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Les Miserables, All in All: A Critical Study of Elements of the Romantic, the Realistic, the Psychological and the Historical Novel Found in Victor Hugo's "Les Miserables".

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LES MISÉRABLES, ALL IN ALL

A Critical Study of Elements of the Romantic,
the Realistic, the Psychological and the
Historical Novel found in Victor Hugo's
"Les Misérables"

by

Martha Virginia Sleet

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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1931

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FOREWORD

In submitting this thesis to the Faculty of the College of William and Mary, I wish to thank all those who have in any way aided me either by suggestion or by criticism in my task.

Martha Virginia Sleet.

INTRODUCTION

Many volumes have been written about Victor Hugo. Hugo the poet, Hugo the novelist, Hugo the dramatist, Hugo the romanticist, the realist, the psychologist has been analyzed and criticised, praised, and censured. But little is found that emphasizes the fact that Hugo excels in all these genres, that in one single work alone there are episodes, often running through many pages, which bear witness to the remarkable power of this author to write with equal ease romantic, realistic, psychological or historical prose. Lanson's "Histoire de la Littérature Française" calls attention to this versatility of Hugo in the following words:

(1) "C'est un monde, un chaos que ce roman, encombré de digressions, d'épisodes, de méditations, où se rencontrent les plus grandes, beautés à côté des plus insipides bavardages. Victor Hugo a réalisé là cette vaste conception que le drame étouffait: Tout dans tout, il a mêlé tous les tons, tous les sujets, tous les genres. Il y a des parties de roman historique: Waterloo, Paris in 1832, la barricade etc. L'ensemble est un roman philosophique et symbolique: d'abord c'est le poème du repentir, du relèvement de l'individu par le remords et l'expiation volontaire. Puis c'est un poème humanitaire et démocratique; en face du bourgeois, égoïste et satisfait, le peuple opprimé, trompé, souffrant, irrité, mourant, l'éternel vaincue; en face des vices des honnêtes gens, les vertus des misérables, des déclassés, d'un forçat, d'une fille. C'est un roman lyrique où s'étalent toutes les idées du penseur, toutes les émotions du poète, toutes les affections, haines, curiosités, sensations de l'homme; lyrique aussi par l'apparente individualité de l'auteur,

(1) Roman Historique: V. Hugo. "Histoire de la Littérature Française" par Gustave Lanson. Page 940.

qui s'est représenté dans son héros. L'insurgé Marius, fils d'un soldat de l'Empire, race de bourgeois, c'est bien visiblement le fils du général comte Hugo, le pair de France de Louis-Philippe qui est allé au peuple, et qui s'est fait le serviteur glorieux de la démocratie. Enfin, il y a même des chapitres de roman réaliste dans "Les Misérables"; on y trouve des descriptions de milieux bourgeois au populaires, de mœurs vulgaires ou ignobles, des scènes d'intérieur ou de rue, qui sont d'une réalité vigoureuse. Les vraies origines de M. Zola doivent se chercher bien plus dans 'Les Misérables' que dans 'Madame Bovary'.

Cette oeuvre immense, fastidieuse, ou ridicule par endroits, est souvent admirables. L'idée morale que Victor Hugo veut mettre en lumière, donne aux premiers volumes une grandeur singulière, et cette fois, le poète, si peu psychologue, a su trouver la note juste, marquer délicatement les phases, les progrès, les reculs, les angoisses et les luttes d'une âme qui s'affranchit et s'épure: Jean Valjean, depuis sa rencontre avec l'évêque, jusqu'au moment où il s'immole pour empêcher un innocent d'être sacrifié. Jean Valjean est un beau caractère idéalisé, qui reste vivant et vrai.

Autour de lui, le poète a groupé une innombrable foule de figures poétique ou pittoresque angélique ou grimaçantes, amusantes ou horrible: la psychologie est courte, souvent nulle; mais ici encore les profils sont puissamment, dessinés, les costumes curieusement coloriés. Comme dans 'Notre-Dame de Paris', les tableaux d'ensemble sont supérieurs à la description des individus: si les amours de Marius et Cossette sont de la plus fade et banale élégie, l'insurrection fournit une large narration épique. Par malheur, le symbolisme prétentieux de l'oeuvre y répand souvent une fade ou puérile irréalité. Les individualités s'évanouissent dans l'insubstantielle abstraction des types, et Enjolras, l'idéal insurgé, Javert l'idéal policier, Jean Valjean l'idéal racheté, dégradent la pathétique peinture de la barricade."

It is the purpose of this thesis to show by a critical analysis and copious citations from "Les Misérables" that Lanson's statement is just and true.

A brief outline of the life of Victor Hugo may serve as an appropriate introduction to the paper.

Victor Hugo, the third son of Sigisbert Hugo and Sophie Françoise Trebucheton, was born February 26, 1802, at Besançon, the ancient capital of the Franche-Comté. His life from the beginning was most varied and very conducive to producing France's greatest romanticist, if not the world's greatest romanticist. Hugo's father was an officer in the army during the Bonaparte Régime, and was stationed at Elba, Corsica, and Genoa, finally becoming Governor of Avellino. He also held the position of military governor in Barcelona. Traveling stimulated young Hugo's imagination and this factor, combined with his mother's training and encouragement along the lines of free thought, quickly gave him an intellectual advantage over children of his own age. During the period between 1815 and 1822, while he was still in school, he wrote a poem "Le Déluge", a comic opera, a tragedy, a melodrama, and produced some very good imitations of Ossian, Virgil, Horace, and Lucian.

At the age of seventeen, he left school and contributed towards the support of his mother who had separated from his father, General Hugo. Madame Hugo died July 20, 1832, and with her passing went one of the greatest forces in Victor Hugo's life. The Period between 1822 and 1827 may be considered as the formative period of our author's life. During that time he wrote "Louis XVII", "La Mort du Duc de

Barry", and "La Naissance du Duc de Bordeaux". It was during these years that Hugo realized that his greatest ability lay in the expression of emotion. Consequently, his "Odes", 1822, were very successful and he was granted a yearly stipend of one thousand francs by the government. He immediately married his childhood sweetheart, Adèle Fouchet.

In 1823 "Hans D'Islande" appeared and that same year he formed a newspaper known as "La Muse Française", which was the first mouthpiece of romanticism. Around him gathered such writers as Alfred de Vigny, Emile Deschamps, Sophie and Delphine Gay, and Charles Nodier. It was a romantic group known as the Cénacle, but none dared as yet to state their ideas definitely. In 1826 appeared "Bug-Jargal", but it was not until "La Préface de Cromwell" appeared that the world received its first startling romantic work.

Hugo's defense of romanticism was both logical and appealing. Human beings were constantly changing and since literature was the best means of people's expressing their emotions, then literature must be always changing. Romanticism was not only that philosophy which allowed the expression of the emotions, but it encouraged such expression. With this theory as its background, this genre rapidly developed, but it was not until the advent of "Hernani" that this school made its public début. This drama of

Hugo's incited a struggle between the classicist and the romanticist upon its presentation at the Théâtre-Français. Hugo's popularity rapidly increased and he became a demi-god especially among the literary men of France. At this time the second Cénacle was formed.

