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**'The contribution of Victor Hugo to the liberation, emancipation,
and changing perceptions of women in 19th century French
society.'**

**A Thesis presented to
The National University of Ireland, Cork
for the degree of PhD (French)**

**By
Jeanna Ní Riordáin.**

Department of French, University College Cork

September 2015

Supervisor: Professor Paul Hegarty

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Declaration of Work:

I hereby declare that this thesis submitted for the degree of PhD (French) is my own work and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere.

Signed: Jeanna Ní Riordáin

Abstract.

The over-riding perceptions of Victor Hugo's attitudes towards women are intensely coloured by his deep-seated Romanticism and his well-testified, stifling, and over-bearing treatment of women in his personal life. As such, Hugo's contribution to the feminist movement of his time has been woefully overlooked in the larger scheme of his social and political activism. Through a close examination of his largely neglected and unstudied public discourse on behalf of women's rights, this thesis situates Hugo's feminist views firmly in the context of 19th century French feminism, while also drawing heavily from the illuminating precepts of Enlightenment feminism. In particular, this thesis examines Hugo's support for several of the most determining issues of 19th century French feminism, including women's right to education, equal citizenship, universal suffrage rights, and the issue of regulated prostitution. Further, by examining the way in which Hugo's views on women's maternal role extended far behind the limited vision of domesticity bolstered by the ideology of 'republican motherhood', this thesis engages in a re-appraisal of Hugo's literary representation of maternity which identifies the maternal as a universal quality of devotion and self-sacrifice to which all humankind must aspire for the creation of a just, egalitarian, and democratic society. Though at times inevitably constrained by his Romanticism, this thesis demonstrates the extent to which Hugo's feminism is grounded in his wider vision of social emancipation and is underpinned by a profound empathy, compassion, and moral conscience – qualities which are just as fundamental for men participating in the feminist struggle today, as they were for Hugo when participating in the fitful, though decisive, feminist movement in 19th century France.

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The contribution of Victor Hugo to the liberation, emancipation, and changing perceptions of women in 19th century French society.

When one thinks of Victor Hugo and women, the word feminism certainly does not often, if ever, come to mind. One thinks rather of Hugo as the ardent, philandering lover, the Romantic poet forever contemplating *Le Sacre de la Femme*, or the loving, generous, but over-bearing father. And yet, it is widely accepted that Hugo did support women's rights and defended the plight of women. The figure of Fantine serves as the most enduring reminder of Hugo's defence of women which has lingered on into public and popular imagination. While his commiseration with the plight of women may be acknowledged however, the perceived need to devote singular and unique attention to Hugo's defence of women, or indeed to consider whether his name merits a place in the feminist movement of the 19th century has not been deemed worthy of in-depth critical appraisal in Hugolian scholarship to date.

There appears to be several over-riding reasons for this phenomenon. Most obviously, the voluminous collection of studies devoted to Hugo's personal relationships with women have dramatically directed the course of scholarly focus away from any in-depth appraisal of his contribution to the feminist struggle of his time. We need only peruse the extensive collections of Hugo's private correspondences with the women in his life for evidence of the severely disempowering impact of his megalomania, egotism, and self-indulgence on these women. The many tantalising scandals surrounding Hugo's love life continue to fascinate biographers¹, while his life-long avid sexual appetite² has cemented his image as the virile 'grand homme' and the most

¹ Biographers delight in telling the many infamous scandals surrounding Hugo's amorous conquests in particular his liaison with Léonie Biard which resulted in Hugo being caught having adulterous sex and narrowly escaping imprisonment owing to the immunity allowed to him by his status as Pair de France, while Léonie was sentenced to six months imprisonment in Saint-Lazare. Then there is his famous love pact with Juliette Drouet under the terms of which Juliette promised to give up her career as an actress in return for Hugo's love and protection and of course, the bizarre living arrangements of Juliette in exile, residing only a few kilometres away from the Hugo family home. Biographers devote considerable attention also to Adèle's infamous love affair with Sainte-Beuve. For colourful accounts of such aspects of Hugo's love life, see for example Graham Robb's *Victor Hugo*, Raymond Escholier's *Victor Hugo et les femmes*, Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Temptation of the Impossible: Victor Hugo and Les Misérables*, Michel De Decker, *Hugo, Victor pour ces dames*, Paul Lafarque, *La Légende de Victor Hugo*.

