

VICTOR HUGO (1802-1885)

FR 335u: 19th Century France

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Birth & Family

- Born Feb. 26, 1802, in Besançon
- Two brothers. One of whom was committed for schizophrenia
- Father: Joseph Hugo (1773-1828); Bonapartist, Atheist.
- Mother: Sophie Trébuchet (1772-1821); Catholic, Royalist.
- Parents separated in 1812. Hugo was raised by his mother.

Adult Life

- Fell in love with a childhood friend, Adèle Foucher.
- Married: 1822 until Adele's death (1868) and had five children.
- Mistresses (Juliette Drouet, etc)
- Daughter Léopoldine died at age 19 with her husband in a boating accident 1843. (Hugo stopped writing for three years; never got over her death.

Early Literature: Romantic Movement

- Wrote poetry from very young. Two poems recognized by *l'Académie française*.
- His first collection of poetry (*Odes et poésies diverses*) published in 1822 & earned him a royal pension from Louis XVIII.
- Romantic Movement: emphasized the use of emotions and beauty, particularly of nature and setting.
 - Was developed as a reaction against neoclassicism.
 - Hugo was influence by François-René de Chateaubriand
- Highly controversial play *Hernani* in 1830
 - The controversy secured him as a leader of the Romantic Movement
 - Symbolized the conflict between Romantic ideals & classical French theater.

Early Literature: *Notre-Dame de Paris*

- First full-length novel, published 1831
- Inspired restoration of architecture throughout France
- In 1845, restoration began on Notre Dame cathedral
 - Headed by Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc
 - Restoration completed 25 years later

Victor Hugo



Politics: July Monarchy

- Monarchist-leaning
- 1841 –Elected to *l'Académie française* (5th attempt)
- 1845—Named *Peer de France* and elected to the National Assembly
- Pro freedom of the press, against death penalty, social injustice.

Politics: 2nd Republic & 2nd Empire

- More supportive of Republicanism
- August 1848: founded *l'Événement* newspaper
- 1848: elected to constitutional & legislative bodies.
- Supported Louis-Bonaparte's election bid, but relationship deteriorated.
- Very anti-empire; fought against Napoleon's coup d'état

Politics: Exile

- Belgium (1851-1852), Jersey (1852-1855), Guernsey (1855-1870)
- Continued critiquing Napoleon with political pamphlets: *Napoleon le Petit & Histoire d'un crime*.
- These were banned, but smuggled to the masses.
- 1859: Napoleon III granted amnesty.
- Hugo refused to return due to threat on his freedom of speech
- Returned after Napoleon was defeated

Politics: 3rd Republic

- Continued politics as a senator & national assembly representative
- Believed in European Integration, copyright, etc.

Political Literature: *Les Misérables*

- In exile, Hugo wrote, completed, & published many novels, including his most well-known novel *Les Misérables*.
 - Took 17 years to be written and published
- Popular with the masses, but some writers were very opposed to the novel
 - Flaubert: "neither truth nor greatness"
 - Baudelaire: "tasteless and inept"
- The novel examines the ideas of politics, morality, justice and religion; these issues were soon brought up at the National Assembly of France.
- *Le dernier jour d'un condamné* (*The Last Day of a Condemned Man*), published in 1829, was a critique of capital punishment.

Drawing/Painting & Death/Procession

- Drawing/painting: produced over 4,000 works for private use. Van Gogh stated that if Hugo had become a painter instead of a writer, he would have outshone the artists of their century.
- Died May 22, 1885, at the age of 83 in Paris. Buried in the Panthéon of Paris.