Once more Hugo's versatile mind found honors in a new field; dramas and lyrical creations began to flow from his pen. The people's cause was glorified and explained. This period from 1830 to 1845 marked the arrival of "Marion de Lorme", "Le Roi S'amuse", "Lucrece Borgia", and "Ruy Blas", as well as several less popular works. It was during the presentation of "Lucrece Borgia" that Hugo met Juliette Drouet, an actress. His relations with this woman marked the one dark spot on the moral life of the "grand old man of France".

1845 brought the first setback of this promising writer, with the failure of "Les Burgraves". From then until 1853, he lived in a period of turmoil. Up to this time he had been a most prolific author, but from 1843 to 1853 very few of Hugo's works were published. (2) It was probably the most unique period of his life and he no doubt reached his peak about 1845. What was the cause of his silence? Did he fear public ridicule? Was he grieving over the death of his daughter Léopoldine, who had been drowned in 1843? Was he simply suffering like all other

(2) "Victor Hugo de 1843 à 1853" par Le Breton, Professeur à la Sorbonne. (Chaise de Victor Hugo) Page

artists after the truce with Louis-Philippe? André Le Breton says that none of these conjectures are correct. He was suffering from political aspirations and sought to equal the political careers of Chateaubriand and Lamartine. It is certain that although little was published by him during these ten years, he was not idle. Most of "Les Contemplations", "La Légende des Siècles", "Les Quatre Vents de L'Esprit", "Le Théâtre en Liberté", and "Les Misérables" was written at that time, as well as "Les Chants du Crépuscule", a collection of political, moral, and social satires, and expressions of affection for his wife and his love for Juliette Drouet. His grief over the loss of his daughter was tragic, but he concealed it and plunged into a political life which led him to the Academy, the Tuileries, the Chamber of Peers, the Constituant Assembly, the Legislative Assembly, and finally into exile at Brussels and Ile of Jersey. His love of strife, inherited from his army family, aided him in his political career and placed him at the head of the revolutionary party which ultimately caused his banishment from France. When he realized that his exile was to be long, he seriously resumed work on "Les Misérables", which he had begun in 1823. It grew rather into a collection of novels than chapters. He next gave his attention to the sea and attempted to symbolize life through that medium. So varied were his fields of interest and attack that all Europe felt his intellectual and moral

domination.

The period between 1870 and 1885 were known as "The Last Years". In 1870, Hugo returned to France after having been in exile eighteen years. He attempted to resume his old life where he had left off and was elected to the *Assemblée Nationale* in 1871. In his literary endeavors he sought to explain his religious and political opinions and he also published a collection of verse which contained some of the most profound thought that the man ever expressed. However, through all of his works published at this time there ran the note of maturity and understanding gained from grief. He was singing his "swan song".

After having obtained all human glory possible, Victor Hugo, maintaining to the last his belief in the immortality of the soul, died in May, 1885. He was elected to be buried in the Panthéon, but, until the time of his burial, he lay in state under the Arc de Triomphe. At eleven-thirty on June 1st, the funeral procession started for the Panthéon, and, though only some two dozen blocks away, it was not until six-thirty that evening that the last of the procession passed through the gates, so numerous were the people paying tribute to the dead author.

ROMANTICISM IN "LES MISÉRABLES"

The years between 1789 and 1839 mark a period of general literary decadence in all France. Poetry and drama were both dominated by rigid rules and the only literary form of expression which showed any development at all was the novel. The entire national outlook was one of depression, due to the fact that the scenes of the revolution were still too vividly painted on the minds of everyone to allow the creation of new thought. Consequently, the desire for romantic tales and stories requiring the use of imagination was dominant, but unfulfilled until about 1830. Apparently, romanticism received great impetus from the southern European countries and especially Spain. Her legends of chivalry and romance passed from generation to generation, spread throughout the world, lending vigor and color wherever they landed.

Out of this chaotic condition emerged three groups of writers. The first group still clung to the eighteenth century form. The second group was one of a reactionary type, and represented the revolutionary influence. The third group was the one from which emerged the novel containing the intense human elements. This last group was led in France by Étienne de Senancour and Benjamin Constant. All

these conditions paved the way for the great French romanticist, Victor Hugo.

In making an analysis of the various phases of Victor Hugo's greatness, "Les Misérables" has been selected as a basis for this study, because, like Tolstoi's "Guerre et Paix", it covers a period of twenty or thirty years; it is a faithful picture of the whole of French society; a mixture of meditation and gossip, and as a whole the work is a philosophic and symbolic novel. Waterloo, Paris in 1832, and the barricades belong to the historical novel. It is also lyric in prose, since it expresses all the emotions of the human race, and, at least in the first volumes, the psychology portrayed every instant in the struggles of Jean Valjean is true.

The romantic movement in literature was secondary to a movement in the people known as Social Romanticism. This latter movement was of tremendous range in influence and was due to new trends in sociology, history, economics, and anti-individualism. It attempted to free the individual by freeing the masses. With this in mind, one is justified in saying that any work produced which pictures sociological tendencies and democratic sentiments may be called romantic literature.

(3) André Le Breton claims that unquestionably Hugo was

(3) "Victor Hugo, Chef de L'École Romantique" par Andrée Le Breton, Faite à la Sorbonne, Le Jeudi 29, Mars, 1928.

the leader of this movement, although Saint-Simon may have been the first to conceive it. In 1827, when romanticism first became prominent, Alfred de Musset was only seventeen years old, and though he had lived a romantic life, he could not have even then been the leader. He was too young and too fickle, interested only in himself and his desires and so was automatically eliminated. Lamertine was the other possibility. It is perhaps true that he was not Hugo's inferior in any literary sense, yet he lacked the qualities needed for the assault against neo-classicism. Hugo, on the other hand, lacked and perhaps envied the political careers of several of his contemporaries; still, he felt from an early age that a writer's profession was the most glorious in existence and insisted on following such a career, to the disgust of his father. He showed no partiality to any school, but stood for liberty in art. Being the son of army people, an-inherent love of strife and a love of extravagance may have predisposed him to be the leader of the classic-romantic struggle.

His language was simple, yet his vocabulary is the despair of most students and translators, and the goal of most French scholars. Daudet has often been compared favorably to Hugo in this respect, but Daudet's form violated all the rules of usage and grammar. Hugo's love for life was all inclusive and he wished to see all, to know all, and

to paint all in the present, the past and the future. Undoubtedly his youthful vigor and fervor produced a renaissance in art which motivated Leconte de Lisle, Coppée Baudelaire, Verlaine, Banville, Rostand, Flaubert, Loti, and even Döstoievski and Tolstoi. He certainly dominated the literature of the nineteenth century.