² Henri Guillemin's *Hugo et la sexualité* provides a very detailed and amusing account of Hugo's sexual conduct during his years in exile which have become notoriously labelled as "the servant years" by biographers. Guillemin's study is based on the private journals kept by Hugo in Jersey and Guernsey which record the minute details of Hugo's sexual encounters, and which were almost all written in Spanish in a bid to cover his tracks.

notorious Don Juan of the 19th century. Of course Hugo himself contributed to such an image, which undoubtedly very pleasingly flattered his ego: ‘J’aime les jeunes femmes, non les vieilles. Je ne suis pas bouquiniste en amour.’³

Countless biographies and primary documentation attest to Hugo’s stifling and overbearing impact on the women who surrounded him. For decades, Juliette Drouet, Hugo’s long-suffering lover and self-proclaimed ‘la plus misérable des femmes’⁴, has been the subject of extensive and highly sympathetic scholarly attention.⁵ The publication of *Le Journal D’Adèle Hugo* provides an invaluable insight into the way in which Hugo’s political exile alienated the rest of the Hugo family, most notably his daughter Adèle. In *L’engloutie: Adèle, fille de Victor Hugo 1830-1915*, Henri Guillemin argues that the degree to which Hugo wished his family to surround him was almost unnatural: ‘Il est vrai...qu’il tient beaucoup à cette unité concrète de la famille, bonne et nécessaire lorsque les enfants sont petits, mais qui cesse d’être concevable, et devient presque contre nature, lorsque les enfants sont adultes.’⁶ The letters exchanged between Hugo and Mme Hugo reveal the absolute self-sacrifice which befell the women in Hugo’s life: ‘L’exil ne se discute pas [...] et je comprends que ta famille qui n’est quelque chose que pour toi, se sacrifie, non seulement à ton honneur, mais aussi à ta figure. Moi, je suis ta femme, et ce que je fais n’est que mon strict devoir.’⁷ Indeed, Hugo’s megalomania is seen as one of the major contributing factors to his youngest daughter Adèle’s descent into madness owing to the manner in which Hugo dealt with his grief over the death of his eldest daughter Léopoldine, which deprived his youngest daughter of an existence in her own right.⁸ The severity

³ Cited in *Le Fil de la vie*, Laffont, Robert, (Max Pol Fouchet: Paris, 1957) p. 58.

⁴ Escholier, Raymond, *Victor Hugo et les femmes*, (Flammarion: Paris, 1935), p. 54.

⁵ Some of the notable studies which present Juliette Drouet in a deeply sympathetic light include *Olympio ou la vie de Victor Hugo, Juliette Drouet: une destinée* (Pascale Lafargue, Éditions Lanore: Paris, 2004), *Juliette Drouet: la prisonnière sur parole*, (Henri, Troyat, Flammarion: Paris, 1997). *Victor Hugo*, (Joanna Richardson, Weidenfeld & Nicolson: 1976), *The career of Victor Hugo*, (Elliot M. Grant, Harvard University Press: 1945)

⁶ Guillemin, Henri, *L’engloutie: Adèle, fille de Victor Hugo 1830-1915*, (Éditions du Seuil: Paris, 1985), p. 44.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 46.

⁸ Aspects of Hugo’s grieving process were extremely self-indulgent and insensitive towards the rest of the family, in particular towards Adèle – his habit of having models dress in Léopoldine’s dresses and parade about the family home for instance or the famous table-tapping sessions in Jersey which Adèle attended, though not in great health herself at the time compounded her emotionally fragile state. (Guillemin, p. 38.) Such behaviour meant that Adèle was not only struggling with her own unacknowledged grief over her sister’s death but that she was also faced with the impossible task of

and solitariness of life in exile had a disastrous effect on Adèle's mental and physical health,⁹ while Hugo's insistence on a traditional female role for Adèle is partly to blame for her ill-fated pursuit of Albert Pinson: 'c'est pour elle surtout que je lui demande de réaliser ces deux progrès: être femme du monde, être femme de ménage.'¹⁰

