The Lighthouses on Victor Hugo's Sea/Shore

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Abstract: The sea and lighthouses are timeless in Victor Hugo's oeuvre. Repeatedly he writes a scene wherein the sea causes shipwrecks which narratively and poetically bring about lighthouses. These events edify a boundary at the sea/shore which changes through time while remaining recognizable. In Hugo's work sea, land, and lighthouse are constants which persist through periods of stasis and supposed progress. Hugo's lighthouses and the sea/shore are a timeless genre of a place. This is a study of two poems (from *Inner Voices* (1836) and *The Legend of the Ages* (1877)) and one passage from a novel (*The Man Who Laughs* (1869)). The geocritical (Westphal 2007) and spatial (Tally 2013) analysis herein builds upon Casey's work on space, place, and edges (1993, 1997, 2007, 2017). In doing so it will better situate Hugo's architecture (Brière 2007) in its place. Finally, it joins recent work on literary lighthouses (Guèrmès 2024, Russella 2025).

Keywords: Victor Hugo, lighthouses, sea, land, boundaries, shipwrecks, timelessness

> "The lighthouse invites the storm."
> — Malcolm Lowry

Introduction

The sea is timeless in Victor Hugo's work. An elemental force, it makes seafarers and storms, land and its structures, including lighthouses, timeless by association. This timelessness is born of a series of repeated events that associates the lighthouse with a genre of place fixed to the sea/shore boundary. Hugo wrote and drew lighthouses throughout his life. In his poetry, prose, theater, and drawings there are myriad depictions whose settings range from antiquity to his present. The inevitable constant is their *topos*: they necessarily mark the edge between land and sea, protecting mariners from both. While there were great improvements to lighthouse technology during Hugo's life, because of the timelessness of the sea to which they are inextricably linked, lighthouses are, for him, no more effective than they were thousands of years ago. This essay will focus on three of Victor Hugo's works: two poems (from *Les Voix Intérieures [Inner Voices]* (1836) and *La Légende des siècles [The Legend of the Ages]* (1877)) and one passage from a novel (*L'Homme qui rit [The Man Who Laughs]*). Each include sea, storms, land, shipwrecks, and lighthouses. Each follows the same narrative presentation of these elements despite variation in the times and places they depict. While these could be considered sea, storm, or shipwreck texts, the best denomination is *lighthouse text* to distinguish them from the other examples in Hugo's work that depict ships (lost) at sea. Because they are based on a recurring event, making them *eventmental*, these three lighthouse texts demonstrate a timelessness that yields a genre of lighthouse place.

In identifying a genre of place, the risk of overgeneralization is evident. There is not an *unchanging* timeless place; there is a place that fits a standard based on the events that make it necessary. As long as there has been sea travel, there have been shipwrecks. When storms from the sea lead to shipwrecks, the response is to build a lighthouse or to update one. When there are shipwrecks written by Victor Hugo, his response is to include a lighthouse in his work. All the elements within lighthouse place are con-

stantly moving from static to rebirth. For a time, lighthouse place is in stasis, then for a time it is not. Hugo's writing depicts a sea that is all at once changing and universal from one text to another. The situation is the same for the storm, the shipwreck, and the lighthouse. Both the static and changing moments make a genre of place that adapts and evolves, thus contributing to its timelessness.

This analysis includes the multifocal and diachronic approaches from geocriticism (Westphal 2007) and a spatial understanding of history (Tally 2013). It will also rely on philosophical texts, particularly the works of Edward Casey on space, place, and edges (1993, 1997, 2007, 2017), to identify how Hugo's writing makes lighthouse place.[1] While significant work has been done on Victor Hugo's architecture (Brière 2007; Mallion 1962), the studies that have included lighthouses do not sufficiently connect the structures to their surroundings, a relationship that will be at the heart of this essay. Isabelle Duran–Le Guern's (2001) work on time and timelessness in Romanticism has been helpful, as have been numerous works on lighthouse history and technology by Jean-Christophe Fichou, Noël Le Hénaff, and Xavier Mével (1999), Theresa Levitt (2013), Francis Dreyer (2016), Léon Renard (1867) and Vincent Guigueno (2001). While these texts inform the context of Hugo's lighthouses, the vast expanse of these historical works pays very little attention to their literary and cultural representation. This study seeks to build on the work established in the collection *Phares en littérature* (2024) directed by Sophie Guermès as well as in the study of the contemporary Breton-Francophone lighthouse in Russella (2025).

Romantic tropes associated with the power of the sea and the powerlessness of humanity are well established. The universality of the language used, and the narratives employed, however, extend beyond Victor Hugo's literary movement. This depiction of the sea as timeless contributes to an understanding of place as a collective amalgamation. Furthermore, in two of the works studied herein Hugo directly attributes the construction of a lighthouse to a shipwreck, and the structure of the third lighthouse poem suggests a similar rationale. This connects the nautical and terrestrial as one place, regardless of how dangerous the boundary between them may be. In her work on Hugo, Karen Quandt (2017a, 2017b) has written about his landscapes and the significance of his settings, especially in the English Channel Islands, suggesting that his "experience of the insulated, yet infinite, archipelago established an ecopoetics of hybridity and metamorphosis related to a dialectical dynamic of destruction and creation" (Quandt 2017a 65). Metamorphosis applies directly to this example because the relationship between sea and lighthouse is not isolated, it is a cycle of shipwrecks and creation of maritime safety infrastructure. Victor Hugo's depiction of lighthouse place inverts Malcolm Lowry's phrase *the lighthouse invites the storm*.

