

Antoine Paul Mahalin (b. Epinal, 17 January 1828; d. Paris, 20 March 1899) was a popular novelist, and journalist. A number of his novels reused characters created by Alexandre Dumas (D'Artagnan, Porthos, Aramis, Monte-Cristo) and Paul Féval (Lagardère). Vidocq, ou la Belle limonadière was first a novel which Mahalin published in 1884. It was based on the historical character of Madame Romain, who had already been featured by Balzac in César Birotteau (1837). Then it became a 5-acts drama, co-written with Louis Péricaud, and first performed at the Théâtre de l'Ambigu on 20 July 1894. Louis Jean Péricaud (b. La Rochelle, 10 June 1835; d. Paris, 12 November 1909) was a very successful playwright, but also a historian of the theater, a director, and even an actor.

VIDOCQ AND THE LEMONADE GIRL

by Paul Mahalin & Louis Péricaud.

CHARACTERS

VIDOCQ a.k.a. M. JULES
COCO-LACOUR
YVRIER
M. DE BERGONDE
ROLAND
SABINE
MADAME MAZEROLLES
GEORGES MAZEROLLES
JACQUES LEBRUN
HELENE LEBRUN
M. COURTOIS
MADAME MADOU
NAVET
VAILLANT
BRIGITTE LIEGEOIS
ANNETTE CHEVASSU
AUGUSTE
A RAG PICKER
A LAMPLIGHTER
A CLERK
TWO COPS
AN OLD GENTLEMAN
A DOCTOR
MEN AND WOMEN OF THE PEOPLE, DINERS, SOLDIERS, ETC.

The action takes place in Paris in 1823.

ACT I *SCENE I*

THE RUE DES MAÇONS-SORBONNE¹

On one side, the hotel Mazerolles, a huge, lordly lodging with an immense coach-door and high windows near the audience. Mid stage, a café.

Near the audience on the opposite side, a cabaret with the sign “Courtois, wine merchant.” Further back, a grocery with windows, boxes of candles, and sugared bread in wooden boxes. Further still, on the same side, a butcher shop. Adjacent and usable streets.

AT RISE, it is mid-night. The café alone is lit up. A Lamplight hangs across the stage. Shops and windows, closed.

Courtois is shutting the blinds of his establishment. Passers-by cross at the back. Annette arrives from a street near the cabaret, and takes leave of some acquaintances who accompany her, and leave in various directions. Annette heads for the hotel.

COURTOIS: Heavens, Mamselle Annette.

ANNETTE: Good evening, neighbor. You’re closing up your establishment already?

COURTOIS: Hell, since we are in the year of grace 1823, His Majesty Louis XVIII reigns in the Tuileries, it’s only the lemonade vendors who provide consumers with the means of getting drunk after mid-night, while as for us simple wine merchants—but you neighbor, so late in the street?

ANNETTE: Just imagine, I’m coming from the theater. I saw them play *Victor, the Child of the Forest*.² Oh, how much fun we had! We wept all the time.

COURTOIS: Truly?

ANNETTE: Now I must rush to go in before M. Jacques Lebrun brings back my mistress from her old friend on the Rue Hautefeuille, where she went, as she does every night, to play Boston.

COURTOIS: M. Jacques Lebrun, the supervisor, the factotum of the house. Ah, it’s he who serves as the cavalier to this good Madame Mazerolles. Well, what about Brigitte, her chambermaid who undertakes that duty?

ANNETTE: Brigitte obtained Madame’s permission to go to the Calf Sucking Tits to take part in a wedding dance with the niece of Butcher Vaillant, the supplier of our house, and God knows when she’ll be back! But I’m gossiping, and my Mistress’s table is not set. And then, I’m in a hurry to sleep and dream of Victor.

COURTOIS: You won’t have much time to dream—nights are short at the moment.

ANNETTE: Till tomorrow, M. Courtois.

COURTOIS: Till tomorrow!—we are done.

(He goes into his house humming. Sabine and Roland enter from the back.)

ROLAND: You see, my dear Sabine that I follow you with confidence—but yet once more: where are you taking me?

SABINE: Where I have business, my dear Roland.

ROLAND: Here? In the Rue des Maçons-Sorbonne? In front of this hotel where I lived like a son, and where I later was cast out, head bowed, read in my face, scolded like a child, and kicked out like a lackey?

SABINE: Yes, for having stolen a hundred crowns from Madame Mazerolles. She’s your godmother who since she became a multi-millionaire, no longer understands the appetites of youth.

ROLAND: And why did I commit this first sin? Because I loved you! Because you sing for a living in a dive at the Palais Royal, and I dreamed of taking you away from a precarious existence of running adventures, and creating a situation more worthy of you. Unfortunately, the meager resources that I took from this house were soon exhausted.

¹ Later absorbed into the Boulevard Saint-Germain and the Rue Champollion.

² *Victor, ou L’Enfant de la Forêt*, 3-act play by René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt (1773-1844) first performed at the Ambigu-Comique theater on 10 June 1798.