"Notre-Dame de Paris" is considered Hugo's masterpiece of romanticism, yet in "Les Misérables" one finds wonderful characters typifying this genre. A pure romantic character is Jean Valjean, a hero of the finest type, who tries to hide his light and who asks no recognition for reward for his acts - a degree of unselfishness which is rarely found. The very heart of this man bares itself in his soliloquies which are psychological in content yet romantic in freedom and force of expression. This character, whether under the names of Monsieur Madeleine, Monsieur LeBlanc, or Monsieur Fauchelevent, remains throughout the whole story a live, stimulating force. Jean Valjean came from the laboring class of people. Through unselfishness and a desire to help others, he committed an act which caused society to brand him a criminal. Here Hugo amply expresses his opinion of mankind and its lack of understanding. It is certainly a satire on society's individualism - all for itself. In spite of all that was done to injure instead of help, Jean Valjean succeeded in retaining a love of humanity in

general, and was totally lacking in hardness and cynicism. His experience had made him a better man, but how many of us would profit by such a test?

Hugo, in his treatment of this character, has used a tenderness and a sentimental style which may possibly be an echo of that of Pigault-Lebrun of the preceding century. It was this last named author who first gave the people the feeling that the novel had arrived. He used popular scenes, cynicism, bulky language, good humor, joked, and depicted violent emotions for the masses which had not yet recovered from the effects of the Reign of Terror.

The first outstanding evidence of Hugo's romantic ability shown in "Les Misérables" is found in the portrayal of the Bishop of Digne. This worthy man, with traits too good to be earthly, is a perfect idealist or romanticist. His attitude, the key of the entire novel, clearly indicates Hugo's tendency. One might rightly say that nearly every chapter in the novel contains some mark of romanticism, but I think that chapters eight, nine and thirteen of the First book of Fantine may be called romantic almost in their entirety. They deal with the Bishop's extraordinary influence in changing people's attitudes, his absolute self-effacement in deed and thought, and his type of dreams and ideals.

The change in Jean Valjean's outlook was nothing

less than a change bordering on the supernatural. He was so greatly influenced by the Bishop's reception and hospitality upon his entrance into Digne as an ex-convict that he was forced to wonder whether there was really any truly unselfish people in the world. Never had he encountered true altruism before. This question becomes a revelation when, after having attempted to steal from the man who had befriended him, he was told by this same man,

(4) "Jean Valjean, mon frère, vous n'appartenez plus au mal, mais au bien. C'est votre âme que je vous achète; je la retire aux pensées noires et à l'ésprit de perdition, et je la donne à Dieu". From this time emerged the marvelous character known as Monsieur Madeleine.

In chapters two, three, and four of Book Five of "Fantine", one is given a complete description of Montreuil-sur-mer and its leading citizen and benefactor, Monsieur Madeleine. Monsieur Madeleine is none other than the former convict, Jean Valjean, who, because of the Bishop's influence, has become a philanthropist, endowing hospitals, caring for the needy, and furnishing occupation for all. What a change has been wrought in this man who had lived the major part of his life guided by the one law of self-preservation. Shortly after this phase of his life, he willingly undertook the responsibility and

(4) "Fantine": Book II, Chapter XII, Page 163, Nelson Edition.

care and rearing of Cosette, the illegitimate child of Fatine, a woman who had suffered the knocks of the world and whom Jean Valjean had assisted instead of condemning as the rest of the world had been only too willing to do. This act brought him the greatest happiness of his life, for he learned to know what it was to love and to be loved and to feel that he was responsible to the world for the care and guidance of a life. Hugo showed a great knowledge of human nature here. Few of us have the power to fail our responsibilities to others, and Jean Valjean was merely a human being.

The fear that he, Jean Valjean, would be apprehended and that Cosette would be lost to him made him desperate. It was at this time that he made his escape with the child into the yard of the Convent Petit Picpus and there met his old friend, Monsieur Fauchelevent, the gardener whom he had befriended in Montreuil-sur-mer sometime earlier. Although Jean Valjean had had the experience previously of being shadowed and apprehended several times by the law, yet his anxiety and fear were much worse now, because of the dependence upon him of the child.

Hugo again painted a romantic character in his account of the life and death of the little gamin Gavroche. This child symbolized the children of the poor types in large cities with this exception: no matter how sordid the child's

Life became, nor what his temptations were, his spirit always remained bright and he was the one ray of light in this very ugly picture of life. Gavroche embodied also the only element of humor that Hugo incorporated in this epic, a quality in which the author was somewhat lacking. He was the one contrast to the beautiful pessimism that pervades the novel, the same quality over which Lamartine has so amply shown his mastery of expression.

There is certainly a bit of romanticism connected with the life and death of George Pontmercy. The sentiments and emotions of the man are expressed with the freedom that only this new form of rhetoric afforded. Romanticism gave blood and force to the French language. This man who had hardly been permitted to see his own son and who had been ostracized by his wife's people, made life livable through the thought that he was doing the correct thing for his son, through the belief that there might be a chance meeting with that son, and through his interest in and love of nature. The son, Marius, another of the major characters of the epic, is an idealistic type, given to dreaming and brooding, rather than action. This boy, after having been reared according to one philosophy by his grandfather, suddenly assumed and cherished after his father's death the romantic life and goal of his father, and turned away from the grandfather's teachings and training with apparently no

effort. In General Pontmercy, Hugo has portrayed his own father, General Hugo.

During the period when Marius' attitudes were changing and just after the change, he suffered a feeling of pessimism and melancholia due to maladjustment. As mentioned before, this pessimism and melancholia were beautifully expressed by Lamartine and especially by Chateaubriand in "René". A young man as attractive and healthy as Marius was not likely to become entirely enwrapped in carrying out a request of a father whom he had hardly known, a request for his son to befriend a certain Thénardier who had saved General Pontmercy at the Battle of Waterloo. Such deathlike determination is abnormal and certainly is the expression of a very emotional type.

That entire section which deals with the development of the friendship and love between Marius and Cosette is pure romanticism. It certainly is the unrestricted expression of emotion. However, this will be discussed later under that specialized phase of romanticism termed lyricism.

Father Mabeuf is still another romantic figure in the novel. It was he who apprised Marius of the true character of his father, General Pontmercy. Obviously, he emulated the Bishop of Digne in his goodness and self-denials. Poverty and hardship served merely to strengthen this old hero.

One of the loveliest and one of the strongest characters

in the epic is that of Enjoléras, the leader of the insurrection at the barricade in 1832. This young man who had ability and character, ambition and health, was willing to sacrifice all for an ideal. He had the welfare of humanity at heart. His morale and courage during the development and culmination of the insurrection form a most romantic touch.

