



# The Later Novels of Victor Hugo: Variations on the Politics and Poetics of Transcendence

By Kathryn M. Grossman

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This study places the last three novels of Victor Hugo's maturity - *Les Travailleurs de la mer* (1866), *L'Homme qui rit* (1869), and *Quatrevingt-Treize* (1874) - within the context of his artistic development after the success of *Les Misérables* (1862). By situating these historical narratives in relation to each other, to all of Hugo's previous fiction, and to a number of poetic and critical works published in exile and in the initial years of the Third Republic, it illuminates the final structural and thematic shifts from a poetics of harmony to one of transcendence. As in *Les Misérables*, the disharmony associated with social tumult, apocalyptic vision, and oxymoronic tensions provides an essential component of the later Hugo's Romantic sublime. Instead of merely capitalizing on the runaway success of *Les Misérables* by recycling its prominent features, however, each novel makes an original contribution to the political and aesthetic trajectory inscribed by the entire *oeuvre*. Each testifies as well to the wizardry of Hugo's own 'special effects' that contribute to his story-telling genius. Such effects, especially the dizzying spatial optics and manipulation of temporal dimensions, function not as mere playful gimmicks or novelistic flourishes but as strategies for figuring and communicating the ideal, both political and artistic. The unique interplay of poetic and historical discourse in each text reconfigures our disordered experience of the world into something far more coherent a construction of meaning that strives to change perceptions and to promote social action.

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### Review

"Grossman's insightful conceptualization of Hugo's narrative work allows her to exhibit the patterns and particularities of each of the novels in question. Each embraces disjunctions and is charged with manifold tensions regarding human morality, historical lineage, and sociopolitical intrigue." --*Modern Philology*

"This study completes a noteworthy, welcome achievement, a trilogy that surveys and interprets all Hugo's novels..Should long remain unsurpassed, indispensable as a monument of interpretive scholarship devoted to the greatest author of nineteenth-century France."

--*Nineteenth-Century French Studies*

"With great clarity and erudition, the author uncovers the intricate connections between Hugo's poetics and his evolving sociopolitical outlook...Essential." --*Choice*

### About the Author

**Kathryn M. Grossman** is Professor of French at Penn State University, University Park, Pennsylvania. She is the author of three previous monographs on Victor Hugo, as well as of numerous journal articles and chapters in edited volumes.

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