Lighthouse Texts

The first poem is called "XXIV. Une nuit qu'on entendait la mer sans la voir" ["The night we heard the sea without seeing it"]. Written and published during the July Monarchy, *Les Voix Intérieures* [*Inner Voices*] (1836) includes poems that are personal and philosophical. The poem is dated 17 July 1836, which fell in the middle of a summer trip with Hugo and his lover Juliette Drouet to Normandy. The poem is very Romantic. There is a storm, a shipwreck, a lighthouse, and, as the title suggests, a highly sensorial lexicon.

The second poem comes from *La Légende des siècles*, specifically the "Nouvelle Série" (the second of three published parts) which was published in 1877. The work is one part of a poem written in 1862 called "Les Sept Merveilles du Monde" [The Seven Wonders of the World]. The poem gives voice to, among other wonders, the Gardens of Babylon, the Pyramids of Giza, and, in Part V, the Lighthouse of Alexandria. This edifice stood over 300-feet-tall and marked a major Mediterranean port. As one of the first lighthouses that was widely written about, it is only natural that the French word for lighthouse, *phare*, comes from the island of *Pharos* where it was built. It remained in place well into the Middle Ages, a time that fascinated Hugo and other Romantics. In the poem there is once again a problem at sea and a lighthouse.

The final example comes from *L'Homme qui rit* [*The Man Who Laughs*](1869). Early in the novel, a ship called the *Matutina* leaves Portland, England, and sails into the English Channel. Aboard are a mix of honest passengers and others from a group called the *comprachicos* who kidnap children and mutilate them to later sell them to carnivals. They leave one such child behind, a young boy whose cheeks have been cut to look like he's laughing, who goes on to be the novel's protagonist. The ship sails away straight into a snowstorm. Tossed around in the foul weather, they find themselves rudderless. They encounter a lighthouse before their ship is wrecked. For the purposes of this analysis, the part of the novel that will be studied is called "L'Ourque en mer" ["The Hourque (a type of ship) at sea"] and the primary focus will be a chapter entitled "Les Casquets," which refers to the islands and lighthouses which share that name. Whereas the poems each depict one lighthouse, this chapter is a so-called *lighthouse digression* including two generations of lighthouses on the same site.

The Language of Lighthouses on the Sea/Shore

This study is focused, in essence, on the behavior of a short list of nouns: sea, shore, lighthouse, wind, storm, boat. Victor Hugo's language is consistent throughout the three works, while still varying widely within each of them. In all three works, he refers to ships with variation that at times makes imagining the vessel nearly impossible: *nef* [ship], *esquif* [skiff], *barque* [raft], *trirème* [an ancient ship], *ourque* [an Hourque or two-masted ship in use until the 19th century], and by its proper name *La Matutina*. Hugo refers to his ships just as frequently by their crew: *pauvres marins* [poor sailors], *marins perdus* [lost sailors], *nochers* [sailors] or *les naufragés* [the shipwrecked]. Water is often *flot* [swell], *houle* [swell], or *onde* [water, wave, flow] in addition to *mer* [sea] and *océan* [ocean]. Wind is *vent* [wind] but also *acquilon* [north wind] or *noroit* [northwestern wind] and undoubtedly lives in *nuées* [clouds], *coups de vent et coups de mer* [wind and sea strikes], and *orage* [storm]. Land is *grève* [shore], *terre* [land], *côte* [coast], and even specific features inland like *collines* [hills], *bois* [woods], *village* [village], *vallée* [valley] and at sea like *récif* or *éceuil* [reef or shelf]. As for the lighthouse, it is often referred to as *feu* [fire].[2] Everything turns around that term. Each work uses *phare* [lighthouse], specifying at times with features like *phare au rouge éclair* [lighthouse with a flashing red light] and *phare inébranlable* [unwavering lighthouse]. The consistency of these elements within and between works helps to establish a lighthouse place. For example, there are any number of metaphors to be found in the event of a shipwreck or a storm at sea: the shipwreck is the power of nature over humanity, the lighthouse is humanity saving itself from nature, the storm is divine punishment, and so on. Nearly every environmental feature in Victor Hugo's *milieu* can be read for its deeper metaphorical significance. The ship at sea can be a metaphor for powerlessness. A synechdoche used to describe the ship by naming its passengers contributes to the possibility of controlling the ship in a storm, changing it from a determinist symbol to one of free will. By emphasizing the polyfaceted nature of the sea, the latter technique brings the experience closer to those travelling on the ship: they sail through *swells* and *waves* more than they do on the *ocean*. Lighthouses are metonymous for land when mariners cry out for them.

The homonym of *phare* [lighthouse] and *phare* [beacon] in French contributes similarly to this place. The distinction between *phare*-lighthouse and *phare*-beacon is at times difficult to make, especially in Romantic poetry. The language of the maritime lighthouse is intertwined with that of the metaphorical beacon. Even though some occurrences clearly define the structure as a maritime lighthouse, the literal depiction is always instilled with the metaphorical. Consider this example from outside the world of shipwrecks. In *Odes et Ballades* [Odes and Ballades] (1826) the poet offers political advice to M. de Chateaubriand:

> Il faut l'onde en courroux, l'écueil et la nuit sombre // Pour que le pilote qui sombre // Jette au phare sauveur un œil reconnaissant. (Odes 116)

> [There must be a raging wave, a reef and a dark night // so that the pilot who is going down // sends the saving lighthouse/beacon a grateful glance]

There is a maritime lexicon, so calling this *phare* a lighthouse is appropriate. But there is undeniably a metaphorical sense, a guiding beacon, such as in Hugo's play *Cromwell* (1828): "Alors il est compté parmi ces mortels rares // Que les peuples de loin suivent comme des phares" [So he is considered amongst those rare mortals // who far off peoples follow like a beacon] (*Cromwell* 419). In French-language works, one must consider every lighthouse as a beacon.

