure une onde
Qu'on ne voit pas.

*The funereal Jinn,
Threads of death
In the dark
Accelerate their approach;
Their swarm snarls;
Like the rumbling
Of a deep wave
One does not see.*

Ce bruit vague
Qui s'endort,
C'est la vague
Sur le bord;
C'est la plainte
Presque éteinte
D'une sainte
Pour un mort.

*This vague sound
That falls asleep,
It is the wave
On the rim;
It is the moan,
Almost extinct,
Of a saint
For a death.*

On doute
La nuit...
J'écoute: -
Tout fuit,
Tout passe;
L'espace
Efface
Le bruit.

*One doubts
The night...
I listen: -
All flees,
All fades;
Space
Erases
Sound.*

Victor Marie Hugo (1802-1885) was a French poet, novelist, and dramatist of the Romantic movement. He is considered one of the greatest and best-known French writers. In France, Hugo's literary fame comes first from his poetry and then from his novels and his dramatic achievements. Among many volumes of poetry, *Les Contemplations* and *La Légende des siècles* stand particularly high in critical esteem. Outside France, his best-known works are the novels *Les Misérables*, 1862, and *Notre-Dame de Paris*, 1831 (known in English as *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*). He also produced more than 4,000 drawings, which have since been admired for their beauty, and earned widespread respect as a campaigner for social causes such as the abolition of capital punishment.

"Les Djinns" was published in 1829 as part of a collection "Les Orientales", inspired by the Greek War of Independence.

Though a committed royalist when he was young, Hugo's views changed as the decades passed, and he became a passionate supporter of republicanism; his work touches upon most of the political and social issues and the artistic trends of his time. He is buried in the Panthéon. His legacy has been honoured in many ways, including his portrait being placed on French franc banknotes.

Information from Wikipedia.