Perhaps Hugo strayed further from reality in the portrayal of the character of Javert than in any other phase of the novel. This man is decidedly a type and at no place impresses one as being a real man that one might meet in daily life. He is an automaton with but one guiding principle in life - duty. No doubt the reaction to this man is generally unfavorable, possibly because he is misunderstood. Javert deserves pity and not condemnation. He is a victim of lack of judgment, the type of person who suffers intense torment whenever a dilemma presents itself. Here Hugo's love of extravagance and antithesis has carried the great artist too far. He withdraws so decidedly from the field of reality that he ceases to appeal to the reader. With this character, we are suddenly forced to realize that we are reading a work of fiction and not an account of real life. Javert, a detective, proves to be the life-long fear and enemy of Jean Valjean. He is constantly "popping up" at unexpected places

without any apparent connecting link with the next part of the novel. But, he serves to glorify the character of Jean Valjean by proving that Jean Valjean understood the limitation of Javert's character and had no rancor for this man who had made his life miserable.

Throughout the entire novel there run a series of romantic elements around which the novel is formed. It might justly be said that "Les Misérables" depends upon too many imagined improbabilities which detract from its force and unity. Certainly Hugo has brought his exuberant imagination into full play and has furnished us with artificial and allegorical connecting links of his own design, thus leaving the impression that "Les Misérables" is composed of a series of episodes that have become related by chance.

A beautiful strain of devotion and love between Jean Valjean and Cosette runs through the novel. Cosette was Jean Valjean's one thought and her welfare occupied his entire energies. He gave everything and asked only that he be allowed to retain this one interest in life which had brought him so much and meant so much to him. In this relation between Jean Valjean and Cosette, Jean Valjean might be termed a selfish man in some ways, yet he was assuredly unselfish in others. He denied Cosette nothing

as far as money was concerned, being content himself to live with the barest necessities, yet, he either did not understand or he refused to accept the demands of life, for he wished to keep Cosette for himself, and so cut her off from all young companionship. In this situation, Jean Valjean failed to see that his happiness meant Cosette's unhappiness. Therefore arose his great dislike for Marius. Jean Valjean feared that this young man would find Cosette attractive more than he feared that he, himself, would fall into the hands of the law. And yet when the final decision had to be made, Jean Valjean stamped himself as one of the noblest of the noble. In the year 1832, both Marius and Jean Valjean found themselves at the barricades of Paris: the former, because he thought that Cosette had left for England with her father without a word to him; the latter, because he had discovered that Cosette loved Marius and his paternal heart was broken. When the barricade was taken, Jean Valjean took the wounded Marius on his back and set out on his trip through the abandoned sewer system of Paris in a gruesome attempt to save the life of the boy for the sake of Cosette. This act of heroism is one of the most realistic and the most horrible pictures of the entire story. His unselfishness had finally conquered and proved to be the controlling force in his life.

Likewise did Jean Valjean show himself to be a man of

great heart and altruism when he went to Marius after the marriage of Cosette and Marius, and told Marius his true identity. As far as he knew, there was no other need for this confession than his dislike for the untruth. Here Marius proves to be a great disappointment. He only saw that the man whom Cosette called father was an ex-convict. As such he could not forgive him. The paradox is that Marius, unaware of his rescuer of the barricade, had sought everywhere for the man who had saved him and was willing to give almost everything he possessed as a reward. He was even selfish enough to ask Cosette to forego pleasures which she might have had and offered the money that Jean Valjean had given as her dowry to this man who had saved his life. That rescuer was none other than Jean Valjean.

Cosette, too, fails to come up to the expectation of the majority of Hugo's readers. Granting that the women of the nineteenth century were quite different from the women of this date of feminine emancipation, yet, one scarcely sees how Cosette could escape the criticism of being weak even according to standards of that period. She is the typical clinging-vine, undecided type that even Hugo with his radical divergence from eighteenth century literature had nevertheless preserved. This girl, who had been practically inseparable from Jean Valjean from early childhood, allowed

herself to be completely weaned from her father by the desires of her husband after Marius, without Cosette's knowing, had discovered that Jean Valjean was an ex-convict. The fidelity of all womankind certainly was questioned, whether the author was aware of it or not. One is inclined to think that this criticism of Cosette's character illustrates a fault common to the majority of Hugo's women character. He, like his English brother Dickens, was weak when it came to their portrayal. Certainly what has been said of Cosette is true of Esmeralda of "Notre-Dame de Paris."

Death brought a close to the wonderful character of Jean Valjean, a death which was as romantic and as peacefully received as the many other events in his turbulent life. Until the end he absolutely maintained his practice of lack of self-consideration and refused to allow himself the little solace and comfort possible for a man dying of grief. There was absolutely no hardness nor bitterness in his heart concerning his lot in life, but only happiness and joy that God had permitted him to see his adored Cosette once more before leaving this world. The tribute to this man on his very simple tomb reads:

(5) "Il dort. Quoique le sort fût pour lui bien étrange,
Il vivait. Il mourut quand il n'eut plus son ange;
La chose simplement d'elle-même arriva,
Comme la nuit se fait lorsque le jour s'en va."

(5) "Jean Valjean: Book IX, Chapter VI. Page 463, Nelson Edition.

Hugo was a typical romanticist by reason of his remarkable imaginative powers and in his love of extravagance. And it was this very love of extravagance, this lack of balance, which kept the great romanticist from becoming a great author of all time. His fondness for exaggerations tended to make Hugo's characters degenerate from men and women to mere types, especially in the latter part of the novel "Les Misérables". For this reason, the literature of Hugo will not survive so long as Balzac. Unlike Daudet, Hugo possessed the art of using his imagination and of creating, within his own mind, persons and events of a purely fictitious origin, the outstanding quality of a good story teller.

With the departure from staid and restricted form of literature there came a type of novel devoted particularly to the expansion and expression of sentiments and emotions. This type was known as the lyrical novel and George Sand is perhaps the ablest exponent of this school in the French literary world. Correctly speaking, the term lyrical should be applied only to poetry. The lyrical novel is after all a specialized form of the romantic novel.

Hugo has shown his ability in this field in both his prose and poetry. In "Les Misérables" the entire part

dealing with the love affair between Marius and Cosette belongs to this category, for has not Hugo run the complete gamut of human emotions? He beautifully describes the first sign of interest between these two which occurred after their repeated meetings in the Luxembourg. Cosette made daily visits to these gardens with her father and it was while she was still a child that she observed the young man, Marius, apparently immersed in thought, as he took his daily exercise. At this time, Marius was enjoying self-imposed martyrdom due to his refusal to accede to his grandfather's desires, his own determinations to accomplish his father's dying wish, and his effort to maintain General Pontmercy's standards. He was entirely too self-occupied to notice the child Cosette.

After a brief interlude these daily meetings were resumed and, in the meanwhile, the child Cosette had developed into the woman Cosette. The psychological reactions of the young male are quite amusing. As soon as Marius perceived Cosette's attractiveness, he immediately became aware of his own personal shabby appearance which had, until now, not entered his mind. So intently did he attempt to be nonchalant and disinterested that he aroused the suspicion of Jean Valjean, who previously had never noticed Marius. Jean Valjean immediately decided to cease visiting the Luxembourg and to center Cosette's attentions elsewhere.

Too late. Cosette was already very much aware of this handsome young stranger.

