HUGO THE NOVELIST.

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Bibliography

1. "Johnson's Cyclopedia"
2. Saintsbury, "Short History of French Littérature" pp. 521-527
4. Demogeot, "Histoire de la Littérature Française" pp. 640-660
7. Béré, "Victor Hugo après 1830" Tome I et II
8. " " " " avant "
10. Robert Louis Stevenson, "Familiar Studies of Men and Books" pp. 643
11. C. Renouvier, "Victor Hugo, le Poète"

* All the references made to Saintsbury in this thesis are made to his "Short History of French Littérature"
Victor Marie Hugo was born at Besançon on February 26, 1802, his father was an officer of distinction in Napoleon's army; his mother was of Vendean blood and a staunch royalist. Son of a general of the empire he led a rather wandering life, moving from France to Italy and from Italy to Spain, but he received nevertheless the foundation for an excellent education.

Returning to Paris Hugo was placed in a school.
preparatory for "l’École polytechnique" but in 1818 after several successful efforts in verse, Hugo abandoned his polytechnical studies and devoted himself entirely to literature.

In his writings Hugo has confined himself to no particular field, he has been by turn poet, literary critic, dramatist and novelist: it is as a novelist that we shall here consider him.

The titles of Hugo’s principal novels together with their dates of publication are as follows — "Hans d’Ieland" (1823), "Bug Jargal" (1826), "Notre Dame de Paris" (1831), "Les Misérables" (1862), "Les Travailleurs de la Chêne" (1866), "L’Homme qui Rit" (1869) and "Quatre Vingt-Trois" (1874).

1. "M. Ouval’s Histoire de la Littérature Française" pp. 269
2. "M. Ouval pp. 272-273
The first two novels published by Hugo, "Hans d'Island" and "Bug Jargal" are not generally considered by critics as his greatest; so that I will simply describe them briefly and then take up in the order of their publication a closer examination of the other five novels mentioned.

"Hans d'Island" published anonymously (1823) being the first of Hugo's romances was handled with much extravagance but with extraordinary force and picturesqueness, and describes the adventures of a bandit in Norway.

"Bug Jargal" published in book form in 1826, had appeared earlier in "L'Conservateurs Littéraire" to which Hugo was a contributor. Its plot is founded upon the negro insurrection in San Domingo during the year 1791. It is a prodigiously wild and improbable story, the fruit of an imagination young and exuberant.

"Notre Dame de Paris" the third of Hugo's romances is founded upon the customs and ideas of the Paris of the Middle Ages. The work may be said to treat of two themes, first it argues against the superstitions and religious dogmas of the fifteenth century, and second it pleads the cause of the Gothic Architecture as opposed to the Modern.

The plot of Notre Dame is I think one of the most intricate and fascinating of any which Hugo has produced, but it will be impossible to give an outline of it here. The principal characters are Quasimodo, Claude Frollo and La Esmeralda.

Quasimodo is to me the most pathetic character in the story, more pathetic even than the real use. Deformed and hideous in body but beautiful in many points of his character, Hugo has used him as an instrument for his great powers of antithesis. Quasimodo was himself one might say almost a living antithesis, but Hugo has used this his favorite method in Hugo's preface pp.V & VII de Huitième Edition.
in rhetoric not only in picturing the contrasts which existed in
Dorimodo himself, but also in comparing and contrasting
him with the great building which was his home.

In Claude Frollo we have I think the masterpiece of all
Hugo's psychological studies. In the youth Claude Frollo, Hugo
has pictured for us the ideal scholar of the Middle Ages. In him
he has centered all the great problems and superstitions which
at that time stirred men's minds in art, philosophy and
theology. In him Hugo has shown us the learned benevolent
dignified priest controlled by dogma and reason. But in the
older Claude Frollo, Hugo has changed the colors; he has shown
us the man in the priest, controlled by passion, overleaping
reason, cutting away dogma, and finally accomplishing
the ruin of himself and those about him, by a complete
yielding to the powers for evil which were within him.

