

Benôit Vidal

*Pauline
à Paris*



*Éditions
Hbhb*

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PAULINE IN PARIS

Benoit Vidal

For a long time now, Josephine, who is a hundred years old, has been telling her grandson, the author, about the story of Pauline, which is worthy of a novel by Victor Hugo. The heroine, a Parisian maid in the 1900s, has an adventure with a handsome, moustachioed young man who disappears after getting her pregnant. Forced to abandon her daughter, she meets a man thirty years older than her who, touched by her story, decides to help her retrieve the child...

Using recordings of conversations with his grandmother, and taking notes of the variations in her story, Benoit Vidal investigates in the hope of filling in the blanks and uncovering the facts. This fotonovella opens up his family album and, through the use of period paintings and newspaper imagery, helps a lost world come to light: By telling Pauline's story, Josephine is offering us a rare insight into the history of France from the end of the 19th to the beginning of the 20th century.



A very original book that's impossible to put down and reads like a family album.

AUDE LAVIGNE, FRANCE CULTURE, 13/11/15

Inrockuptibles

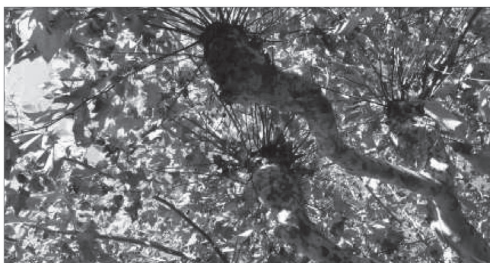
Well-written, sensitive, both a family tale and a tribute to popular literature (...) this story asks sensible questions about transmission and memory, about fact and fiction. And wonderfully unites these two women, whose lives are so ordinary and yet so moving.

ANNE-CLAIRE NOROT, LES INROCKUPTIBLES, NOVEMBER 2015



The Author

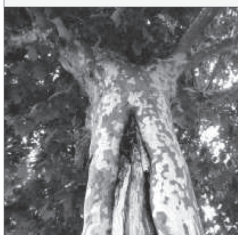
Benoit Vidal was born in 1968 in Paris. He started reading comic books at a very early age. As a student, he took part in several fanzines. His interests lie equally in travelling as in teaching and research, and he now works as a lecturer in management schools. Josephine is Benoit Vidal's grandmother. She has always enjoyed telling stories. The year of her hundredth birthday, the author went to visit her regularly in Toulouse, where she now lives. He recorded their conversations, and took pictures of her on her patio, in front of the plane tree that has watched over her since she was born. Josephine left us in the summer of 2015. She was 106 years old.



Toi le platane,
t'es pas bien beau...



... t'es même fendu !



T'es pas bien grand...



... t'es même tondu !



T'es pas plus laid que tes camarades
sur cette place du foirail.



C'est là que se tenait le marché
aux bestiaux dans le temps...



... il y a cent ans.

You're not looking your best, are you, old plane-tree? // Look, you even have a crack down the middle! // You're not very tall... // ...and you're been shaved! // You're not any uglier than your fellow trees on Foirail square. // This is where the livestock market used to be... // ...a hundred years ago.



You've been here over a hundred years, so you've been through a lot. // It was the cattle's ropes that injured you on this square. // My grandmother Josephine says it was the lightning... // Josephine is more than a hundred years old. You know Josephine well, you've heard her stories very often. // So if you could talk, you'd be able to tell me a few yourself. // About Pauline for example. // You knew her well!



Elle habitait au bout
de cette rue des Carrelots,
devant laquelle tu montes la garde.



Et son mari, le Parisien, tu l'as vu,
n'est-ce pas ? Il a bien existé ?



Ce n'est pas une invention née de
l'imagination d'une jeune fille ?



Si tu pouvais parler, tu pourrais m'aider à discerner la
part du vrai de celle du faux dans cette histoire...



...dans cette histoire de Pauline
racontée par Joséphine.

Joséphine me l'a racontée plusieurs fois,
ici-même, sur la terrasse, sous tes branches.

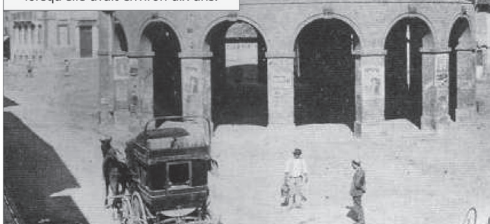


Cette histoire plonge
ses racines à la fin
du 19ème siècle.

Mais pour Joséphine,
elle débute par une rencontre...



...un beau jour vers 1920,
lorsqu'elle avait environ dix ans.



She lived at the end of Carrelots street, where you stand guard. // And her husband, the Parisian, you saw him didn't you? Did he really exist? // He wasn't just a figment of the young girl's imagination? // If you could speak, you could help me this story straight... / The story of Pauline, as told by Josephine. // Josephine told it to me several times, right here on this patio, under the branches. / This story dates back to the end of the 19th century. // but for Josephine, it started with a chance meeting... // ...one fine day around 1920, when she was about ten years old.

À l'époque, Joséphine n'habitait pas dans cette maison.



Elle habitait un peu plus loin, avec ses parents, à Maroule, sur la route qui mène au bois de Rieumes.



Mais elle venait ici voir ses grands-parents.



PLACE
DU FOIRAIL



Et c'est peut-être ici, sur cette place, qu'elle a rencontré pour la première fois Pauline...



...et le « Monsieur »...