From this point, a race between lover and father began for the control of Cosette's attention and affection. Jean Valjean moved frequently and secretly, but the same thin thread of fate, which runs through the entire novel, was with Marius. Perhaps Hugo had as his philosophy the Calvinistic doctrine of Predestination, for apparently he had willed that Marius was to marry Cosette and it just had to be, regardless of obstacles.

Marius' despair at his inability to locate Cosette was assuredly most human. In fact, his melodramatic thoughts of self-destruction might have been copied from one of a half dozen or more dime novels. Evidently Hugo was interested in substantiating the old adage that "human nature is akin the world over." At least, he is not guilty of Zola's criticism of Flaubert. Zola claimed that Flaubert created characters not of nature's making, their love affairs even being stilted. He has gone so far as to call certain of Flaubert's works "manuals of hypocrisy."

Certainly the love between Marius and Cosette was not a love based on anything but physical attraction. Marius knew nothing of Cosette's intellectual ability, training, social standing, or financial position. Cosette, on the other hand, knew nothing of Marius' stratum of society,

profession, or accomplishments. That love was a love which declared the right of divine passion and is, according to Le Breton, purely romantic in origin. Either the standards of marriage and companionship have changed in themselves or economic and social pressure have caused them to change. The absolute guilelessness and oblivion of their love is shown in the lines, spoken after about three years of worship from afar, yet, three years in which they had had no opportunity to converse. This paragraph concludes their first personal meeting:

(6) "Quand ils eurent fini, quand ils se furent tout dit, elle posa sa tête sur son épaule et lui demanda:

"Comment vous appelez-vous?
Je m'appelle Marius, dit-il. Et vous?
Je m'appelle Cosette."

It was during one of these periods of despair, upon discovering that Cosette had again vanished, leaving no word, that Marius was induced to join his comrades at the barricade. It is to this same barricade that Jean Valjean wandered in just as desperate a frame of mind upon discovering that Cosette loved Marius. Both were hoping for self-destruction, but it becomes the lot of the father, Jean Valjean, to save the wounded Marius in order that Cosette's happiness may not be marred. Their marriage and life together afterwards formed an anticlimax to this beautiful love story.

(6) "L'Idylle Rue Plumet:" Book V, Chapter VI.
Page 221, Nelson Edition.

Still another bit of lyricism presents itself in "Les Misérables". It is the love of Éponine, the daughter of Thénardier, for Marius. Apparently Marius is unaware of this attraction or is indifferent to it. This girl, who had known only hardship and the worst environment possible, showed not a criminal character at all. She followed the only means of livelihood that she knew, begging, yet, the desires and dreams within her heart were exactly the same as those in the heart of the protected Cosette. It was Éponine who gave Marius the impetus to go to the barricade just after he had discovered that Cosette had disappeared, and it was Éponine who followed Marius to the barricade in hopes that she might have the comfort of dying with the man she loved. Even this was denied her. That power which had crushed Éponine lower and lower in society had not been strong enough to extinguish the girl's courage and unselfishness. It was her body which stopped that bullet intended to end Marius' life. She had had opportunity to see her desire accomplished, yet at the last moment, she sacrificed her life and saved Marius for Cosette. The delineation of this character deserves as much praise as that of any other in the entire novel with the exception of Jean Valjean, for, like Jean Valjean, she had so little to begin with and did so much with what qualities and background she had. She exhibited the same gaiety and

REALISM IN "LES MISÉRABLES"

One of the most startling and unusual aspects of Victor Hugo's creative ability is his power to change completely genre and style. The entire epic of "Les Misérables" is so tinged with romanticism that it would seem an impossibility for the same man to alter entirely his treatment of the same subject and characters so as to produce a realistic atmosphere of the most striking sort. This versatility of Hugo's makes one of his strongest bids for greatness.

Zola claimed that with Daudet, the novel of intrigue ended and the novel of observation took its place. This acute novel of observation was the forerunner of realism, which is characterized by vulgarity, robustness, exuberance, fiery activity, and brusqueness. It lacked the beautiful expressions and finer sentiments so common to romanticism and lyricism. Today, one considers a realist to be an artist who deliberately selects his subjects from the ugly and unsavory, one who deals with types instead of individuals, and, above all, one who strives to represent facts exactly as they are. In the end, the very purpose which motivated the school brought its downfall. So anxious were the realists or naturalists to depict life in its full reality that they made the mistake of assuming that reality was found only in the poorest classes of

mankind. Sixteenth century Italian novels had announced this school of realism through their vulgarity and insensibility.

This realistic period of literature was controlled by three purposes, namely: to make a true copy of reality, to stir the heart and emotions, and to portray the general truth of types. With these three guiding principles in mind, Ferdinand Brunetière concluded that Balzac, who is generally considered to be the exponent superb of French realism, was not a realist at all. He, like Hugo, was interested in facts only as they could be used in literature, and he fully realized that art was not solely limited to truth. There has been much discussion as to the merits and influences of the two writers, Hugo and Balzac, and it is conceded that the characters of Balzac will outlive those of Hugo, for, as was mentioned before, most of Balzac's characters are at all times real men and women of flesh and blood. Too often Hugo's characters are types of good or evil. Both men show the influence of their English brother, Charles Dickens. It is thought that even George Eliot affected these French realists slightly, for, even though she was a naturalist primarily, her conception was that of a realist bordering on romanticism. It would seem that, since naturalism sought to avoid all recourse to the supernatural and to remain entirely within the realm of the natural materialism, panthéism, positivism, and realism are all

specializations of the above mentioned theory. Would there be justification in saying that a naturalist was a realist with a pessimistic and perverted view of life?

Benjamin Constant's "Adolphe" was the first definitely French creation which marked a reaction against lyricism and a turn towards realism. It was no doubt the forerunner of "Le Rouge et Le Noir" and re-introduced the realistic psychological novel. Constant aided much in setting the plan for the modern novelists, especially Bourget.

That portion of "Les Misérables" which treats of Jean Valjean's first entry into Digne certainly belongs to this genre. Victor Hugo was more clever than Flaubert in that he always was capable of selecting the correct style for his subject and, therefore, the treatment did not appear to be shallow. The speech is brusque and there is a certain force in the action of this section. With the sting of prison hardship and cruelty still in his brain, hatred, mistrust, and rancor developed in the heart of Jean Valjean, a freed convict, when he discovered that nowhere was confirmed his imagined acceptance into society. Nowhere was there kindness, a word of cheer, a shelter. Nowhere was he considered good enough to mingle, because he carried the hated yellow passport of the ex-convicts. After such experiences, it was perfectly

natural that suspicion should be the controlling principal upon receiving hospitality and kindness from the good Bishop of Digne. That society had destroyed all faith in this man, not only for itself, but for God, is shown by Jean Valjean's actions upon entering Digne. (7) "En passant, sur la place de la Cathédrale, il montra le poing à l'église", and by his statement to the Bishop, (8) "Je m'en suis allé dans les champs pour coucher à la belle étoile. Il n'y avait pas d'étoile. J'ai pensé qu'il pleuvrait, et qu'il n'y avait pas de bon Dieu pour empêcher de pleuvoir."