Given that his less than favourable personal treatment of women has been so candidly exposed, we can hardly be surprised that Hugo has not been considered as a fore-running feminist of his time. The lack of critical attention on Hugo's feminism to date can thus easily be attributed to such an intensive focus on his private relationships with women from which he emerges as a megalomaniac lover and the quintessential 19th century patriarch, while the long-suffering and self-sacrificing women who surrounded him have emerged as formidable figures worthy of feminist appraisal and critical attention in their own right. One of the most fascinating features which connect each of the women in Hugo's life is the fact that they all chose to write and leave behind countless primary correspondences and writings, some 20,000 letters in the case of Juliette Drouet. It was as if these women, who lived their lives under Hugo's illustrious shadow, were desperate to leave behind some trace of their own existence. As Danièle Gasiglia-Laster observes: 'Les femmes de l'entourage de Hugo se mettent presque toutes à écrire, comme si elles avaient besoin d'exister par les mots.'¹¹ In *Les*

living up to the idealised image of perfect femininity with which Hugo endowed Léopoldine's memory.

⁹ Madame Hugo's letters to Hugo demonstrate her despair over the grave consequences of the family's prolonged exile on Adèle's health: 'Mais ce qui est incontestable, c'est qu'on a agi comme si Adèle n'eût pas existé [...] crois-moi, faisons matériellement et moralement pour Adèle ce qui est dans la mesure de nos forces. *Ce ne sera qu'une dette que nous acquitterons* et ce n'est pas le père que j'invoque, mais l'équité que Dieu a déposée en toi, et à laquelle je t'ai vu rarement faillir.' (Guillemin, p.47, emphasis in original) Friends of the Hugo family also observed the grim effects of exile on Adèle's health such as Hetzel, and also Hugo's son François-Victor who supported his mother in trying to persuade his father that Adèle would be better off in Paris. Annette Rosa describes the degeneration of both Mme Hugo and Adèle's health in exile and Hugo's obstinate refusal to acknowledge Adèle's declining health: 'Se sentant de plus en plus inutile, étrangère à une maison qu'elle n'aime pas, vieillissante aux côtés d'un époux qui semble rajeunir, Adèle s'assombrit. Elle s'accommoderait encore de cette vie étroite, mais elle souffre de voir ses enfants, sa fille surtout s'étioler dans une oisiveté et un célibat hors de saison [...] une atteinte grave, survenue en décembre 1856, révèle un état fort alarmant: crises de nerfs, délire, fièvre, troubles psychosomatiques. Le médecin la croit perdue. Elle guérit. Si Hugo se rassure vite, Adèle devine et redoute des suites dépressives.' Annette Rosa, *Victor Hugo: l'éclat d'un siècle*, (Éditions Messidor-La Farandole: Paris, 1985), p. 58.

¹⁰ Hugo, Adèle, *Le Journal d'Adèle Hugo 1852*, ed. Frances Vernor Guille, (Lettres Modernes Minard: Paris, 1968), p. 54.

¹¹ Gasiglia-Laster, Danièle, *Victor Hugo: Celui qui pense à autre chose*, (Portaparole: Tuscolana, 2006), p. 52.

modernités de Victor Hugo, Béatrice Didier examines the extent to which Adèle Foucher exercised her own autobiographical agency in her writing of *Victor Hugo: raconté par un témoin de sa vie*, the “‘as told-to’” biography.¹² Pascale Lafargue comments on the way in which writing became for the self-effacing Juliette Drouet, an indispensable means of self-expression and self-affirmation: ‘L’écriture était pour Juliette un moyen de libérer ses envies, ses doutes, ses angoisses, ses émotions [...] L’écriture était devenue son arme, son atout, sa façon d’exister,’¹³ while Annette Rosa observes how ‘Juliette se réjoint d’être, plutôt que témoin de l’existence de Victor Hugo, à sa manière un de ses auteurs.’¹⁴

Since the publication of her diaries, Adèle Hugo has received substantial attention as a feminist figure. Leslie Smith Dow observes how the young Adèle ‘embraced George Sand’s brand of feminism’ by ‘fervently opposing marriage’¹⁵ The diaries themselves portray Adèle’s feminist consciousness, most notably her yearning to establish her own self-identity apart from being Hugo’s daughter¹⁶, and her desire to write ‘un livre libérateur des femmes, un livre adressé au XXe siècle, un livre “dont on ne rira pas dans cent ans [...] 1954.”¹⁷ Laurence Porter observes that ‘the enduring fascination with Hugo was emphasized in 1975 when Adèle H, the story of the daughter who went mad, was filmed by François Truffaut, starred Isabelle Adjani who received the Grand Prix du Cinéma Français’, and comments on how ‘to the motif of the difficult life of a child overshadowed by a parent’s genius, Adèle H adds the feminist implications of a woman destroyed by her desperate yearning for attention in a man’s world.’¹⁸ If such studies on the women in Hugo’s intimate life reveal an ‘enduring fascination’ with Hugo, it is a fascination which has glorified the women in his life as feminist icons, while effectively making any consideration of Hugo as a feminist figure, a seemingly unrewarding, and frankly implausible feat.