Whereas many of Hugo's works delve into detail to situate narratives spatiotemporally, those studied here provide few clues to their locations beyond the occasional toponym. The lighthouse texts in this study represent three distinct places as indicated by their titles and place names in them. Inspired by his surroundings, the location of the composition of Hugo's works is nevertheless signifi-cant to understanding poetic and narrative settings. "Night," written likely on the Normand coast, simply features a *phare*. Of "Wonder," composed in exile on Guernsey in 1862, biographer Graham Robb writes: "By the end of September 1862, he was back on his island fortress, talking to his old friend, the Ocean, 'which always agrees with me'" (Robb 386). It is set in the Mediterranean, al-though the sea and lighthouse are only identified through land, by the naming of the city of Alexan-dria and of the lighthouse's creator Sostrate Gnidien. There is a general, universal language in these works suggesting that while these lighthouses have different names or inspirations, their essential features outweigh their distinctions. Specific, place-based scholarship is often central to geocritical analyses. In this study, however, the names of the features, structures, and spaces associated with this place often amount to a presentation of the same features with a different name. Thus, we are talking about a genre of place. Still in exile on Guernsey, Hugo set his 1869 novel nearby in England and in the Channel. The specificity of the sea is named in the text. The doctor, one of the passengers of the *Matutina* explains: "La Manche n'est pas une mer comme une autre" [The Channel is not like any other sea] (*Homme* 153). A study of Hugo's language in these works will demonstrate this to be false.

Sea, Storms, and Shipwrecks

The sea in "Night" is unspecific. A storm is rolling in, the sailors are caught off guard, and the lighthouse is on the shore. It is written from the perspective of someone speaking to a denizen on land. Four of the five stanzas focus on the sea and sailors while one is dedicated to the lighthouse. The poetics are sensorial, focusing on sound rather than sight. In many contexts the combination of waves, wind, dark skies, and rain would constitute a storm, but Hugo does not use those words (*tempête* [tempest, storm], *orage* [storm], and *ouragan* [hurricane] that are prominent parts of Hugo's lexicon elsewhere). The weather event is the water: "Écoutez vers l'onde" [Listen to the sea], "La mer est bien haute !" [The sea is rising high], "Pas d'ancre de fer // que le flot ne rompe" [The current could break any anchor], and "Quand le flot s'élève" [When the water rises] (*Voix* 227-230). The sea, synonymous for bad weather, in this case, is personified and sounded; there is a crying, rumbling, and deep voice. These sounds are sometimes interrupted by "un son plus clair" [a clearer sound] which extends the metaphor in the refrain: "le vent de la mer // souffle dans sa trompe" [the sea wind // blows its horn]. The wind is equally and conjointly as personified as the sea: "Le vent dans la voile // déchire la toile // comme avec les dents !" [The wind in the sail // rips the fabric // as if it had teeth] (229). Hugo is describing an event that emanates from the sea. As per the refrain, the *vent de la mer* [sea wind] is contingent upon the sea. After thoroughly presenting the situation, Hugo describes those threatened by the sea. Sailors are at first *lost souls*, somewhat pitiful far off in the in the shadows. Hugo rhymes the darkness of *Au loin, dans cette ombre* [Far off in the shadows] with *Sur la nef qui sombre* [On the sinking ship] to tie the storm to the situation on board. The *sombre* homonym returns a few lines later when sailors are reaching out *vers la terre sombre* [towards the dark land]. As the poem continues, the seamen are deemed reckless by the poet. They fight the sea and reach from their struggling ship towards land. On land there is a lighthouse. The sea here is not general or banal as the language in the poem is varied and descriptive. Rather it is universal, timeless, a trend which contin-ues in the other works in this study.

Like in "Night," the better part of "Wonder" is dedicated to the problem, the sea, with a lighthouse appearing at the end. In the poem there are again *marins perdus* [lost sailors] in a threatening sea (Hugo, *Légende* 274). Again, Hugo writes a sea that growls ("le sinistre ocean grondait" [the sinister ocean growls] (*Légende* 274). Again the wind and sea are conjoined, Hugo uses the word *orage* [storm], this time through the Roman Gods of Wind and the Sea: "Éole fou prenait aux cheveux Neptune ivre" [Insensed Aeolus took a drunken Neptune by the hair] (274). With another Classical example, Hugo refers to the sea and the sky as two Hydras, this time to signal that the storm was over: "L'hydre verte laissait luire l'hydre étoilée ; // L'océan se mettait, plein de morts, teint de sang, // À gazouiller ainsi qu'un enfant innocent" [The green Hydra let the starry Hydra shine // The ocean, full of corpses, stained with blood, began // to babble like an innocent child] (274). The personification of the murderous sea, sky, and wind through these Ancient timeless beings anchors elemental features like the wind and the sea in timelessness as well. The Lighthouse of Alexandria appears at the end of the poem in response to the catastrophe. It is humanity's effort to "suppléer, // sur les eaux, dans les nuits fécondes en désastres, // À l'inutilité magnifique des astres" [to compensate, on the waters, in the dark and stormy nights, for the magnificent uselessness of the stars] (Hugo, *Légende* 275). A human structure, the lighthouse's cause and responsibility is a proposed solution to problems posed by the sea.