I would hardly call La Esmeralda the heroine of
1 Livre quatrième, Chap. III
"Notre Dame de Paris." In fact, it is a story without a hero or a heroine. But nevertheless La Esmeralda is the character around which the chief interest of the story centers. It is through her influence that the other important characters are developed. Without her the pathetic story of the recluse would have been necessarily omitted; without her our interest in Quasimodo would have flagged, without her the great character study of Claude Frollo would have been impossible, and without her one of the authors apparent purposes in writing the work would have failed, for it was through her, through the touching story of her loneliness, innocence and tragic end that Hugo has been able to argue most powerfully against those superstitions and religious dogmas which controlled the minds of men and women in the Paris of the Middle Ages.

To consider now Hugo's treatment of Gothic Art, Hugo has continually mingled with the plot and put into the mouths of Stevenson pp. 55.
of several of his characters, short and often broken discourses upon the beauties of the Mediaeval Architecture. But not only has he intermingled these discussions but in three chapters he has almost entirely abandoned the plot in order to discuss this subject. The chapters referred to are, "Notre Dame de Paris a vol d'oiseau" and "Ceci tuera cela."!

In the first chapter mentioned Hugo describes minute by Notre Dame of the fifteenth century. In the second chapter mentioned Hugo takes us to the top of the tower of Notre Dame and there describes to us the art and architecture of Mediaeval Paris. In both chapters he compares the Modern Architecture to the Gothic and denounces the profanations which modern workmen have made upon the latter.

In the chapter "Ceci tuera cela," Hugo likens the edifice to the printed page. Architecture he tells us is one great granite

1 Stevenson pp. 38-39

Pellissier "Le Gouvement Littéraire au XIXe Siècle" pp. 92-94
book begun by the Orient, continued by antiquity grecian and roman, and reproducing by its every movement all the great epochs of history. Then he compares the power of architecture to the power of the printing press, and he proves that the latter will survive the former as a method of preserving thought; or, that "Ceci n’est pas cela" (this will kill that) the book will kill the edifice. This chapter I consider not only one of the best examples of Hugo’s powers of comparison, but I also think that from many points of view it is one of the finest, if not the finest chapter that Hugo has anywhere written.

Les Misérables was published in 1862. It was written while Hugo was an exile. In Les Misérables Hugo has discussed many questions of general interest. Was, the Paris streeturchin, insurrections, fallen woman-hood, the injustices of certain legal penalties for crime, and the power of love to reform the criminal, all these have been treated. 1 But they have been

1 Hugo’s preface to Les Misérables
treated from the standpoint of that great class of humanity whose labor and tears have helped to support the great social litter upon which many of us recline. 1

In his discussion of war, after describing the battle of Waterloo, Hugo shows us the dark side of war and the awful carnage which results. In the character of Gavroche Hugo gives us a pathetic picture of the trials, temptations, and dangers which beset the Paris street urchin. When describing the insurrection, Hugo has not only successfully carried the plot of his story, but he has also pictured in the strongest colors the nobility of character which exists in leaders and followers of insurrections, in other words he has set forth in bold relief many of the excellencies which exist in those elements which taken together form the mob.

The first volume of the series "Les Misérables" is called Fantine. It is the story of the reduction of a young girl Fantine.
of the disgrace which she suffered after her first fall, of her affection for her illegitimate daughter, of the injustice which she received at the so-called courts of justice, and finally of her death at the house of a magistrate who had befriended her.

Cosette, the illegitimate daughter of Fantine, is like La Cenerella the character around which many of the scenes of the story group themselves. Standing alone, Cosette is to my mind very little of a character, but placed as she is, she is very essential to the development of the other characters in the story, especially of Marius and of Jean Valjean.

Marius the successful suitor to Cosette is an important character, but the main character, the hero of the whole story, is Jean Valjean. In Jean Valjean, Hugo treats the two great problems which I have before mentioned, the injustices of many of the legal penalties for crime, and the power of man's love for man in reforming the criminal.

Stevenson pp. 555.
The story of Jean Valjean is the story of one of those unfortunate who when a youth had been sentenced to a long imprisonment for a very trifling offense against society. Returning home disgraced and discouraged, he was so badly received by his fellow countrymen, that he would have gone back into crime, had he not been lodged and treated with all kindness and confidence by an old bishop, whose benevolence had brought upon himself the nickname of "Monsieur Bebeur".

