



## Victor Hugo: A Tumultuous Life

*Noel Gerson*

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## **Victor Hugo: A Tumultuous Life** Noel Gerson

Victor Hugo was the titan of his age.

Not only was he a superb poet, novelist, dramatist, essayist, and critic who influenced generations of writers following him, he won a degree of hysterical public worship such as no author had ever received.

But his whole life was a series of paradoxes.

Hugo was pompous, yet possessed a quiet, sweet humility that was startling. He was a penny-pincher who lived like a monarch, and a profligate when it suited his fancy.

He proclaimed the virtues of monogamy, yet in later years had scores of mistresses. At the height of his career, he maintained three separate households at the same time: for his wife, his principal mistress, and a woman who might best be described as an auxiliary mistress.

He imagined himself a man of the people, but so mishandled himself during a political crisis in Paris that he barely escaped lynching by the public.

An aspiring politician whose views ran from orthodox monarchism, through Bonapartism, to liberal republicanism, Hugo yearned for a political career. Although he became a member of both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, he failed miserably in his second vocation. But many considered him the most influential political figure of his day, and he played a major role in the downfall of Napoleon III.

The events of his life were not only melodramatic, but often tragic.

His favourite brother went mad at Victor's wedding, and had to be confined to a sanatorium, where he languished for many years. The eldest of Victor's daughters, his favourite, was drowned in the Seine, and may have committed suicide. He not only outlived his two sons, but his younger daughter became insane after an abortive elopement with a British army officer and spent the next half-century in an asylum.

The highs and lows that shaped him as a man, also shaped his writing. And his unwavering dedication to giving a voice to the outcasts, the poverty-stricken and the dispossessed helped create his two most famous novels: 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame' and 'Les Miserables'.

Using Hugo's compelling, and often tragic, life Gerson analyses Hugo's much-loved novels and gives a fascinating portrait of a remarkable man.

Noel Bertram Gerson (1913-1988) was a prolific American author, who wrote 325 books under his own name and under several pseudonyms. He channeled his own wartime experience in military intelligence into many of his novels, as well as writing widely about American history. His titles include 'Liner', 'Daughter of Earth and Water: A Biography of Mary Shelley', 'The Conqueror's Wife' and 'I'll Storm Hell: A Novel of Mad Anthony Wayne'.

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