

مجلة جامعة الرازي للعلوم الإدارية والإنسانية RUHMS

عملية محكمة تصدر عن كلية العلوم الإدارية والإنسانية – جامعة الرازي

أبحاث العدد:

- مدى توافر مقومات تطبيق نظام محاسبة المسئولية في الجامعات الأهلية اليمنية (دراسة حالة في جامعة العلوم والتكنولوجيا)
- Les The Resilience of the Human Spirit in “Les isérables” by Victor Hugo: A Critical Analysis
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- المظاهرات بين المشروعية واللامشروعية

جامعة الرازي

كلية العلوم الإدارية والإنسانية



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The Resilience of the Human Spirit in “Les Misérables” by Victor Hugo: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

This paper aims to make a critical analysis of one of the literary pieces of nineteenth-century novels and one example of postmodern literature, Les Miserables, written by the French artist, Victor Hugo. The well-woven art represented by the writer shows his ability to personify the sequence of the human spirit's conflict and its resilience to get purified. The paper clarifies the master craft of the novelist to confess to the readers that the human spirit's resilience and dignity transcend time and place. It throws light on the manner of the writer; he abuses and criticizes the situation he has lived in. His satirical contradictory style of gathering comedy and tragedy multiplies his spark.

Keywords: Resilience, postmodern literature, transcendence.

1- Introduction

Resilience is a literary and religious term that means the ability of the human spirit to get purified and get rid of sins. It is derived from the Latin verb, *resilire*, which was first used in 1674 and means “to jump back”. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines resilience as “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.”

Masten (2014), a developmental psychologist, is known for her definition of resilience that has evolved to take a more systemic approach. She writes, "Resilience can be broadly defined as the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development. The concept can be applied to systems of many kinds at many interacting levels, both living and non-living, such as a microorganism, a child, a family, a security system, an economy, a forest, or the global climate." (Ungar, 2018)

Postmodernism is a literary approach. Though there is much debate among critics about the postmodernism approach, postmodern literary works are well known for evoking social problems and issues and discussing them without passing judgment on them. In *Les Miserables*, Victor Hugo shows twentieth-century social demerits. He sheds light on French society. However, with no final judgment, he leaves the criticism of that situation to the reader.

Transcendentalism describes the idea that “Our self-reliance, our intuition, and our natural instincts should guide us to do the right thing. In Nature, we are uncorrupted. It is only when we let society influence us that we start to conform and hence — be corrupted, right?” (Walter Bowni, 2021)

Thus, Jean, with his instinct, believes that he can do the right deeds after he has purified himself from his sins. We, as Javert, who follows the social norms, have no doubt that a sinful person will never be a rightful person.

2- Literature Review

Victor Hugo (1802- 1885) has a wonderful childhood and lived as a royalist in France, but as he grows older, he develops republican ideas and becomes a staunch supporter of the republicans. "Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art" (Preface: p.18). He is devoted to them in his massive literary works. For that, he deserved to be considered a literary figure of the nineteenth century as well as a European hero.

Victor Hugo began his education at the Real Colegio de San Antonio de Abad in Madrid. The beginning of the literary period of his career (i.e., the late early years of the nineteenth century) begins with his marriage to Adele Foucher. He is one of the French romantic writers who participated in all literary genres: poetry, plays, essays, dramas, and novels. *Les Miserables* (1862) and *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1831) are his two most brilliant novels.

Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* is a documentary manifest, which denotes the rebellion in France in June 1832. There is socio- economic hardship accompanied by a widespread cholera epidemic. Therefore, the writer in his novel throws his shades on all the victims in society. Hugo never kept himself idle. He had an inherent gift of keen observation, which made it possible for him to analyze the nuances of human beings and conflicts. As the wise saying goes, 'Home keeping youths will have homely wits' (William Shakespeare,1623), Hugo wanted to keep himself abreast of the latest developments in the literary field. A multi-faceted personality in Hugo was not the creation of a single element. He was really a jewel in the literary domain of French.

Hugo is a very humble man who has not aspired to fame, nor has he used his position to enlarge his interests. He has spent his entire life working for the wealth he inherited from his society. He spent his time alleviating the suffering

of others and revolting against tyrannical and oppressive ideas and people. And it is so clear from his writing and the positions he has occupied. Thus, the paper shows the efforts Hugo made to abuse the juxtaposed thoughts that spread during his period that a sin creature could not get rid of these sins and be purified.