Similar is the experience of Fantine, who, having made one mistake, became the degraded victim of inexorable social laws. During the romantic period, love, whether legal or illegal, had been praised and idealized. Hugo treats quite differently the illegitimate love of Fantine and expresses the reaction of society of that time. Only once did society offer a helping hand to this woman and that one glimmer of hope was given by Jean Valjean as Monsieur Madeleine, a man who has suffered similar degradation at the hands of society and knew the world's capabilities.

The description of the Thénardier family and the Inn at Montfermeil is likewise most realistic. The characters of the Thénardier family have assuredly been stripped bare of all romantic illusion and beauty. One gains a clear idea of the

(7) "Fantine": Book II, Chapter I. Page 109, Nelson Edition.
 (8) "Fantine": Book II, Chapter III. Page 117, Nelson Edition.

coarse, vulgar, lower type Frenchman and his habits from the portrayal of those gathered at the Inn. We are deeply stirred by the cruel treatment, both physically and mentally, received by Cosette, Fantine's daughter, at the hands of these Thénardiens. All gaiety, frankness, and trust had been driven out of the child. Only fear and an inferiority complex remained. This is realism par excellence.

Perhaps historical in content, yet certainly realistic in form is the description of penal requirements and conditions of France in the latter part of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. Certainly this section would be of interest to sociologists studying the forces operating in the formation of French group and criminal life. One might be justified in saying that this description proves that Jean Valjean was beyond question one of the most romantic characters of all time, for it would seem almost humanly impossible for a man to have suffered as he did and yet become the character that he became, unless this character was the creation of an extremely romantic imagination and spirit.

A bit of judicial history is given in realistic form in the account of the court trial at Arras, of Champmathieu, also an ex-convict, who had been mistaken for Jean Valjean and was being accused of Jean Valjean's wrongs. The arrangement of the room, the principal characters and the procedure are all

explained and painted in a realistic manner, while Jean Valjean, or Monsieur Madeleine looked on, suffering the tortures of the damned.

Hugo apparently is very well versed in knowledge of the underworld of Paris and indeed all France. Of course, (9)"Les Misérables" is primarily a story of society's unfortunates and Hugo's understanding of these people bespeaks a thorough and sympathetic study of this group. He knows their background, their necessities and desires, and their temptations. He knows their crimes and their methods in crime. He knows their baseness, cruelty, and lack of standards. All this he tells in the style best suited to the purpose, that of pure realism. To this group of characters belong the Thenardiens or Jondrettes, Bigrenaille, Babet, Deux-Milliard, Gueulemer, Claquesous, and Montpanose.

That complete section of the "Tome" of Jean Valjean presenting the struggle of Jean Valjean in the abandoned sewer of Paris with the wounded Marius is gross realism. The filth, the squalor, the darkness, the fear of the unknown, the hardships and the dangers are all vividly painted. Hugo's vocabulary was always more than adequate for his needs, and this description certainly demonstrates that fact. How far removed are these thoughts and their form of expression from that part developing Monsieur Madeleine's philanthropic plans or his care and devotion for Cosette, yet, how carefully are the characters in

(9) Definition of "Les Misérables" - The Wretches and the Wretched.

both parts handled. What a contrast this author is to Émile Zola, who had been so severely criticized for his flat style and his careless handling of characters about which he has no first hand information.

When one seeks a standard of comparison for French realism, one is almost forced to turn to Balzac for this standard. This man, an indefatigable worker, who in this respect was similar to Hugo, lacked self-confidence, under-estimated his own value, was capable of producing all kinds of literature, and was inimitable at his best and impossible at his worst. As was mentioned, he lacked the self-assurance of Hugo and yet he built his career better than he knew. In spite of all this, Ferdinand Brunetière feels that it is to Gustave Flaubert that one should turn when seeking a standard of comparison for realism. (10) Brunetière believes that though a naturalist, Flaubert, represents the goal to which realism was aspiring. He was an artist both by his good qualities as well as by his mistakes, he knew more than the mechanics of his profession, and for this reason, it is felt that he was worthy of leaving a legacy to posterity. "Madame Bovary" was a Mélange of romanticism and realism combined with a mastery of style which has never been equalled nor approached.

Perhaps Hugo does not rank with these leaders of this school, but certainly there are times when Hugo is a realist in expression if not in observation.

(10)

Reference: "Le Roman Naturaliste" par Ferdinand Brunetière.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL NOVEL IN "LES MISÉRABLES"

Doubtless the psychological novel, like the lyrical novel, is an outgrowth of the romantic novel. Had it not been for the influence of freedom, and the disregard for restriction of expression that developed with romanticism, the individual emotional conflicts would never have been expressed. Saint Beuve was perhaps the one who gave impetus to this form of novel in France, and Stendhal is certainly an able exponent of the school. This form fosters the expression of internal agonies, states of mind, and human conflicts. It bespeaks self-analysis.

Victor Hugo has again proved himself to be ably qualified as a writer in this genre. Nothing could more clearly demonstrate the conflicts which go on within the human mind than that part of "Les Misérables" in which Jean Valjean is torn between the two desires to kill the Bishop of Digne as he lay asleep after he had offered Jean Valjean the hospitality of his home, and to stoop and kiss the Bishop's hand.

(11) "Il semblait prêt à briser ce crâne ou à baiser cette main." He was caught between the pull of the old life of self-preservation, and the influence of kindness and gentleness which the Bishop had aroused in him. This same struggle still continued the next day when he almost automatically took and retained the coin dropped by Petit-Gervais. His reaction was that of maniac

(11) "Fantine": Book II, Chapter XI. Page 158, Nelson Edition.

when he realized what he had done. Again he was suffering from a conflict of an unsocialized habit and the altruistic influence of the Bishop.

One of the most difficult decisions for Jean Valjean to make came when he was mayor of Montreuil-sur-mer and known as Monsieur Madeleine. His age-old enemy, Javert, had reappeared in his life. As has already been pointed out, Javert was a type and not a human being. Jean Valjean was wanted by the law because of the theft of a "piece of quarante sous" from Petit-Gervais. Although Jean Valjean had changed completely and had become a benefactor to hundreds of people in Montreuil-sur-mer, Javert's exaggerated sense of duty would not allow him to overlook this "crime". For the sake of duty, he was willing to destroy the man, Monsieur Madeleine, and so to injure those hundreds whom Monsieur Madeleine, was assisting. Javert was the only person who knew of the stupendous strength of the convict, Jean Valjean. Since Javert already suspected Monsieur Madeleine of being Jean Valjean, it was no wonder that Monsieur Madeleine had a tremendous mental struggle when Father Fauchelevent was caught under his cart and he, Monsieur Madeleine, knew that he was the only man who could remove it. He also knew that if he did remove the cart, he would be convicting himself in the eyes of Javert as the convict, Jean Valjean.