The treatment of the old bishop wholly changed Jean Valjean's purposes for life. He became henceforward a character wholly devoted to doing good. Changing his name and residence he acquired in due time both wealth and position and we next recognize him as mayor of a little village, using his fortune and office for the betterment of his fellows. He it was who had befriended the unfortunate Fantine and he it was who had assumed the care and protection of Cosette.
But the remembrance of a crime and the falsehood and insecurity of living under an assumed name were with Jean Valjean the sources of a constant torture, and his life was throughout one of tempest within and of profound tranquillity without.

The character of Jean Valjean is, I think, like many of Hugo's characters more ideal than real, in that it is far nobler character than one would be likely to find among men. But in exaggerating the character Hugo has succeeded not only in giving greater interest to the plot, but in bringing out more clearly his ideas upon the subject which he is discussing, namely the treatment of the criminal.

Professor Mangansarian in a lecture delivered some time ago in Chicago said "In "Les Miserables" Victor Hugo discussed the most important problem of our age—the treatment of the criminal. In Jean Valjean we are made to see the disastrous effects of penal institutions. The poet condemned
the society which sentences a man who steals a loaf of bread to five years in the galleys and subjects him to a social damnation which terminates only in his death.

In the generous and humane treatment which Mr. Wellesley accorded is foreshadowed the ideal society of the future. In one picture we see the laws trampling down men and women in the dust, (wrecking their hopes, blighting their virtues?) and branding them with infamy; in the other we see the new laws dictated by wisdom and humanity, lifting up the fallen, supporting the tottering, and redeeming the lost. Hugo seems to throw the entire responsibility for crime upon society. The modern school of criminologists taking Darwinism for a basis considers crime as a natural phenomenon.

According to Hugo the most effective punishment we can inflict upon a criminal is to love him. He can resist his fetters, he cannot resist the love of his fellowmen.
If you would save the world love it. How to punish crime and save the criminal is a problem worthy of the highest talents we possess. That crime must be punished is generally admitted, but should we continue to administer a punishment which withers the criminal? The experience of Voltaire proves that it is a most serious thing to commit a crime once out of line with society and the moral law; it is exceedingly difficult to re-join back to righteous and order.

Summing up the testimony of the various critics, and especially that of the one last quoted, *Les Miserables* may be defined vaguely as the expression of a great moral purpose. That purpose was to depict, defend and deliver by all the powers of rhetoric which the author possessed, that great underclass of humanity which he has called by the title of his work "Les Miserables" (The Miserables) of Paris.

"Les Travailleurs de la Mer" was published in 1866. The
scene of the story is the scene of Hugo's banishment, in and about the island of Guernsey. "Religion, society, nature; these are the three struggles of man.... The mysterious difficulty of life springs from all three. Man has to deal with obstacles, under the form of superstition, under the form of prejudice, and under the form of the elements. A triple necessity weighs upon us, the necessity of dogmas, the necessity of law, the necessity of things. In "Notre Dame de Paris" the author has denounced the first; in "Les Misérables" he has pointed out the second; in this book he indicates the third. 1

The time of the story "Les Travailleurs de la Mer" was about 1820, about the time that Fulton's steam-boat was beginning to be used for commerce. Hugo pictures the inhabitants of Guernsey as being very superstitious at that time, and he tells us of the fear with which they...

1 Preface to "Les Travailleurs de la Mer."
regarded this great "Devil-Boat" as they named it.

Finally however after noting the success of the marine-machine and the service which it rendered to the inhabitants of the island, there came a time when with the exception of a very few persons it was not only tolerated but admired.

The owner of this first steam-boat, the "Durande" was according to Hugo an old sailor called Mess. Lethierry. The "Durande" was Mess Lethierry's fortune, but owing to the treachery of the commander of the vessel M. Clabin, the Durande was wrecked on one of the rocks near Guernsey.

The fortune of Mess Lethierry seemed lost when Déruchette his niece and the prettiest girl upon the island gave her promise to marry the man who would rescue the machinery contained in the Durande. The man who undertook and accomplished the task, although afterward failing to win the pretty Déruchette, was one Gilliat.
The difficulties which Gilliatte overcame in carrying out his purpose make up the great part of the story. It is here that Hugo has depicted the struggle of a man against the mighty forces of nature, against the great force of gravitation, against the air and the sea in motion, and against that powerful and horrible animal which inhabites the sea, the octopus or devil-fish.