Previous studies on the same matter

“Les Miserables is a melodramatic novel written from the premise that any man can rise above his circumstances to reach perfection. The plot of the novel is suspenseful from start to finish; it follows both Jean Valjean’s and society’s struggles with good and evil.” (Threate De La presents, 2020).

“Jean Valjean is the hero of the show. It is his life journey that we follow. He is supposed to be stronger than other men, and so he should physically appear robust. He should carry himself confidently onstage and come across to the audience as reasonably mature and paternal. Valjean’s capacity for change is his greatest asset throughout the story. The key to his character is his great humanity and compassion. Jean Valjean is a vocally demanding role, so cast your best male singer and actor.” According to (Broadway Camp, 2019).

3-Analysis of the Resilience of the Human Spirit in the Novel

The story of Les Miserables is like most stories of its time, in the nineteenth century in particular, which deal with social issues. As a postmodern story, the story raises many social issues under the Republican rule in France during that era. There is poverty, persecution, and child exploitation in the country.

Les Miserables is a story about a man who becomes a prisoner in order to feed his family. He escaped the prison only to find himself returning there for the same sin he had committed. In the novel, the protagonist, Jean, appears to

be wrestling with the calamities that have plagued society. And in his struggle to obtain a loaf of bread for the children of his miserable, poor sister through legitimate work, unfortunately, and due to the spread of unemployment, he has no choice but to obtain that loaf illegally, leading him after that to prison.

Despite the harsh life of the hero, he has not surrendered but continued to struggle to obtain the necessities of life. He escapes from prison, but this is not feasible and it is a reason to extend the sentence. The prison is not isolated from the outside world, but it is a microcosm of the world of misery. Javert, the miserable jailer, hurls his anger at Jean, thinking that it is impossible for a sinner to return one day to a righteous man.

Faith and recourse to God are the saviors in this life. A bishop shelters Jean, a fugitive homeless person suffering from hunger. The community has rejected Jean because his card includes that he was a prisoner. Thus, the miserable Jean, the guest of the bishop, has come to find a pure life. The bishop lives as pure as those silver vessels that his room contains. He considers taking these silverwares and sneaking out of the bishop's house but instead finds himself handcuffed by the police and forced to return to the bishop's house. Here Jean finds himself at the behest of the bishop, whose words have turned all Jean's scales. "Release him." The bishop tells the police, "he doesn't steal them". Why do not you take all of them?" Here, the authority of the restrictions has no choice but to leave, dragging the disappointment of superficial thought and only believing in materials. He believed that this did not provide an opportunity for the human spirit to be redeemed and cleansed of the sins it had committed or been led to commit.

Jean realizes that there is an opportunity to get rid of sins. He has to move from that country to another country and change his name. He becomes "Madeleine", a man who collects his fortune from silver vessels given to him

by the Bishop. He has become a generous man and dedicates himself and the rest of his life to serving his community. He has been appointed the mayor of the town. Madeleine is not more fortunate than Jean but is still pursued by a ghost who does not believe in the forgiveness of sins and the resilience of the human soul after sinning. Javert is a guest of the mayor who finds himself facing another dilemma and psychological struggle. Is Madeleine the man who escaped from prison, Jean?

The novel embodies the predominant thought during the nineteenth century in Europe in general and in France in particular, which is personified by the hero, Javert, “that it is impossible for a human soul that has been afflicted by sin to return one day into a righteous and pure soul.” With full force and determination, Victor Hugo stands against this thought to prove that the truth is exactly the opposite. He criticizes and negotiates such beliefs through the characters, Jean and Javert. As long as a creature has a Lord who forgives his sins, he can repent of them. In addition, his soul can be transcended and purified of whatever it is that is debilitating. As a result, there is a suspected man standing in front of the judiciary to be convicted of the crime of others. Madeleine rushes to acquit that downtrodden man, acknowledging that he is the fugitive Jean who has escaped from prison. Jean pictures the scene of virtue and self-transcendence, which is not compared with prestige and money.