Victor Hugo's most place-based work in this study is the novel *L'Homme qui rit*. In this passage made up of 18 short chapters, Hugo attributes homeostatic urges to a storm. It behaves and responds as if by instinct:

> On veut tout expliquer par le vent et par le flot. Or dans l'air il y a une force qui n'est pas le vent, et dans l'eau il y a une force qui n'est pas le flot. Cette force, la même dans l'air et dans l'eau, c'est l'effluve. L'air et l'eau sont deux masses liquides, à peu près identiques […] ; l'effluve seul est fluide. Le vent et le flot ne sont que des poussées ; l'effluve est un courant. Le vent est visible par les nuées, le flot est visible par l'écume ; l'effluve est invisible. De temps en temps pourtant il dit : je suis là. Son Je suis là, c'est un coup de tonnerre. (*Homme* 127)

> [We try to explain all things by the action of wind and wave; yet in the air there is a force which is not the wind, and in the waters a force which is not the wave. That force, both in the air and in the water, is effluvium. Air and water are two nearly identical liquid masses [...]; effluvium alone is fluid. The wind and the wave are only impulses; effluvium is a current. The wind is visible in clouds, the wave is visible in foam; effluvium is invisible. From time to time, however, it says, I am here. Its I am here is thunder.]

This *effluve* [effluvium] is not the driver of *this* storm, but *storms*, from the sea, communicated through the narrative pivot to *on* [we]. This universality is consistent with Hugo's other work. A few chapters later the storm begins in the water ("Le sombre supplice des eaux, éternellement tourmentées, allait commencer" [The somber punishment of eternally tormented water was about to begin]) and the wind ("de plus en plus le vent, les vapeurs, les houles" [More and more wind, condensation, swells]) (Hugo, *Homme* 158-159). There is chaos. Hugo writes, "Rien n'est logique et rien ne semble absurd comme l'océan" [Nothing is logical and nothing seems as absurd as the ocean] and "l'indescriptible est là, partout" [the indescribable is there, everywhere] (*Homme* 159). As for the ship, its passengers are sailing out to sea like lambs to the slaughter: "La tourmente boréale se précipita sur l'ourque, l'ourque se rua dedans" [The boreal tumult threw itself on the hourque, the hourque rushed into it] (Hugo, *Homme* 162). The chiasmic parallelism of the sentence imitates the waves rocking the *Matutina* (see Caserta 2019). The language is cyclical, and both the geolocation and heading of the ship are lost. Rushing blind into a trap betrays the same sentiment as those caught by the storm in Alexandria. They were caught in the middle of it: *partout piège et naufrage* [traps and shipwrecks everywhere] (Hugo, *Légende* 274).

Hugo makes the snowstorm in "Hourque" to sound even excessively uncontrollable by its zoomorphism, calling it the "immense voix bestiale du monde" [the earth's immense bestial voice];

the earth has a voice: "Ce cri, c'est l'ouragan" [This cry is the hurricane] (Hugo, *Homme* 162-163). The description continues, amassing, accumulating, and attributing adjectives to the sound of wind and waves including a series of locations that are struck by the frequencies:

> Vociférations de précipice à précipice, de l'air à l'eau, du vent au flot, de la pluie au rocher, du zénith au nadir, des astres aux écumes, la muselière du gouffre défaite, tel est ce tumulte, compliqué d'on ne sait quel démêlé mystérieux avec les mauvaises consciences. (Hugo, *Homme* 164)

> [Vociferations from precipice to precipice, from air to water, from wind to wave, from rain to rock, from zenith to nadir, from stars to foam; the abyss unmuzzled,—such is this tumult, complicated by some mysterious contest with evil consciences.]

In naming these places he declares that despite catching the *Matutina* between Portland and its destination, this event is a dangerous combination of elements at sea that could strike anywhere and at any time in history. Because of the sinister travelers in the ship, Hugo describes this storm with some dramatic irony. When the lighthouse appears, passengers are elated, but their salvation will not be granted by the sea.

The effluvium as a universal driving force and the consistency of language from works set in different space–times demonstrates that this passage depicts a Hugolian sea. This sea, while fine-tuned by Hugo, did not originate with him. Among the "diverse natural forces" in Homer's *Odyssey* are "rivers and ocean currents, mist and fog, dark and light," all of which are out of human control (Schultz 302). Calypso's effluvium is undeniably on display when "she rouse[s] the wind and surging sea against them // and all his brave companions were destroyed" (Homer 183). If Victor Hugo's writing in *L'Homme qui rit* was place-based, so was Homer's in writing *The Odyssey* (see Schultz 2009). Yet in both cases, the sea is nonspecific, nonlocal.

In the *The Sea Around Us* (1961), Rachel Carson's descriptions of the sea and wind resemble Victor Hugo's. She uses zoomorphism in describing the *wind-born waves* meeting tidal currents: "It is like the meeting of two wild beasts" (Carson, *Sea Around Us* 112). Despite her precision of naming places (tracing the waves around Land's End in England to their origins elsewhere in the Atlantic, for example), this specificity and connectedness widens to a global language of the sea:

> As long as there has been an earth, the moving masses of air that we call winds have swept back and forth across its surface. And as long as there has been an ocean, its waters have stirred to the passage of the winds. Most waves are the result of the action of wind on water. (110)[3]

In moving from the mid-20th century back to Hugo's lifetime, she highlights a bioregion by quoting from the 1875 *North Sea Pilot* which "contained a warning to mariners, which is repeated verbatim in the modern *Pilot*" (113).[4] Mariners should *batten down* "as it is difficult to see what may be going on in the distance, and the transition from smooth water to a broken sea is so sudden that no time is given for making arrangements" (113). This echoes the suddenness of the storm that traps the sailors in Hugo's "Hourque": "Tout à coup la nuit fut terrible" [All at once the night was dreadful] (*Homme* 160). Carson later quotes again from the same guide which states that several times a year "all distinction between air and water is lost" and "everything seems enveloped in a thick smoke" (Carson, *Sea Around Us* 117). The guide emphasizes the suddenness of the situation, "the sea rises at once" and "the roar of the surge may be heard for twenty miles," each of which are elements that can be found in Victor Hugo's poems and prose (117).