(12) "Madeleine leva tête, rencontra l'oeil de faucon de Javert toujours attaché sur lui, regarda les paysans immobiles et sourit tristement. Puis sans dire une parole il tomba à genoux, et avant même que la foule eût eu le temps de jeter un cri, il était sous la voiture."

Severe as this struggle might have been, it was nothing compared with the ethical conflict that Jean Valjean waged when he learned that an old convict, Champmathieu, taken for him, was about to be tried for repeated infraction of the law, the penalty of which would be life imprisonment. Here was the question: this Champmathieu had never made any worth while contribution to society, yet he was not a vicious character. If Jean Valjean apprised the law of their mistake, Champmathieu would be released and he, Jean Valjean, would be tried and convicted instead. That would mean that the entire population of Montreuil-sur-mer would be left in a financially precarious position. On the other hand, if Jean Valjean did not rectify the mistake, he would be living a lie and would always suffer mental torture from the injustice done Champmathieu. Furthermore, he would be going contrary to the teachings of his beloved Bishop of Digne. All night long, pacing the floor, he wrestled with this problem. With the coming dawn, he made his decision and he prepared to depart for Arras, the place of the trial. Mental battles were not enough. Jean Valjean met obstacle after obstacle which made it practically impossible to carry out his desire. It seemed as if all nature were trying to prevent his confession.

(12) "Fantine:" Book V, Chapter VI. Page 259, Nelson Edition

Fantine represents a typical reaction during that period which one might term Fantine's degradation. Fantine was not a bad woman at heart and her mistakes were all mistakes of ignorance and maternal love. So anxious was she to give all comforts possible to her child, Cosette, whom the Thenardier's were keeping that she did not hesitate to sacrifice herself. Therefore, it was natural that she would become hardened, bitter and spiteful for the way the world had treated her.

A similar incident is seen in Fantine's child Cosette while she was under the care, if one may so term it, of the Thenardiers. She was simply a drudge for the family, she expected nothing but hardships and therefore she was developing into nothing but a cowed liar with no thought but self-preservation. That this same child reacted differently to another environment and under the kindness of Jean Valjean is psychologically true.

(13) Emile Zola says that Stendhal's talent is primarily that of a psychologist. For him, the principal thing about man was his brain, the other organs being secondary. Stendhal had not the faculty of treating emotions psychologically, but was a logician who often arrived at truth by deducing it from facts. Taine claimed that Balzac was an observer and having observed, he then wrote of his observations, but Stendhal incorporated his observations in his writings. It is a difference

(13) "Les Romanciers Naturalistes" par Emile Zola.

of philosophy and Taine felt Stendhal was the greater, because he remained in the true realm of spirit, mind, and logic. It is for this same reason that Zola insists that Stendhal is inferior. No doubt Hugo would agree with Zola, for certainly Hugo would not grant anyone to be a great artist who could not or would not delve into the emotions of the human soul.

Psychological bits manifest themselves frequently throughout the epic and several in particular are striking. The first of these was the conflict Marius suffered when he discovered that the man, Jondrette, who was attempting to blackmail Cosette's father, was in reality Thenardier, the inn-keeper of Montfermeil. Marius' father's dying request had been that if his son ever found this man Thenardier, he should befriend him in any way possible. (14) "Un nommé Thenardier m'a sauvé la vie. Si mon fils le rencontre, il lui fera tout le bien qu'il pourra". After bearing criticism and poverty and after having searched diligently for this man, he found that Theénardier was a scoundrel and was planning harm to the father of the girl he loved. The problem was almost too large for the boy to solve.

Throughout that entire part of "Les Misérables" dealing with the association and companionship between Jean Valjean and Cosette, Jean Valjean fought the fear that some day Cosette would be taken from him. This brought about his dislike for

(15) "Jean Valjean:" Book VII, Chapter XX.

Marius. He fought and won and certainly did not waver when the long dreaded situation arose. He personally effaced himself from Cosette's life, thinking he was giving her happiness. Is the root of all love fear, and is fear solely interested in self? Evidently Hugo did not think so, for altruism certainly manifested itself repeatedly in the novel.

The meeting of Jean Valjean and Javert at the barricade is another example. It was with the power of Jean Valjean to remove forever this enemy who had made life miserable for him. Instead, (15)"Jean Valjean coupa la martingale que Javert avait au cou, puis il coupe les cordes qu'il avait aux poignets, puis, se baissant, il coupa la ficelle qu'il avait aux pieds; et, se redressant, il lui dit:
Vous êtes libre".

One is forced to marvel at this man who had become so imbued with the idea of "turning the other cheek" that he could not, even under the conditions which existed at the Barricade, do away with a personal enemy and a spy to the political cause with which he was affiliated.

A similar incident deals with a conflict within Javert himself. After being rescued by Jean Valjean at the barricade, he again met Jean Valjean and was still torn between the demands of his position, namely, to arrest Jean Valjean, and to show gratitude for the saving of his life. The struggle was too complex for his undeveloped power of judgment to cope with, so he committed suicide, a logical act considering the character of the man.

(15)"Jean Valjean": Book I, Chapter XIX, Page 152, Nelson Edition

THE HISTORICAL NOVEL IN "LES MISÉRABLES"

Walter Scott was practically the pioneer in the modern historical novel, romantic, however, in its essence. This type of novel had sufficient fiction in it to combine the facts of history with the local color of the period. The first French writer to follow in Scott's footsteps was Alfred de Vigny. Vigny was not a novelist, but a romantic poet, so, therefore, he was not at his best in his novel "Cinq-Mars", which copied closely Scott's historical style. Vigny was not always true to history, but he justified this fact by saying that the greatest thing in art was the modification of reality. He was guilty of such gross anachronisms that his novel lacks power to hold, yet it ably demonstrates the possibility of the breaking away from the allegorical novel and the development of the historical novel. "Cinq-Mars" does not possess the appeal of "Marion de Larme" nor "les Mousquetaires" but it was the beginning of that type of novel which has such great value in that it paints for us the characters and customs of the past.

It has been mentioned that Hugo had shown power in this genre in "Marion de Larme", which is perhaps a much better example of his ability as a historical novelist than the historical parts of "Les Misérables". Brunetière claims that the historical novel is a clever means of detaching the author's character from himself and making it live in bygone days.

In order to do this, customs and language of earlier days must be introduced. The necessary element of the historical novel is the milieu. Remove that and the character becomes flat. Consequently, one is not surprised at the dramatization of the colorful scenes of Paris that Hugo gives us in "Les Misérables".

Sir Walter Scott exemplifies chiefly the historical novel of manners, but Hugo gives us not only the novel of manners but the novel of fact, and the novel of character. All are to be found in "Les Misérables". For instance, the exact description of Hougomont and the plain of the Battle of Waterloo forms a historical element of fact. The account is made by a traveler on foot, and minute plan is given of all that the traveler saw and passed. For example, (16) "Il apercevait, à l'ouest, le clocher d'ardoise de Braine-l'Alleud qui a la forme d'un vase renversé". Likewise is the description complete of Hougomont or Hugonon, as the name properly is. (17) "Ce manoir fut bâti par Hugo, sire de Somerel, le même qui dota la sixième chapellenie de l'abbaye de Villers".