SABINE: And it's to put you afloat again that I decided to attempt a trick, which, it's true, I have no great confidence in.

ROLAND: A trick? At this hour? Here?

SABINE: If I succeed, you'll know what I have done.

ROLAND: And if you don't succeed?

SABINE: In that case, my poor friend we'll have to resign ourselves to a necessary separation.

ROLAND: A separation. Ah, you never loved me!

SABINE: You are mistaken; I do love you.

ROLAND: You?

SABINE: I love you to the degree that I'm astonished myself that this feeling was able to revive in a heart I thought dead. I love you without knowing why. Perhaps, because we have the same nature, the same passion, the same thirst for power, for luxury, for pleasure. Perhaps, in the end, because our two stars were destined to shine with the same dazzle. The one that brings fortune or to extinguish in some dark catastrophe.

ROLAND: But, if you love me, why refuse to belong to the man towards whom all joins to carry you away, to the man who, since he met you, asks on his knees to give himself completely to you, to possess you, and would be capable of anything, even crime?

SABINE: My darling, because I don't want our first night of marriage to be framed in a hovel. Because I don't want that worry over the future slip between the intoxication of our kisses. Because a love made of two poverties is quick to change into regret and reproaches. Finally, because I don't wish to give myself today if the necessities of life will oblige me to take myself back the next day.

ROLAND: You are right. It's necessary to be rich. Rich at any price. Rich by any means.

SABINE: Do you have the means?

ROLAND (considering): Hold on—a last hope. See that house? (pointing to the café)

SABINE: That house?

ROLAND: Under the appearance of being moderate and calm, it's a dive, where, when I was living at the Hotel Mazerolles, I turned my first card, and won my first sou. I've got two sous left. I kept them to be able to offer you every morning that bouquet of red carnations with which you love to perfume your corsage.

SABINE: And you want to gamble them?

ROLAND: Luck is smiling on me, I'm sure of it. First of all, I've discovered an infallible plan. Yes—soon a heap of gold will be amassed before me.

SABINE: In that case go, but don't return with a new deception.

ROLAND: You won't go with me?

SABINE: I told you—I've got business that keeps me here. I'll finish it while you are playing.

ROLAND: You'll stay alone, at night, in this deserted neighborhood?

SABINE: I won't be alone since I'm waiting for someone, and you know, I'm not a little girl.

ROLAND: Then, till later, since you wish it—(starting to walk away) But, since you won't be at my side to bring me luck, give me something that will! (He points to her bouquet.) One of those flowers which feels your beating heart.

SABINE: Here. (listening) I think I hear someone coming. Go.

(Roland puts the flower into his buttonhole and goes into the café.)

SABINE(looking): There she is. Ah, the Intendant is accompanying her.

(She goes close to the door of the hotel. Jacques Lebrun and Madame Mazerolles enter. Jacques gives his arm to the old lady, and holds his lantern in his hand.)

JACQUES (grumbling): My sacred word! Madame, you are not reasonable. To go back after curfew. Really you deserve to spend the night at the police station.

MADAME MAZEROLLES: Don't scold me, my good Jacques. Hours pass so quickly when one talks about the past. The time when one was young, gay, carefree, loveable and when my old friend and I start getting deep in memories—

JACQUES: That's it, useless for the clock to tick—by then, you are too tired to go home.

MADAME MAZEROLLES: It's true. I'll have a bad day tomorrow.

JACQUES: By Jove, here you are at home! But, as for me, I live near the Palais du Luxembourg. And what must my beautiful Helene think, not seeing her father come home? You have your key?

MADAME MAZEROLLES (giving it to him): Here it is.

(Jacques goes to the door and bumps into Sabine.)

JACQUES: Who's there? (raising his lantern) A woman?

MADAME MAZEROLLES: A woman? (recognizing Sabine) You!

JACQUES: The boss's daughter-in-law!

(He puts out the lantern and paces it by the coach door)

MADAME MAZEROLLES: What are you doing here in front of my house?

SABINE: I have to wait for you outside, since you refuse to receive me in your home... (leaning) ...Mother.

MADAME MAZEROLLES: I am not your mother! I forbid you to give me that name!

SABINE: Am I not the wife of your eldest son?

MADAME MAZEROLLES: Say rather, the widow of my son, of my poor son, Charles, whom you cheated on with lovers, whom you made very ridiculous, and the most unhappy of men, and who ended by dying of shame because of your disorders. You are no longer anything to me! And I refuse to receive you, I refuse to listen to you.

SABINE: All the same, you must listen to me, and this will be the last time I importune you.

JACQUES (intervening): See here, my little lady, this is neither the time nor the place to hold a conversation. It will soon be tomorrow! What the Devil—my mistress will consent to listen to you.

MADAME MAZEROLLES (excitedly): No! This woman will not cross the sill of my dwelling. She opened the door too much to everybody. And I won't open mine to her.

