Character Evolution In Victor Hugo S Les Mis Rables Essay, Research Paper

Any character can fit into one of two categories, static or dynamic. One can consider the changes undergone by dynamic characters evolutions. These evolutions capture the reader s attention and focus in a novel. Victor Hugo masters the art of character change with both his characters Jean Valjean and Fantine. Quite simply, both Valjean and Fantine undergo substantial changes in their respective natures.

Initially, the reader receives a very negative impression of Valjean. For a time, every character he encounters shuns him. Hugo describes him in the excerpt, A man with a knapsack and a rope, and a terrible looking face (Hugo 12). Furthermore, the local innkeeper throws him out, acting as if he has no vacancy. Truly the description, Jean Valjean entered the galleys sobbing and shuddering; he went out hardened; he entered in despair; he went out sullen, fits Valjean like a glove (Hugo 20). Valjean soon proves the public s view of him to be well justified. After a kind and selfless priest brings Valjean in from the cold, Valjean repays him by thieving his silver. Miraculously, the priest gives him another chance at redemption by deceiving the police; he adds the brief message, you have promised me to use this silver to become an honest man (Hugo 30). However, Valjean commits one last act of wickedness. Valjean steals a silver piece from a young boy. Soon after, Valjean does indeed make an evolution in his character. He seeks frantically to return Petite Gervais coin. The quotation, what a wretch I am, signifies to the reader this change in Valjean. This change remains permanently in Valjean. Some years later, a fire burns in Montreuil sur Mer. Valjean rushed into the fire and saved two children (Hugo 44). Finally, the public sees the changes in Valjean, though they know not his true identity. Yet, His character continues to change for the better. Jean Valjean s goodness seems to know no bounds when he saves an innocent man from life imprisonment only by sacrificing his own freedom. Valjean changes for no other reason than personal will and pure-heartedness. Clearly, Valjean s evolution from scoundrel to saint exemplifies Hugo s mastery of character change.

Hugo uses both Fantine s physical appearance, as well as her wealth, or lack thereof, to depict her constantly falling status. Fantine begins quite humbly. She bears a daughter out of wedlock named Cosette. While Valjean changes as a result of his pure heart, Fantine changes for the love of her daughter. To reinstate this point, Hugo states, the woman had nothing in the world but the child (Hugo 37). Hugo initially describes Fantine in this quotation, a workingwoman . young and beautiful (Hugo 36). Fantine possesses but eighty francs in the world, but she tenders seventy-five of them to house her child for a month. Already, Fantine begins to sacrifice herself for her child. Fantine returns home and soon acquires a job to support the fees enacted upon her by the Thenadiers. At this point, Fantine s life seems to change for the better. Sadly, an unapproved dismissal from her job leaves her penniless once again. Now unable to support her child, she must search for a new form of income. From this the reader can determine how her undying love for her child adversely impacts her life. Moreover, her social, physical and financial positions become steadily more frightful. A barber informs her that he will pay ten francs for her hair. Immediately, she replies, cut it off (Hugo 54). Soon afterwards, Hugo describes her smile in the statement, the corners of her mouth were stained with blood . the two teeth were gone (Hugo 57). This physical degradation clearly portrays Fantine s steady evolution to obliteration. After a short time, Fantine falls ill and passes away. This brief synopsis plainly represents the total destruction of Fantine. To summarize, Fantine evolves negatively until her destruction, in order to save her child.

To recapitulate, Jean Valjean evolves from a despised scoundrel to a beloved martyr as a result of his pure heart. Fantine evolves in quite the negative direction. Fantine, however, evolves because of the greed of society trying to place a monetary value on the infinite love for her daughter. Despite the differences, both characters undergo a change. Clearly, both of these characters make an evolution of identity.