Despite his best efforts to purge his sins, Madeleine is still bound by a crime committed against a woman struggling to support her only daughter. She was rejected by a factory manager to work because of those days’ labor discipline. She is a mother of a child, and she is not allowed to work. Fantine, the mother of Cosette, one of the heroes of the story, has sold everything she owned, even her hair, for the expenses of her daughter in the Ténarde’s inn. She does that in order to have a job opportunity. Though she sacrifices and suffers a lot, she is

unable to pay her debts. She becomes a vagrant, struggling with disease, hunger, and the weather's ups and downs. Fate has brought Fantine to Madeleine, who has custody of her child, Cosette, before she has died. Thus, a burden is added to Mr. Madeleine, the responsibility of that child. He is responsible for everything allied with the wrongful and unfair dismissal of Cosette's mother from his factory. While Cosette suffers a lot, her mother sends her money, clothes, and toys. Everything was taken away from her, not only what she had received from her mother but also from her childhood. Believing that every sin is counterbalanced by deeds of righteousness and goodness, which erase that sin, Jean leaves to fetch Cosette after he has spent plenty of money on that greedy old man, Ténarde. The poor girl is taken into Jean's care and lavished with bounty and livestock.

This is how the story paints a landmark of the human soul's superiority, simplicity, and cooperativity with its peers to feel their suffering. It participates in erasing that suffering. These are lofty significances that have been stripped from that era. There is no safe place for women to protect themselves and their children from homelessness, disease, and even insults and vulgarity.

Just as there are no limits to conflict in this life, which is not devoid of sweet and sour. The days pass and Jean finds himself being pursued by a young man, "one of the ghosts wants to haunt him", Jean thinks. Finally, he finds that the young man is suffering because of his love for Jean's little girl, Cosette. Jean should not make the same mistake that his factory manager has made. He should not be an obstacle in the way of two young lovers, who have been destined to meet. Jean's dream has been fulfilled. Marius, the young man, becomes close to Cosette and receives the old Jean's love and care.

There is nothing more beautiful in life than feeling the suffering of others and supporting them to get rid of their life difficulties. It is Jean's habit to look

for Marius and this time finds that Marius has joined the Youth of Alphabet, young boys standing against oppression and tyranny in the country. They demand the necessities of life. Thus, Jean has to support them, believing in their demands and protecting Marius, who has finally rejoined Jean's family.

Things fluctuate, and days are ups and downs. The ghost, who pursues Jean, becomes in the grip of the Youth of Alphabet. Javert is now a prisoner, but Jean releases him. Thus, the purified soul has to avoid grudges, and Jean teaches a great lesson to the captured ghost Javert. He has succeeded in obtaining his dream. He gets out with the wounded Marius through the sewer tunnel, but unfortunately, he finds himself surrounded by that ghost awaiting him at the mouth of the tunnel. The novelist has succeeded in picturizing a real comparison between the purified soul and its opposites. Here is a clear portrait of the superiority of the human soul after getting resilience and purification.

Victor Hugo, the French novelist, succeeded in mastering that artistic painting through which he was able to embody the reality of his country during the 19th century, when the republicans prevailed in France before the French Revolution. He is also able to prove to the world around him that the human soul is pure and transcendent when it seeks to escape sins and gain resilience. That is what Javert realized at last. At the bottom of the tunnel, he has to find out if reality juxtaposes his beliefs. The deformation in the belief has no remedy but to throw himself into the depth of the ocean to hide the ghost of crooked thoughts that perched on France for a long time.

Thus, the story reflects the resilience and dignity of the human spirit. Javert comes to find that his belief that "sinful people never be reformed" is completely paralogous. Jean is a sinful person as they think and deserves punishment according to the law, saving the lives of Marius, Gavroche, and Javert. He tries his best to save Fantine's life, but there is nothing in his hand

to do and, at last, she has passed away. Then he spends his time and wealth on Fantine's daughter, Cosette. And that what has been realized at the end by Javert, the policeman.

Hugo has the uncanny knack and acumen to unravel the silent sufferings passed through by the women in society and the glaring physical torments accosted by the young girl, Cosette. Though *Les Miserables* is a social novel that speaks of a particular period, it has all the ingredients of political and ethical upheaval. It is just a prototype of the myriad sufferings of humanity. There is an absent reality at the end of the novel, with the feeling of Javert contrasted with the indescribable duty Jean has put on his shoulders against society and the people.