SABINE: Madame—

MADAME MAZEROLLES: If she really has something to say to me, let her say it and say it quick.

SABINE: So be it. I will be brief. Madame, you are rich and I am poor.

MADAME MAZEROLLES: Ah, I understand. You are coming to demand money from me. As if I hadn't given you enough—which didn't prevent you dragging the name of your husband through the mud with venal favors and high priced tendernesses. But those days are over. To encourage vice with my own money, my God! Strike that out of your papers, my sweet.

SABINE: You are going to let me starve to death?

MADAME MAZEROLLES: That's better than living the way you live!

SABINE: You refuse me the alms of a scrap of bread?

MADAME MAZEROLLES: I don't wish to do harm to true indigents.

SABINE: That's your last word?

MADAME MAZEROLLES: The final and only word. When I play cards, I never take my card back.

SABINE (striding toward her): My sweet mother-in-law, watch out!

JACQUES (getting between them): All in vain! You're forgetting I'm here.

SABINE: M. Jacques Lebrun, I am not speaking to you.

JACQUES: That's possible. But if you threaten my mistress, this old dog growls and shows his teeth. It's idle for you to glare at me with that set of pistols. Although, I know you and what you are capable of—it was you who ruined the unfortunate Roland.

MADAME MAZEROLLES: Roland, my god-son—it's she who—

JACQUES: Hey, yes, by Jove. She's the one who dug a gulf beneath the feet of that weak lad—into which she pushed his fantasies. She's the one who forced him to pile up debt upon debt, until you were forced to kick him out of the house—where he'd deceived your trust. She turned him into a debauchee, an ingrate, a thief—and perhaps will do worse.

MADAME MAZEROLLES: Oh! The slut! the slut! Get out! Do you hear—and tell your lover to leave, let him leave Paris, let him go to the colonies and repurchase his past with a new life. At that price, he can hope that I will forgive him one day. But, if he resists my orders, beware in your turn. And remember—remember carefully that there is forced labor for thieves, and a penitentiary for prostitutes. Goodnight, Jacques! I no longer need you, because Annette must be waiting for me.

(She goes into the Hotel.)

JACQUES (closing the door and picking up his lamp): Goodnight, my dear Mistress. (passing before Sabine) Madame, I don't bow to you.

(He leaves in a different direction from the way he came.)

SABINE: Rejected! Insulted! Threatened! Decidedly, it's she who's asking for it.

(Roland comes slowly out of the café. A window is lit on the first floor of the Hotel Mazerolles.)

SABINE: My poor friend, I see from your somber air that you were no luckier than I.

ROLAND: Ah, you—

SABINE: Madame Mazerolles saw me without pity—

ROLAND: Madame Mazerolles! You addressed yourself to her.

SABINE: Yes. I attempted to get you back in her good graces. I begged. I wept. But all failed against her bull-headedness. Here's the ultimatum from your sweet god-mother. You must go immediately to some port from which a ship will take you three or four thousand leagues from France, if you don't wear some uniform on your back, if you don't do penitence in the end—

ROLAND: Well?

SABINE: Well—she will have you arrested.

ROLAND: So—it's exile or prison, the camp or the galleys, the cap of a soldier or the helmet of a galley slave!

SABINE: You're in this woman's power. Remember, a word fallen from her mouth can ruin you. At any cost you know how to obtain her pardon.

ROLAND: Me, submit? Leave! Come off it! I'd prefer to break my head on the pavement. The chain gangs aren't as far from Paris—which is my life, because you live here, as the colonies.

SABINE: Oh, as for me, my darling—it's nothing less than a question of locking me up, like you.

ROLAND: Locking you up because of me?

SABINE: In a penitentiary with ruined girls.

ROLAND: They would dare! Why, then we must flee! Both of us must flee!

SABINE: And what will we do for money?

ROLAND: It's true. We are without resources! (enraged) Oh, the means, the means to procure our escape from the will of that woman!

SABINE: The means—there is one. And the money—it's there. (She points to the window.)

ROLAND (shaking): A theft!

SABINE: Didn't you demand of her strong box what your god-mother's avarice refused you? You know the secret of that strong box. Look—the light just went out. Madame Mazerolles has gone to sleep.—You've kept the key to the door?

ROLAND (repeating): A theft!

SABINE (very coaxing): Didn't you say just now that for me you would be capable of a crime? Well—the time has come to prove if you love me! Do you want me?

ROLAND (entwining her): Sabine!

SABINE(releasing herself): Then get going. A bit of courage, and I am yours. Yours, without reserve—forever, for life.!

ROLAND (still hesitating): My God!

SABINE (pushing him towards the hotel): Once again—be a man! Tonight or never!

ROLAND: Well, so be it!

(He goes to the door and opens it with a key that he pulls from his pocket.)

SABINE (leaning on his shoulder): And think that it's your mistress who awaits you!

(Roland goes in and shuts the door behind him.)

SABINE: Finally!