1. One figure of Gilliatte upon that rock is a sublime picture. On the one hand are the expanse, the waves, the winds, the lightnings, the meteors; on the other a man. On the one side the sea on the other a soul. On one is infinite, on the other an atom. 2. His defiance of the elements reminds one at once of King Lear, only Lear's defiance was the unavailing defiance of madness, Gilliatte was the availing defiance of mind and hand acting in obedience to the laws of nature.

In "Les Travailleurs de la Mere" is to be found Hugo's grand masterpiece, his description of the struggle with the afore mentioned octopus. It is in this description I think that Hugo's powers of antithesis and of dramatic situation are shown in their strongest light.

To my mind the plot of "Les Travailleurs de la Mere" is weak. Judging it in point of plot alone, it is I think without question inferior to any of Hugo's romances which I have read. But on the other hand judging it in point of variety of expression and of originality of conception, "Les Travailleurs de la Mere" can never I think be reckoned one of the least of those five great monuments of prose fiction which Hugo has erected.

"L'Homme qui Rit" published in 1869 is considered by critics as one of the best of Hugo's novels. "In L'Homme qui Rit, it was Hugo's object to denounce the aristocratic spirit."

1. Stevenson p.57 and 47 also Saintsbury pp.524
as it was exhibited in England."

There being no copies of "L'Homme qui Rit" in either the University or city library, I have not been able to make a personal examination of the work, hence will attempt no description of it. The following references which bear almost exclusively upon the subject will no doubt be valuable after one has read the work. 1.

"Quatre Vingt Treize" the last of Hugo's novels was published in 1874. The plot of the story is founded upon those events of the Revolution which occurred in France during the year 1793. Most prominent among these events and the one about which the story chiefly concerns itself being "The Counter-Revolution of La Vendée. The effect of this story upon the reader was to give him a more intense, more painful conception of the stern realities of war, and of the awful

1 Stevenson pp. 47-50.  Saintsbury pp. 524
sacrifice of personal ties and affections which was necessitated by the work. This work shows us the terrible brutality and the unrelenting fierceness with which the old kingdom, headed by the princes, resisted innovation, and on the other hand it shows us the horrible cruelty and unyielding purpose with which the commonalty, headed by Robespierre, Danton and Marat, fought for the so-called "Rights of Man" and the preservation of the Republic.

The principal characters of the story are the Marquis de Lanténa, the leader of the royalist forces in La Vendée, his nephew Gauvin, a commander of the Republican forces there, and Cimmounain commissioner from the Committee of Public Welfare.

In Lanténa put to flight against his nephew Gauvin, with the watchword "No Quarter!" between them which watchword was that of the French Revolution, we see family ties and blood relationship completely cut asunder by political
affiliations. In the tragic end of Gauvain and Cémoulin, we see the dearest bonds of friendship set at naught by the stern demands of duty. The story from beginning to end with few exceptions is the story of suffering, it is the story of war, of men of flesh turned into men of iron, and performing deeds of blood. The episode of the mother and the children, and the depiction of the character of Gauvain are the two softening influences in the story.

Both Stevenson and Mme. Duval fail to find a hero in any particular character of "Quatre Vingt Tétei" says Stevenson. "It is a novel built upon a sort of enigma" which was at that date laid before revolutionary France, and which is presented by Hugo to Tellmarch, to Landine, to Gauvain and very terribly to Cémoulin, each of whom gives his own solution of the question, clement or stern, according to the temper of his spirit. That enigma was this: "Can a good action be a bad action? Does not he who spares the
wolf kill the sheep? -- The interest of the novel centers about revolutionary France; just as the plot is an abstract judicial difficulty, the hero is an abstract historical force. 1. Says Mme. Durval "Quatre Vingt-Treize pictures the struggle between the royalty and the people; this is a romance without love and without a lover, the only hero is the Revolution." 2.