"The chief function of criticism is to enlighten and stimulate"(Chaudhuri, 1998). A superficial reading of *Les Miserables* spurred an instinct in the writer to probe for a wealth of literary and historical content in the novel. It is no denying the fact that anyone who reads this novel will be compelled to read it again and again for the rich resources it contains. Not only does the novel abound in an aura of historical anecdotes, but it also renders in a veiled manner, the emotional conflicts that many characters pass through. It captivates the writer in general and the world researchers in particular with its broad and deep account of French history couched in literary fervor. The novel in French has been faithfully translated into English, keeping the readers quite engaged from the beginning to the end. The novel's most astonishing and extraordinary feature is the combination of the strains and success that the purified soul has met and is being administered simultaneously.

4- Conclusion

Les Miserables is a period novel and a social document that encapsulates the emotional and political turmoil. The novel is a crisp account of the past

decadence with a realistic portrayal of the suffering and death of Jean Valjean, which is imbued not with a grim, sorrowful tone but with an underlying irony, which permeates the whole narrative. Such irony cannot be accompanied by a generally sympathetic tone. However, Victor, as a true artist, makes a point of playing on our sympathies on occasion, bringing sorrow to the surface abruptly.

The striking features that the novel exemplifies are the well-woven series in which the human soul changes after getting rid of its sins. The evocation of pathos and the tragic denouement result from separation and alienation. The royals resort to the unsympathetic and inhuman practice of killing young boys calling for freedom. These young boys are quite hopeless and helpless. They are pathetic creatures as they are made to work round the clock without any respite or respect.

When these issues are fulfilled, the purpose of the writer for the amelioration and upliftment of society is very much realized. Hugo instills hope in a society rich in cultural heritage that it will one day reach the pinnacle of fame and development. *Les Miserables* ends with the reality that Javert has been denied for a long period of time.

The writer correlates these initiatives to the intuitive didacticism the novel encapsulates in itself. The elements of poignancy reflected in the novel could be treated as pointers for developing a flawless society. The writer has deduced from the novel that moral debasement and financial deprivation would mar the progress of any society. It is this message that Hugo has painted imperceptibly in his novel. However, there is optimism and a vision for the emergence of a stronger French society. The great poet Shelley says:

"If winter comes can spring be far behind" (P.B. Shelly Selected Poems, p. 54.)

Notwithstanding the minor hurdles we face, there is every hope of marching towards progress.

It is the avowed intention of the writer that the novel should not be an object of literary pursuit but an instrument to promote harmony and progress that would make France get rid of awful fame as well as the human soul get resilient and purified from sins.

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مرونة الروح البشرية: تحليل نقدي لرواية البؤساء للروائي الفرنسي فيكتور هوجو

الباحث: عبدالقادر حسن إسماعيل مشعف

الملخص العربي

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى التحليل النقدي لأحد الاعمال الأدبية و أحد روايات القرن التاسع عشر التي تجسد نموذجا لعصر ما بعد الحداثة. تلك الرواية هي "رواية البؤساء" و التي كتبها الاديب الفرنسي فيكتور هوجو. لقد أبدع هوجو في كتاباته إذ حاكها بمهارة عالية يظهر فيها تمكن الكاتب من تجسيد صراع النفس البشرية و مرونتها من أجل ان تحضى بشرف التوبة و التخلص من درن الآثام و المعاصي.

إن هذه الورقة البحثية تظهر القدرة و المهارة العالية في اقناع القارئ بفطرة الروح البشرية و تتوقها الدائم إلى الانابة و التخلص من اوزارها في أي زمان أو مكان. كما تسلط الورقة الضوء أيضا على أسلوب الكاتب في نقده و عدم رضاه عن الوضع الذي عايشه و ذلك بأسلوب واضح و متكرر في الجمع بين النقضين؛ المأساة و الملهاة. إن هذه الورقة البحثية تظهر القدرة والمهارة العالية في اقناع القارئ بفطرة الروح البشرية وتتوقها الدائم إلى الانابة والتخلص من اوزارها في أي زمان أو مكان. كما تسلط الورقة الضوء أيضا على أسلوب الكاتب في نقده وعدم رضاه عن الوضع الذي عايشه وذلك بأسلوب واضح ومتكرر في الجمع بين النقضين؛ المأساة والملهاة.