

📖 Topic Page: [Hugo, Victor \(1802 – 1885\)](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/hugo_victor_1802_1885)

Definition: **Hugo, Victor Marie** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

French poet, dramatist, and novelist. A major force in 19th-century French literature, Hugo received a pension from Louis XVIII for his first collection of *Odes* (1822), and presented his manifesto of Romanticism in the preface to his play *Cromwell* (1827). Later works include the plays *Hernani* (1830) and *Ruy Blas* (1838), and the novels *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831) and *Les Misérables* (1862). Some of his most important works were written whilst in exile, such as the satirical poems *The Punishments* (1853). On the fall of the Second Republic, he returned to Paris where he became a senator.

Summary Article: **Hugo, Victor (Marie)**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

French novelist, poet, and dramatist. The verse play *Hernani* (1830) firmly established Hugo as the leader of French Romanticism. This was the first of a series of dramas produced in the 1830s and early 1840s, including *Le Roi s'amuse* (1832) and *Ruy Blas* (1838). His melodramatic novels include *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831), and *Les Misérables* (1862).

Hugo's position in French literature is important: he gave French Romanticism a peculiarly decorative character and kept the Romantic spirit alive in France for some 30 years after its apparent demise. His writing is notable for its vitality, wide scope, graceful lyrical power, rhetorical magnificence, the ability to express pathos, awe, and indignation; and the variety of style and skill displayed in his handling of metre and language. Despite a lack of humour and proportion, and an all-pervading egoism, Hugo remains a literary giant.

Hugo, born in Besançon, was the son of one of Napoleon's generals and his childhood was spent moving from one military station to another. He was educated in schools in Paris and Madrid, and at the Ecole Polytechnique in Paris. His literary talent was apparent from an early age: he won the Floral Games of Toulouse three times before publishing his first volume of verse at 20. Hugo's political opinions underwent considerable changes during his lifetime. During the reign of Louis Philippe he was a monarchist, sitting in the Assemblée Constituante as a representative of Paris. Later he became an extreme Liberal and finally, on his election to the Assemblée Legislative in 1848, a democratic republican. His support of republican ideals led to his banishment in 1851 for opposing Louis Napoleon's coup d'état. He fled to Brussels, Jersey, and finally Guernsey, where he lived until the fall of the empire in 1870, later becoming a senator under the Third Republic. He died a national hero and is buried in the Panthéon, Paris.

Hugo followed his literary debut *Odes et poésies diverses* (1822) with two extravagant prose romances, *Hans d'Islande* (1823) and *Bug Jargal* (1826). His second volume of poems, *Odes et ballades* (1826), and his third, *Orientales* (1829), definitely mark the trend of his tastes and opinions. They are Romantic in the extreme, the subjects being barbaric and fantastic, the metre varied and irregular, and the language glowing and exotic. His first play, *Cromwell* (1828), which was never acted, is more a romance in dramatic form than a true drama. Its preface served as a manifesto of the new Romantic school, asserting the dramatist's independence and emancipation from all the old conventions.

In 1830 *Hernani*, the first of his typical dramas, was acted at the Théâtre Français. Its subject is the suicide of a noble Spaniard at the moment of his marriage, on account of a point of honour, and its style is in direct antithesis to all the traditions of the French stage. The play was the subject of long and violent contention between Classicists and Romanticists. In 1831 a correspondingly revolutionary work in prose romance form appeared in *Notre-Dame de Paris*, a pretentious but picturesque novel of medieval Paris, which shows the influence of Walter Scott. Although lacking proportion, humour, and a complete construction, it displays Hugo's faculty of description, command of passion, and splendidly poetic language. (It was later filmed as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* in 1924 and 1939.) In the same year Hugo published *Les Feuilles d'automne*, a volume of lyric and contemplative verse.

The next few years were occupied in producing dramas: *Marion Delorme* (1831), *Le Roi s'amuse* (on which Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Rigoletto* is based), *Lucrèce Borgia* (1833), *Marie Tudor* (1833), *Angelo* (1835), *Ruy Blas*, and *Les Burgraves* (1843). All these dramas show command of language and fertile invention, but are somewhat lacking in construction. Their production was interspersed with that of several volumes of verse: *Chants du crépuscule* (1835), *Les Voix intérieures* (1837), and *Les Rayons et les ombres* (1840).

In exile in Guernsey Hugo issued *Les Châtiments* (1853), giving vent to his anger against the Second Empire. The book is notable as a rare example of lyric satire, a combination of true poetry with invective. After three years of silence, he emerged in an entirely different light with *Les Contemplations* (1856), a collection of lyrics remarkable for their beauty of expression, simple diction, and breadth and profundity of thought. In 1859 the *Légende des siècles* appeared, a collection of narrative and pictorial poems dealing with different periods of the world's history, which, though unequal, contains some of his masterpieces. In 1862 Hugo published *Les Misérables*, a long prose romance dealing with contemporary life. Its descriptive sections are remarkable, and although the style is sometimes mannered and the plot sometimes faulty, most of the writing is touching and sincere. *Chansons des rues et des bois* (1865) was a collection of light lyric verse, which shows Hugo in rather a different character; the grace and wit of some of these poems, though not always free from laboured mannerism, show his extraordinary adaptability. *Les Travailleurs de la mer* (1866), another prose romance, is a tale of passionate adventure and self-sacrifice, set in a Guernsey fishing community.

The writings of his latter years, after his return to France, are of less importance. They include *L'Année terrible* (1872); poems; *Quatre-Vingt-Treize* (1873), another historical romance; *Seconde légende des siècles* (1877); *Histoire d'un crime* (1877); five volumes of poetry; *L'Art d'être grand-père* (1877); *Le Pape* (1878); *La Pitié suprême* (1879); *L'Ane* (1880); *Les Quatre Vents de l'esprit* (1881); and a play, *Torquemada* (1882).

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Les Misérables

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