Such is the opinion of Stevenson and Mme. Durval, but it seems to me nevertheless that if we consider the romance in a somewhat narrower way, that is if we give ourselves over to a more careful scrutiny of and a greater sympathy with the characters, we will find that "Quatre Vingt-Treize" has a hero that hero is Gauvain.

In Gauvain we have courage, enterprise and manliness, those three main points of character which when united go to make the hero. Lanterne I think might be considered as a type of the old France, of the old nobility with its 1 Stevenson pp. 51-52 2. Mme. Durval pp. 273
despotism, its cruelty and traditions. Gauvain might on the other hand, be considered as a type of the new France with its hopes, its ideals, its possibilities.

In Vol. II, Bk. 7, chap. 1, Hugo has allowed the Marquis de Lavenue to speak in behalf of feudalism and royalty. In Vol. II, Bk. 7, chap. 5, Hugo has permitted Gauvain to speak in behalf of the coming France, in behalf of the "République of the Ideal," in behalf of that great terribile of civilization which the Revolution was then building under the scaffolding of barbarism and for which so much was accomplished during that memorable year after which Hugo has named his historical novel "Quatre Vingt Trente."

In conclusion I shall try to consider some of Hugo's main characteristics as a writer. To describe Hugo the writer briefly, he was a romanticist. The word romanticist is very vaguely applied and embraces some very different ideas, but nevertheless the romanticists had certain
principles which they followed more or less rigidly. These principles I shall try to define roughly showing in what manner Hugo conformed to them.

The first great principle of the romanticists was that they looked for freedom in art. They were opposed to the narrow classicism of the school of Ronsard and Malherbe, which set enthusiasm, love, liberty and poetry at naught; which believed that all lay in calculation, force of figures and the sword.

In three ways Hugo was loyal to this first great principle. In the first place he allowed no fixed forms of rhetoric to interfere in his judgment of a work: his sole criterion was L'ouvre est-il bon ou est-il mal? (The work, is it good or is it bad?) In the second place he indulged too often in anachronisms: this fault together with a certain carelessness

Pellissier pp. 82.
in regard to facts has called forth severe condemnation from certain critics. In the third place his works are an indication of his broad and enthusiastic sympathy for mankind, especially oppressed mankind.

The second great principle of the romanticists was that they were influenced by religion. Says Pellissier (page 83) "The principal fact which appears to us to dominate romanticism in its origine and in the most profound part of its development, is the rebirth of spiritualism, uniting by its natural affinities with the christian sentiment in the breast of society, before which all bands have seemed to be dissolved."

There can be no question but that Hugo was influenced by religion says Pellissier (page 85) "Victor Hugo considered religion not only as the deepest source of poetical inspirations..."

1 Stevenson pp. 50-51
2 Ivan Duval pp. 264
but as the highest form of human thought. His odes are penetrated with a spirit entirely catholic; he complains that the national poets of France, have been until this time pagan poets.

The third great principle of the romanticists was that they sought much of their inspiration in the art and legends of the Middle Ages. Says Démogoc1 (page 641) "The true Middle Age was studied, felt in its architecture in its chronicles, in its picturesque vivacity." This principle Hugo has followed very closely, the best example of it being his "Notre-Dame de Paris".

The fourth and last great principle of the romanticists which I shall mention, was that they turned to nature for much of their inspiration. "To convention, says Pellissier, pp. 49, it (the Romantic School) opposed nature, and it preferred a barbarity of Shakespeare to an ineptitude of Campistron."

We know that Hugo is true to this principle throughout his

1 Mme. Duval pp. 264.
works. The most prominent examples being "Bug Jargal" and "Les Travailleurs de la Mer."

But although Hugo was the leader and dictator in the Romantic Movement, it would be impossible to do any more than most widely classify the principles which controlled his pen. To be felt he must be read, to be understood he must be studied.

And when, if in after years our critical powers shall have become quickened by time, we shall look back upon these romances and shall see more clearly their defects, let us not blind our eyes to them, neither let us be indifferent to the good. Let us try to remember what they contain of the heroic, the tender and the strong, let us remember their beauty from end to end of divine and passionate love, and let us be glad that France has bequeathed to the world a king no less in romance than in song "Hugo the Novelist."