The sea in these examples is outside of time and out of place. Even when specific details are given by naming a place or a body of water, either the sea behaves in relatively the same manner regardless of place, or its poetics change little through the centuries. While Rachel Carson writes of sea life and Hugo of life at sea, they share a common poetics attached to a global sea. In the Forward to another of her works, *Under the Sea-Wind*, Carson writes that to stand at the edge of the sea and see and feel its life is "to have knowledge of things that are as nearly eternal as any earthly life can be" (*Sea-Wind* 3). The sea continues "through the centuries and the ages, while man's kingdoms rise and fall" (3).

Hugo echoes Carson's sentiments about the sea while questioning the longevity of humanity: "La marée pourtant, c'est éternel; mais l'éternité obéit à l'homme plus qu'on ne croit" [The tide is eternal; but eternity obeys man more than one would believe] (Hugo, *Homme* 144).

Sea/Scape and Lighthouse Place

The relationship between the lighthouse and the sea as well as the lighthouse and the shipwrecked is based on their positions relative to one another in space. Alain Corbin sees them as intertwined: "Les môles allongés, les phares qui parlent de naufrages, s'accordent à ce pathétique des rivages" [The stretched-out breakwaters, the lighthouses that speak of shipwrecks, meet at this moving shore] (Corbin 23). The sea and the lighthouse, particularly in Hugo, constitute a duality of safety and insecurity on either side of a boundary. Consequently, the lighthouse comes to be a tutelary deity and metonym of the safer coast. In this sense, the safe, the unsafe, and the reality define the Hugolian coastline, the sea/shore, which is the place of the lighthouse.

In "Night" and "Wonder" Hugo's characters dedicate their final living moments in relation to land seen from the sea. In "Night" the lost sailors stretch their arms out "vers la terre sombre !" [towards the dark land] (Hugo, *Voix* 229). In "Wonder" death allows the last thing they see to be "la terre s'éclipsant derrière les agrès" [land eclipsing behind the tiller] (Hugo, *Légende* 274). Land is unattainable. Without land, they are unsafe and their destiny seems inevitable. When the sailors reach out for land, what they *dream* of, according to Hugo, is the lighthouse. "Night" concludes:

> C'est toi, c'est ton feu
> Que le nocher rêve,
> Quand le flot s'élève,
> Chandelier que Dieu
> Pose sur la grève,
> Phare au rouge éclair
> Que la brume estompe ! (*Voix* 230)

> [It's you, it's your light
> Of which the sailor dreams,
> When the sea rises,
> Candlestick that God
> Put on the shore,
> Red flashing lighthouse
> That the fog obscures!]

Following several verses on the lost sailors, Hugo's introduction of a lighthouse at the end of the poem positions it as the narrative response to the shipwreck. In "Wonder" the sailors cry out *Adieu, terre !* [Adieu, land] (Hugo, *Légende* 274). The lighthouse is built to guide them to a refuge, which is to be understood as land, again at the very end of the poem. The conflation of *terre* and *phare* [land and lighthouse] is a seemingly natural metonym because it fuses human construction to the natural world. These land-based features are all parts of one whole: land. Land is a metaphor for safety. The lighthouse must mean *land*, a space which shares a boundary with the sea.

Limits and edges like those between water and land, referred to from this point on as the sea/shore, have distinct natures. Philosopher Edward Casey writes that edges are the end of things: "that area or place where a thing (or field or person or place) runs out, either by ceasing to exist, turning in a radically different direction, or simply dropping out of sight or touch" (*Boundaries* 68). Places are made up of a system of edges. In the examples in this study there is the sea/shore edge, sea or land at the horizon in either direction and wind meeting land or sea, to provide a few of the many possibilities. Each edge provides an opportunity to better understand places. Their boundaries are always changing while remaining stable enough be identifiable. This even includes the fluidity of the waves on the shore during different weather events. In "Night" and "Wonder," the narrative is focused on

one edge: sea/shore. During bad weather, the sea/shore edge becomes a place to which the sailors are drawn, what Casey calls a *terminus ad quem* (*Edge* 81). This is a narrative-based edge. The perspective anchored in, at, or around the lighthouse in both poems depicts the sea/shore edge as a place *from which* sailors leave to go out to sea, a *terminus a quo* (81). When the sea is personified, its sea/shore edge is a *terminus ad quem*. These platial edges form a network with a Janusian character providing boundaries that define the place described in the poems. With few exceptions, lighthouse place is almost entirely made up of the sea/shore edge.

In "Hourque" the chapters of storm and struggle are followed by a chapter dedicated to lighthouses, much like in the poems. Unlike in the other works, however, the narrative in *Homme* does not end with the lighthouse, which means that the efficacy of the lighthouse is put to the test. When sea, storm, vessel, and land appear in the same passage or scene, otherwise understood as an event, the boundaries of the sea/shore edge change (Casey, *Edges* 83). *Eventmental* edges converge with place through surprise, an element that is present in Hugo's writing (Casey, *Boundaries* 509; *Edges* 84). If lighthouse place is defined by the shipwreck event and there have been lighthouses for centuries, often rebuilt on the foundations of previous ones, the fact that storms would still be a surprise is literarily significant. In "Wonder," the sailors find themselves caught in a storm *trapped and shipwrecks on all sides* (Hugo, *Légende* 274). In *L'Homme qui rit* the night worsens *tout à coup* [all at once] (Hugo, *Homme* 160). The sailors are caught out and want to be on the other side of the boundary, the land side, makes the sea/shore an *eventmental* place where, throughout centuries, the poetic, historical, and narrative response has been to build a lighthouse. As these events occur repeatedly, they are part of a cycle that leads to new lighthouses. They will eventually fall short. Where there is change, however, there is also stability. Lighthouse place is a cycle of stasis and renovation. Every lighthouse place is made up of previous events, previous technologies, previous storms.