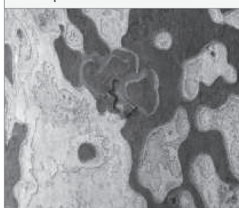
... le « Parisien »...



...qui fera tant d'effet sur Joséphine.



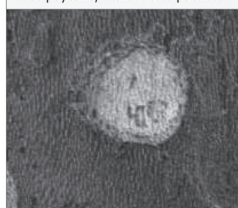
Mais n'allons pas trop vite, et commençons par le commencement.



Il était une fois une petite fille qui s'appelait Pauline.



Elle était née près de Paris, dans les années 1870, et ses parents, des paysans, étaient très pauvres.

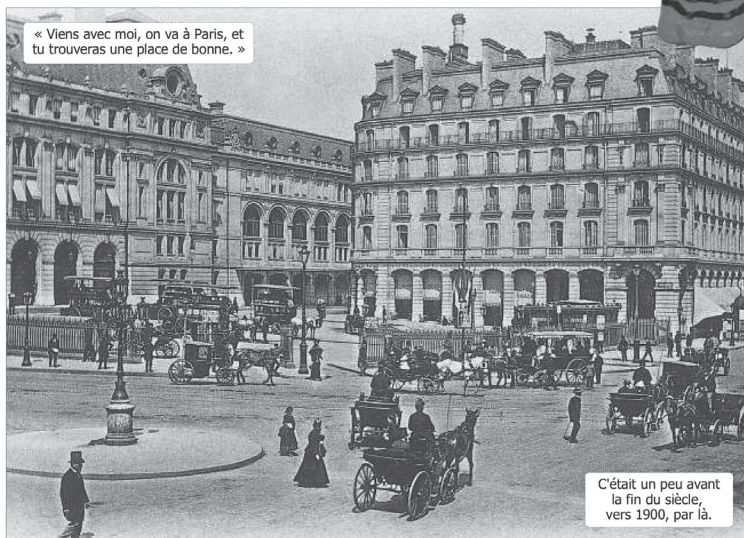
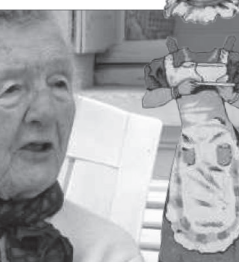


Josephine didn't live in this house at the time. // She lived a little further on, with her parents, in Maroule, on the road to the forest of Rieumes. // But she used to come here to see her grandparents. // Foirail Square // And it might be here that she first met Pauline... // and the "gentleman"... / ...the "Parisian"... // Who made such an impression on Josephine. // But let's not get ahead of ourselves, let's start at the beginning. // there was once a little girl named Pauline. // She was born not far from Paris in the 1870s. Her parents were farmers, and were very poor.



PRINTEMPS

Spring



It's the story of a young girl who lives near Fontainebleau, not far from Paris, in the Seine-et-Marne department / Her name is Pauline. // Then the father died, and the mother was getting old... // so a friend of hers says "Look, there's no work in the countryside, you'll never find a job..."// "I'm the servant, I do the housework and run errands..." // "Come with me to Paris and you can work as a maid." / It was just before the end of the century, somewhere around 1900.



Because in Paris, all the great houses have maid's rooms. / On the top floor, under the roofs. // Nowadays, anybody can rent them. // Back then, the people of the house were entitled to a maid. // So in the evening, all the young maids met up on the seventh floor. / There was a shared sink, and just one shared toilet. // So Pauline replies: "If you find a place, let me know." / "I'll come to Paris..." // "...but Paris is so big, I'll be afraid in Paris, all alone!" // "But we're not alone, there's many of us..." // In the end the friend managed to convince her. / Her mother says "Watch out! Be careful!" // "You're twenty years old now (or twenty-one, I can't remember...), you need to know your way around Paris..." // And she answers "of course..." / And there you go!



She arrives in Paris with her little suitcase. // There's a woman waiting for a maid. // She gets introduced. / "Right, she's called Pauline, she's very clean, she's good at housecleaning, she'll meet all your needs." // And that's it! The lady of the house is very pleased. // And that's how she moved in.



The lady says “well done, you’re good at cleaning, and there, the grocery shop is here...” / “The Bakery is here...” // “You can ask your friends, the other maids, for help. You should become friends with them...” // She gets to know the friends... / ...seven or eight of them, can’t remember... / ...right, very well... // And there she goes, off to a good start. // And then you know, at the end of the week, all the girls would go dancing. // They went out on Saturday nights and Sundays. The rest of the time, they had to work. // So anyway, one Sunday, her friends tell her: // “put on your prettiest dress, we’re going dancing.” / “We know some young men... We’ll find a partner... We know what to do...”



“So why don’t you come to the ball with us?” // “But I don’t know how to dance, I’m from the country...” // “Oh! Listen, if you’re in Paris, you’ve got to make the most of it! Right, come one...” // So anyway, in the end they manage to convince her. // And one Sunday, she gets all dressed up... // And she was pretty as well, of course. // The first day she went to the ball, all the young maids were dancing... // ...and there she was, poor thing, didn’t know anyone. // Then all of a sudden, this handsome young man... // ...he was a combat instructor, he gave fencing lessons... // ...a fine man, handsome face, very young... // he asks her: “miss, would you care to dance?”



So: "But sir, I don't know how to dance, please don't bother" // "I'm waiting for my friends, please don't bother." // "Well, I'll teach you myself!" // And so they dance. // And he taught her how to dance. // "There you go, like this..."



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