The following descriptions may be called strategic or military history. They certainly outline the plan of the last battle of the great French General, Napoleon, and give some of the results of the carnage of Waterloo, one of the world's most important battles. One may easily sense sarcasm in Hugo's statement: (18) "et tout cela pour qu'aujourd'hui un paysan dise à un voyageur, Monsieur, donnez-moi trois francs; si vous aimez, je vous expliquerai la chose de Waterloo!

- (16) "Cosette:" Book I, Chapter I. Page 437, Nelson Edition
 (17) "Cosette:" Book I, Chapter II. Page 440, Nelson Edition
 (18) "Cosette:" Book I, Chapter II. Page 448, Nelson Edition.

It is Hugo's opinion that the factor which defeated Napoleon was nothing more than a little storm and a lack of sunshine thereafter. Napoleon depended greatly upon the rapid massing and moving of artillery. The muddy field denied him this and consequently the battle was not over by the time Blücher arrived with fresh troops for Wellington's reinforcement. This same theory has been advanced by several modern military authorities.

Hugo goes into a character sketch of Napoleon which is tinged, perhaps, by apparent dislike of the man. He seems to think that numerous mistakes of the battle could have been avoided had not the General been so conceited and so absolutely sure of himself. The habits and disposition of the man are described and particularly the Emperor's actions on the night before the battle and the day of the battle. So self-confident was he that before he had attacked, the Emperor sent word of victory to Paris. Just as the rout of the enemy was within Napoleon's hands, reinforcement under the command of Blücher arrived. The victory which a moment previously had seemed a certainty was changed into chaos and slaughter. (19) "Napoleon had awaited A Grouchy; he did not come. Wellington awaited Blücher; he came".

Hugo gives one quite a bit of Ecclesiastical history also. In the section dealing with the order Bernadines-Benedictines of Petit-Picpus, much of the ritual, the self-

(19) "Cosette:" Book I, Chapter XVI. Page 498, Nelson Edition

denial, the discipline, and the worship of the Catholic faith in France is aired. Not being an orthodox man, Hugo has generously sprinkled irony throughout this division of the epic. It perhaps serves as a vent for the author's religious opinions, because most of "Les Misérables" was written during Hugo's period of exile on the Ile of Jersey, when he was bitter and ready to attack almost all established institutions of France. In this respect, Hugo and Étienne de Senancour had much in common. The latter was likewise continuously tearing down institutional forms, but offering no alternative. Whether the description of this life within the convent is generally authentic, it is not possible to say definitely. At any rate, an interesting description of the death and burial of a nun is given. What a difference in attitude is manifested in the treatment of religion by Hugo and Chateaubriand. The latter was primarily a writer of orthodoxy, and as such, preferred all reverence possible to Christianity and its ritual. Hugo, at an early age, felt that the world was tired of religious writings and his first contribution to this new need was "Bug-Jargal", a most bizarre story based on an old Norwegian legend dating from 1679. After Hugo went to the trouble to describe all this, he is still in doubt as to just what these men and women did and got out of life, who lock themselves behind closed doors for the rest of their lives. He says, (20) "Ils regardent l'omére

ils se mettent à genoux, et ils joignent les mains. Qu'est-ce que cela signifie?" His is still the free, curious, seeking mind.

A bit of the royalistic attitude toward the Empire is given by the words of Monsieur Gillenormand, the grandfather of Marius. Certainly there was no love lost for the revolutionary factor. Monsieur Gillenormand expresses the sentiment of the entire royalistic group.

A student of crime would doubtlessly be interested in Hugo's description of the underworld conditions of Paris and the economical conditions which were largely the cause. To this group belonged the Thenardiers and their allies. Hugo offered an interesting suggestion for a solution of this condition. He says, (21) "Eclairer la société en dessous." Would that alone solve the problem? The language of the shadows, the argot used in this part of the novel and its development into slang, is another indication of the author's versatility.

One might easily term that section of "Les Misérables" describing the conditions in Paris and all France about 1830 as a sociological novel. Nevertheless, it is primarily historical, containing many political problems likewise. Hugo's feeling is that the original break from the control of the ruling house was due to the fact the roots of the government were imbedded in one family and not in the history of the peoples of France. Following the revolution

(20) "Cosette:" Book VII, Chapter IV. Page 176, Nelson Edition

(21) "Marius:" Book VII, Chapter IV. Page 464, Nelson Edition

came the iron rule of the Emperor whose tyranny was more pronounced even though more progressive than that of the Bourbons. Consequently, chaos again came with the fall of the Empire. The Restoration came and fell and we find that the years 1830 and 1831 are similar to two mountains in the plains of uncertainty which precede and succeed. Hugo gives us a thorough background for the Revolution of July, and a good idea of the undercurrents and unrest in the personal opinion of Louis-Phillippe. In these chapters of the novel, Hugo has done what Vigny did in "Cinq-Mars". He has given us a political historical novel. It is certainly one of the most informative parts of the entire story. Then came the insurrection and barricade of July 5th, 1832, about which Hugo gives us such a vivid and realistic account. In this account we get some idea of the topography of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine which helps the reader to realize the fire within the people which was ready to be ignited at the slightest provocation.

Not only did Hugo give us a marvelous insight into the political and historical situation at the time of the Revolution of 1832, but he takes us a step further by very realistically and specifically describing even the sanitary conditions prevailing in Paris from the time of Henry II to the Empire. He has given us a splendid description of early methods of construction and plans in that part of the novel

dealing with Jean Valjean and his tortuous trip with the wounded Marius through the abandoned sewer system of the city. This old system, dating from about 1550 had been the cause of many floods, epidemics, and bad conditions in Paris in general. Long since has it been replaced by modern engineering.

CONCLUSION

As a novel, "Les Misérables" is loosely put together, lacks unity, and is often tiring in detailed descriptions. Numerous characters, minutely portrayed, contribute their bit to the background, and disappear without adding to the plot of the story. One is forced to admire a man who can keep so many characters, their actions, and their destinies under control, a man who can make these characters play their role on the stage of life with so much ease and grace, and a man who can withdraw these characters at the proper time without the reader feeling a sense of depression and loss. This, Hugo has done. It is perhaps true that "Les Misérables" should be considered as a group of novels instead of one big epic. However, he has handled the pulsing life of Paris, and in Paris the pulsing life of any other large city as smoothly and as simply as though he were portraying one character. There does, however, run through the work one continuous thread—the story of Jean Valjean, which fact justifies the consideration of "Les Misérables" as a unit rather than a collection of novels.

Despite its many faults, "Les Misérables" is probably the greatest of all modern novels. The long period during which it

was being composed, 1825-1862, no doubt, accounted for much of its looseness and variation in interest and appeal. It appeared simultaneously in ten foreign languages, spreading throughout the world a picture of the abuses and misery of the modern social condition.

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