For the mariners who see land as safety, Victor Hugo makes clear that the event of a shipwreck obscures the sea/shore edge that could be more dangerous than the sea. Science historian Theresa Levitt describes the need for better lighthouses in the 19th century in her book on Augustin Fresnel:

> A few ships undoubtedly were lost on the open sea, overwhelmed by a storm. The majority, however, met their end by running into the shore. It may have been unnerving to leave the safety of the coastline behind and see nothing but water on the horizon ahead, yet as every sailor knew, it was the land that could kill you. (Levitt 14)

The surprise of the *eventmental* edge conceals danger, changing "the unknown to the known (though sometimes also to a new unknown)" (Casey, *Edge* 85). There is surprise when the passengers of the *Matutina* see through the storm *un rougeur* [a reddishness] (*Homme* 176). They cry out "Un phare!" [a lighthouse] *(*176). Whether lighthouses can help is the surprising aspect to this passage.

Hugo describes three lighthouses in *L'Homme qui rit*'s lighthouse digression.[5] It is the poetics and narrative temporality of this short chapter that infuse the sea/shore with a sense of place. The author works backwards from his present day to the time in which the novel is set by describing three lighthouses and with them three phases of lighthouse technology. The first is the modern Casquets Lighthouse. It is a 19th-century structure contemporary to Hugo's writing of the novel. Brière refers to it as the "modèle abouti de l'évolution technologique" [completed example of technological evolution] (Brière 234). The other is the older Casquets lighthouse as it would have been seen by those aboard the *Matutina* in the late 17th century.

The two generations of lighthouses mark the sea/shore by appearing in the narrative as a response to the struggling *Matutina*. Despite their shared location, the descriptions of lighthouse technology through time makes the place seem disjointed. Scholars have seen this digression as separate from the narrative, but a study of the lighthouses demonstrates that this is not true. Echoing the pluridimensionality of time in this example, in his chapter "Le Romanesque et l'écriture de l'histoire dans *l'Homme qui rit*" ["The Novel and Writing History in *The Man Who Laughs*"] Pierre Forgue considers passages like these to be digressions, but still as part of the integrated narrative. For him,

given that *L'Homme qui rit* is a novel, "Le para-texte didactique et digressif est doublé par la fiction qui elle aussi dit l'Histoire. Deux écritures de l'Histoire, celle de Hugo et celle du roman, se trouvent donc en concurrence" [The didactic and digressive para-text is doubled by fiction that is itself also history. Two versions of history, Hugo's and the novel's find themselves competing] (Laforgue 232). Chantal Brière, author of *Victor Hugo et le roman architectural* [*Victor Hugo and the Architectural Novel*] proposed a different way of reading this digression. For her, there is an element of mystery in it (Brière 274). It provides details in an elliptical and mysterious story whose places the reader is required to complete (Brière 274). This lighthouse digression presents temporal and spatial information that is vital to understanding the narrative.

These multiple voices and multiple times lead to the study of the same place through time through a multifocal, geocritical approach. When set against one another, these different representations "se corrigent, s'alimentent, et s'enrichissent mutuellement" [mutually correct, feed, and enrich one another] (Westphal 187). The result of this mutual adjustment is that "[t]oute représentation est par là même assimiliée dans un processus dialectique" [Each representation is assimilated by a dialectical process], which is to say that writing about the Casquets lighthouse in two different times allows each representation to influence the other (188). Taking all of this into account, a study of *Les Casquets* will provide a greater understanding of lighthouse place and the sea/shore.

The composition of the chapter presents several parallels, each of which elucidates a greater difference between the two. In both examples, the lighthouse's role is to communicate with ships through light. In the 19th century it is through the difference between varying lengths of light and dark. In the case of the 17th-century *Matutina*, this means keeping the flame lit. Their light technologies and their towers (or rocks, in the case of the older Casquets) are each described. This is where the greatest distinction between the two appears. In Victor Hugo's lifetime, French physicists, mathematicians, geographers, cartographers, and engineers, had completely overhauled the world's approach to maritime safety (see Levitt 2013, Guigueno 2001, Fichou et. al. 1999). Augustin Fresnel invented the lens which bears his name, said to be the *invention that saved a million ships*. Better maps, sturdier and taller towers, and cleaner burning fuels among many other innovations led to far safer seas. This meant that the sea/shore was changing dramatically before Hugo's eyes. New towers were built on new sites. Lighthouses strong enough to hold a new optic were refitted. Those that could not support the weight were renovated or replaced, often using the same materials. Lighthouses in the 19th century were a model of technological rebirth and were tidier and more efficient.[6]

The 19th-century Casquets lighthouse described in *L'Homme qui rit* is made up of three towers with new optical systems on top of them with a wall connecting them; it looks much like a castle. Hugo's description emphasizes the numerical and geometrical. The mechanism that turns the light is so precise that from a ship one could observe the light and take "dix pas sur le pont du navire pendant l'irradiation, et vingt-cinq pendant l'éclipse" [ten steps on the bridge of the ship during the light, and twenty-five during the eclipse] (Hugo, *Homme* 177). The base rotates "du tambour octogone formé de huit larges lentilles simples à échelons, et ayant au-dessus et au-dessous ses deux séries d'anneaux dioptriques; engrenage algébrique garanti des coups de vent et des coups de mer par des vitres épaisses" [the octagonal drum, which is made up of eight wide simple echelon lenses, with two series of dioptric rings above and below; it is protected from the violence of the winds and waves by glass a millimeter thick] (Hugo, *Homme* 177). The precision of the shape and number of each aspect of this new lighthouse seems disappointing to Hugo. He writes: "Tout y est sobre, exact, nu, précis, correct; un phare est un chiffre" [Everything is sober, exact, exposed, precise, correct; a lighthouse is a mathematical figure] (*Homme* 177). Rather than bear false witness and call it useless, Hugo ridicules the device for its unnecessary complexity, separating it from the older Casquets. The *old savage lighthouse* is far simpler, as is the writing. Here there is a burning fire under an iron trellis at the top of a rock: "une chevelure de flamme dans le vent" [a whisper of flames in the wind] (Hugo, *Homme* 180). These details come in one sentence and accordingly contradict the 19th-century lighthouse in as much space. Through technology, Hugo questions change over time, a lifelong interest.

