

Knowing Simone

Three lives: the lived life, the reflective life, and the historical life, the mystery of each other, the breaking of taboos, the need for each other and the power of historical forces to impinge on, shape and determine lives. It's about what people 'believe' they are doing, and what afterwards, they discover they were really doing.

From Balzac's *Thirteen*

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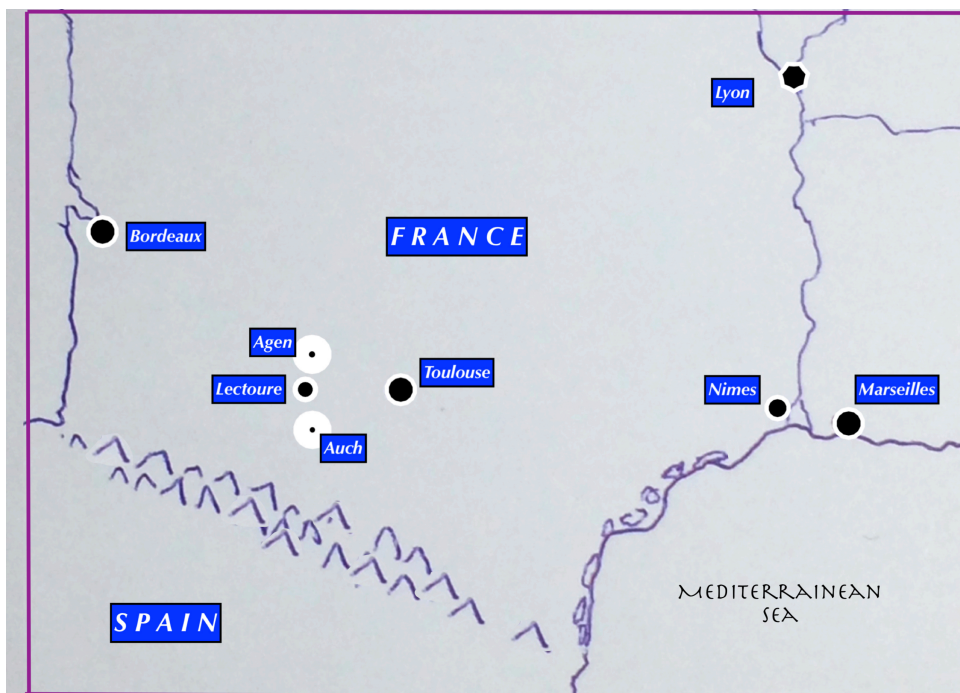
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Knowing Simone: Events Timeline

1848 Louis Napoleon Bonaparte III elected Second French Republic President.

1851 Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte stages a coup d'état. 200-400 people killed, 26,000 arrested, 9,530 sent to Algeria, 250 to the prison of Cayenne. Many thousands in exile.

1850s Napoleon's government imposes censorship and harsh repressive measures against opponents. Some six thousand were imprisoned or sent to penal colonies until 1859. In exile, Victor Hugo writes the widely-read (and banned) 'Napoleon the Little.'

1852 Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte declares himself Emperor, effectively a dictator.

1852-6 Crimean War: France and Britain formally declared war on Russia.

1850s New regime curbs most freedom of the press and assembly. The era saw great industrialization, urbanization, including the rebuilding of Paris by Baron Haussmann. Modernizes the French banking system. The French railway system expanded.

1857 Leon Gambetta studies Law in Paris. Called to the Bar two years later, he made little impression until 1868 when he defends the journalist Delescluze from Government prosecution. He became a national hero and republican President of France.

1860 Franco-Sardinian victory over the Austrian Empire, Second Italian War of Independence. The French Empire's reward is the possession of Nice and Savoy. French military forces defend the Papal States against annexation by other Italy states.

1863 An Opposition led by Adolphe Thiers gains forty seats in the elections.

1864 Nitro-glycerine explodes in Nobel's Stockholm factory, killing five people, including Nobel's brother, Emil. Over three years, Nobel invented and sells Dynamite.

1865 US Civil War ends.

1866 French intervention in Mexico fails.

1867 Emperor Napoleon III promises to restore rights to the Chamber, reform press supervision and allow public meeting rights. The changes are not enacted.

Main Characters

Simone, Lectoure's Parisian quarry owner

Patrice, surveyor, also known as Robert LeMott.

Mimi, town waif.

Claude, mute secretary to Simone.

Marie Cambrai, patisserie-shopkeeper.

Sub-Prefect Hambouff, 'police chief', Lectoure.

Marie Hambouff, wife of the Sub-Prefect.

Blanchir, freelance gendarme and bounty-hunter.

Minister Jessai, Minister for Railways, Napoleonist Regime.

Leon Gambetta, lawyer, later French President.

The Three Musketeers: Jean-Louis, Marcel and Maurice.

KNOWING SIMONE

Part One

‘All Saints Day,’ said Papa, ‘I’m staying indoors.’

‘But why?’

‘Because it’s cold outside, and if I spy Marseilles’ miserable faces, my day will be ruined.’

I wish I had. A short distance from home, under a street lantern, a thin-faced figure looked at me and said, ‘You!’

Taking it as a bad omen, I turned and ran, dashing over the cobblestones into a dim lane. As the city’s tortured buildings bore down on me, the tiger behind hurried around the corner and kept coming. Our urine-encrusted lanes and piles of horse manure usually defeated the authorities, but not this one.

‘Stop.’

Damned if I will.

His boots were louder than mine, sturdier too. If he insisted on chasing me down back streets, my familiarity with narrow, hostile lanes would test his resolve. No gendarmes joined the chase so what chance did he have? I’d outrun him, take him into uncharted territory where refuse blocked narrow gaps between buildings, and rogues waited for easy pickings from lost citizens.

My boots troubled me. There was no time to remove them, and nowhere dark enough to hide from his bad breath. I’d make-do.

With no soles to speak of, one slip and –

Over I went, crashed into a barrel and slid over greasy refuse. I rolled and raised myself, my pursuer’s heavy steps bearing down on me.

Not this.

I couldn’t be caught.

Grabbed by my coat front and punched, I turned fell to ground and readied to battle my pursuer. His breath was worse than I thought. The figure had a face, and the news was not good. In the weak, lantern light of this street corner –

Blanchir.

The very man who dedicated himself to finding me growled. A fellow not much older than myself had a pistol in his hand, and it pointed at me.

Mon Dieu! He'll kill me.

No arrest required, only a carcass. How he came to shoot me did not concern the authorities. My bounty came to any man who brought me to their cells, dead or alive.

All or nothing.

I threw my weight and all my strength at him, my left arm attacking his right. I had to disarm him. As he lay entangled in garbage, his sword was not easily reached or readied.

Argh!

My enemy fell back from the force of my lunge, too slow to fire. I grappled and pushed, punched and scratched like my life depended on it. It did.

In the darkness, we fought hand to hand, his weapon lost or in his fist. If the gun were the old flintlock, it could only fire when cocked. If it were the new hand pistol, it had one shot.

Bang.

‘Merde. Merde.’

He was down and cursing, yet,

‘Stop, or I’ll shoot.’

Was he wounded or not? A gun in his hand? Ignorant of what he possessed, and whether it fired, I wouldn’t stay to find out. I ran.

No shot. Cursing.

He’s bluffing.

Turned towards him without stopping, ‘See you in Hell, Blanchir.’