These technological differences cannot be separated from their distinct time periods. The temporal nature of Hugo's Casquets presents a rich case of narrational distance. The chapter begins by responding to the shipwrecked who cried *Lighthouse!* with: "C'était en effet la Light-House des Casquets" [It was indeed the Casquets Lighthouse](Hugo, *Homme* 176). This statement from a third-person narrator removes itself from the narrative to make a statement about the world directed at the reader, referred to as a *didactic paratext* by Laforgue above. This is the same voice that provides detail about *effluvium* and "Les vagues de tempête de l'Australie atteignent jusqu'à quatrevingts pieds de hauteur" [Storm waves in Australia can reach up to 80-feet-tall] earlier in this passage (*Homme* 130). The difference here is that the name *Casquets Lighthouse* applies to both generations. One presents Casquets as a type of 19th-century lighthouse which he situates in his time of writing the novel: "Le phare des Casquets en particulier est aujourd'hui […]" [The Casquets Lighthouse in particular is today …] (*Homme* 177). In presenting the older Casquets Hugo writes, "Mais le phare des Casquets n'était point de cette mode" [But the Casquets Lighthouse was not like this one][7] (*Homme* 180). Overlooking that the two lighthouses have the same name, Hugo proceeds: "C'était à cette époque un simple vieux phare barbare, tel que Henri 1er l'avait fait construire après la perdition de la *Blanche-Nef*" [It was at this time a simple old savage lighthouse, like the ones Henry I had built after the *White Ship* disaster] (180). Without any other indication the narration returns to the bifurcating sentence that began the chapter: once again, *it was the Casquets Lighthouse*. From the initial return to the didactic para-text, which is closer to the narrative than the description of the newer lighthouse, Hugo connects the edifice through time to the Middle Ages. By anchoring it in the same geographical space at different times, he demonstrates an evolution from the 12th century to the 19th century. Over time the widened sense of the specific place-name binds each lighthouse to a sense of a place on the sea/shore. The phrases *It was indeed the Casquets Lighthouse*, *but the Casquets Lighthouse was not like this one*, and *the Casquets Lighthouse is useful* are opaque enough to refer to either lighthouse. They are distinct, but because some of the same comments can be applied to both, they undergo a process of assimilation. The temporal influence of towers, lanterns, and mechanisms on the narrative is only the beginning. The iron trellis and fire on a rock were *like* the ones Henry I had established in the 12th century. The old Casquets lighthouse does not have a point of origin; the momentum of the chapter suggests that it could have existed even earlier than the Middle Ages. Whereas the 19th-century technology can be pinpointed in time, open braziers have been used to illuminate coasts around the world for thousands of years. Hugo's *vieux phare barbare* is an edifice that connects his narrative to the earliest and most primitive days of sea travel. The technological changes in these lighthouses inform a continuously renewing sea/shore. This continuous cycle makes lighthouse place as timeless as the sea.

Victor Hugo's digression provides greater access to the place it is focusing on than if it were in the narrative. By isolating it and understanding its history, the human connection to the lighthouse makes it a place. Seeing the continuous cycle of its gestation makes it all the more timeless. Brière writes that digressions like these encourage the reader to isolate the place outside of the narrative through "décrochements temporels qui isolent l'édifice dans une continuité histoirque" [temporal detachments that isolate the edifice in a historical continuity] (Brière 210). Timelessness of place in Victor Hugo's work often evokes a Romantic uchronia and an attachment to structures that have stood the test of time, like Notre-Dame de Paris, which he refers to as a human creation having a double character: "variété, éternité" [variety, eternity] (*Notre-Dame* 105). In *Le Moyen Age des romantiques* (2001), Isabelle Duran-Le Guern writes that "Certains lieux constituent pour les romantiques des espaces de rencontre privilégiés avec un Moyen Âge comme conservé au sein du présent" [some places constitute for the romantics special places to meet with a preserved Middle Ages in the present] (Duran-Le Guern 260). Looking back at these places, she writes, erases the movement of history and revolutionary fractures (261). The use of time in Hugo's narration does this, although not through erasure. Through Hugo's digression and the expression of time over

different narrative distances the contemporary lighthouse is folded into the timeless one through the shared space. Through this narrative perspective, according to Duran-Le Guern, Hugo creates characters that seem to "vivre hors du temps" [live untouched by time/are timeless] (261). The lighthouse lives on in the same way.

While evolving and changing, lighthouses retain a timelessness of presence and of function that bolsters that of the sea/shore. In these waters, Hugo writes, the lighthouse is only as good as the state of one's vessel: "A un navire en manoeuvre, pourvu de toutes ses ressources de gréement, et maniable au pilote, le phare des Casquets est utile. […] A un navire désemparé il n'est que terrible" [To a ship at sea with all its rigging that its captain can control, the Casquets Lighthouse is useful. […] To a ship lost at sea it is nothing less than horrendous] (Hugo, *Homme* 180). If one's ship is damaged, its relationship to the lighthouse changes. In these cases, the beacon cannot save, guide, or communicate, it is there to *montre l'endroit suprême* [to point out the final resting place] (Hugo, *Homme* 180). At once echoing and inverting the candlestick image from "Night," Hugo writes that the lighthouse is "la chandelle du sépulchre" [the burial candle] (180). These situations present what Hugo calls a *tragic irony*: the lighthouse is there and it cannot help. This feeble hopelessness could be attributed to a number of biographical points from Hugo's life including his near 20-year exile or his daughter's death by drowning. But 30 years before writing *L'Homme qui rit*, he wrote "Night" which portrays a similar sentiment. In the poem the sailors are bailing out water and fighting with the air when the lighthouse appears. Then the light is covered by the fog. The poem ends with the menacing refrain: *Le vent de la mer // souffle dans sa trompe* [the sea wind // blows its horn]. The lighthouse is ineffective; the sea and wind are still raging. The fate of the sailors and their wrecked ship is unknown.

The lighthouse is constant, a monument marking the sea/shore. Through the "monumentalization of an ecological region," the place is made static (Casey, *Boundaries* 87). In Hugo's work, the sea, the shore, the lighthouse, the storm, and even the way ships wreck all have constant elements that make them timeless. Timelessness does not, however, mean stasis. The lighthouse's timelessness comes through outlasting proper names and technological change. Hugo anchors the place of the lighthouse at the *eventmental* edge of the sea/shore. The lighthouse is then reconsidered, re-memorialized, and, the sea/shore edge and its edifices are, for a time, static again. This is lighthouse place, a genre of a place, on the sea/shore. Everything within a genre has its own version. Hugolian lighthouse place is pragmatic. Throughout his life Victor Hugo observed this cycle, wrote about it, and saw through it.

Conclusion

The *eventmental* nature of the sea/shore continues in literary representation as in recent history. On March 16, 1978, the oil tanker *Amoco Cadiz* was caught in bad weather entering the English Channel. A strong wave hit the rudder and the crew lost control of the vessel. It eventually ran aground near Portsall, Finistère, Brittany, and split in two the next day, spilling over 200,000 tons of oil into the sea. As a response, projects for two new maritime safety structures were initiated: the "Aide majeure à la naviagation" [Chief Navigational Aide] and the Stiff Radar Tower (Fichou 422). The latter, constructed on the island of Ouessant, was the only one to come to fruition. It stands at more than 200 feet tall, nearly 400 above sea level. It more closely resembles an air traffic control tower than a lighthouse. The tower's position on the sea/shore dwarfs *Le Stiff*, one of the oldest lighthouses in France, built only a few years after Victor Hugo's *Matutina* sank. There has been a lighthouse of some kind at the top of this cliff since the 13th century.

Lighthouses as a technology have become a final means of geolocation following the advent of radar, GPS, and other maritime safety innovations. Nevertheless, Victor Hugo captured this cycle nearly a century before human-made catastrophic ecological events like the Amoco Cadiz oil spill were imaginable. The role of Hugo's fiction should not be undervalued in current maritime and ecological discussions. Bertrand Westphal wrote that fiction "actualise des virtualités nouvelles

inexprimées jusque-là, qui ensuite *interagissent* avec le reel" [updates new, yet-to-be expressed potentials that then *interact* with the real] (Westphal 171). There is interplay between Victor Hugo's shipwrecks and lighthouses and those in the 21ˢᵗ-century seascape. By establishing trends and patterns and symbols and by anchoring his lighthouse to the sea/shore, his thinking demonstrates an understanding of a timelessness of place, a *genre of place*.

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Notes

[1] It did not go unnoticed that Casey begins *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Undersatnding of the Place-World* with a maritime setting: "Think of what it would be like to be lost at sea, not only not knowing the way but also not knowing one's present place, where one is. […] It was an extremity experienced in many early sea voyages in the West […]" (*Place* 3). Hugo's response in the works studied in this essay would be to provide a lighthouse and see what happens next. As Casey continues, a British shipwreck in the English Channel means that "place had been lost" (3). This essay proposes that the opposite sets in motion a cycle that provides an opposite result.

[2] While this does refer to actual fires in older lighthouses, the term was retained and is still used today.

[3] Both Hugo and Carson delve into detail regarding local plant and animal life in the sea in other parts of their works. The stormy moments represent outlying moments of generality.

[4] *Pilot*s are region specific books designed to guide mariners through areas of the sea. They provide information on weather and currents, but also on touristic, cultural, and natural features of the area. A contemporary *Shell Channel Pilot*, for example, could guide a sailor through the sea so well known to Victor Hugo in exile.

[5] Only two of these lighthouses will be studied here. These are both situated on the Casquets rocks in the English Channel. The other is the 17th-century Eddystone lighthouse, another Channel structure, historically significant as the first lighthouse-at-sea, but spatially distant from both Casquets and the narrative. Of the three, this has attracted perhaps the most critical attention as the *baroque* lighthouse because of its lengthy architectural descriptions. While most of the few lighthouses that Hugo drew are officially untitled (despite more than two centuries scholarly and curatorial debate), there is a drawing of Eddystone that was copied from a book by Beverell that is exemplary of the style of Hugo's more straightforward artworks. It is as outlandish as the paragraph in *L'Homme qui rit*.

[6] As the optical technology became more sophisticated, so followed the lighthouse keeper. As this study seeks to connect Hugo's sea/shore and lighthouse place to their developments in the world that came after time, it is at the very least interesting that none of his lighthouses have keepers. There are people named as keepers, but they are not keeping the light when they appear in the poetry, prose, and drawings. The lighthouse is an edifice functioning, it would seem, on its own in these texts. This deviates from other 19ᵗʰ-century French writers. Émile Souvestre wrote *Le Gardien du vieux phare* in 1852 and Alphonse Daudet included them in his story "Le Phare des Sanguinaires" in *Lettres de mon moulin* (1887).

[7] *This one* being the eccentric and baroque Eddystone.

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