¹² Porter, Laurence, M., *Victor Hugo*, (Twayne Publishers: New York, 1999), p. 81.

¹³ Lafargue, Pascale, *Juliette Drouet: une destinée*, (Éditions Lanore: Paris, 2004), p. 77.

¹⁴ Rosa, p. 60.

¹⁵ Smith Dow, Leslie, *Adèle Hugo*, (Goose Lane: Fredericton, 1993), p.71.

¹⁶ In her diary Adèle writes: ‘Se faire voleuse ou fille publique est contraire à ma conscience; je ne le ferais pas, tandis que m’affranchir de mon père n’est pas contraire à ma conscience.’ (*Le Journal d’Adèle Hugo*, 1852, p. 69.)

¹⁷ Hugo, Adèle, pp. 69-70

¹⁸ Porter, p. 154.

Adding to the lack of critical enquiry into Hugo's feminism are the wider, practical problems characteristic of Hugolian research in general. The sheer magnitude of Hugo's works continues to present staggering problems for scholars, while the global nature of the social issues in which Hugo was engaged throughout his lifetime such as his condemnation of the death penalty, the freedom of press, and his pioneering advocacy of a United States of Europe has made it easy for his participation in the feminist struggle of his time to be overlooked in the larger scheme of his socialist and political activity. As Danièle Gasiglia-Laster observes: 'On a souvent oublié, en revanche, son combat pour les droits des femmes qui a suscité bien des railleries sur les bancs de ses collègues députés ou sénateurs.'¹⁹ This is indeed lamentable given that Hugo invested the same sense of moral conscience, justice and equity in his defence of women's rights as in his many other campaigns for social equality and given that, throughout his political career, Hugo repeatedly defended women's rights in the National Assembly and Senate, becoming a fervent advocate for the most radical issues which defined 19th century feminism, most notably women's right to universal suffrage, equal education, and equal citizenship. Further, his literary works demonstrate a perennial concern with the oppression of women in society, while Hugo's virulent condemnation of prostitution established him as an international defender of women's rights.

If Hugo's contribution to the feminist movement of his time has not been deemed worthy of in-depth analysis, his name does nonetheless appear in relation to 19th century feminism. It has to be said however that such references, though oftentimes generous, are nevertheless always brief and fleeting, warranting little analysis. In *Le féminisme n'a jamais tué personne*, François Montreynaud identifies the place of men such as Victor Hugo and John Stuart Mill in the mixed feminist movement which existed prior to 1970: 'Jusqu'aux années 1970, le féminisme a toujours été un mouvement mixte. Partout les hommes et les femmes, tels en France Victor Hugo – l'homme le plus illustre de son temps – ou au Royaume-Uni le philosophe John Stuart Mill [...]'²⁰ What is notable however is that when Hugo is mentioned, he is explicitly identified as a feminist, not just as a defender of women's rights. In *Femmes d'hier et femmes d'aujourd'hui*, Édmée de la Rochefoucauld proclaims Hugo as 'féministe et

¹⁹ Gasiglia-Laster, p .8.

²⁰ Montreynaud, p. 15.

généreux...car le grand poète fut l'un des plus ardents à réclamer le droit des femmes de participer à la vie politique. Au moins avons-nous vu qu'elles étaient capables de peindre et de juger les hommes d'Etat.'²¹ In relation to 20th century feminism, references to Hugo are overwhelmingly absent. Simone de Beauvoir does examine Hugo's contribution to feminism but concludes that his personal treatment of women and his deep-seated Romanticism prevent us from defining him as anything more than a 'pseudo-féministe.'²² In particular de Beauvoir condemns Hugo's treatment of Juliette Drouet: 'Nous refusons de la croire heureuse – en nos temps où la femme revendique son autonomie sociale – et sentimentale – puisqu'elle a renoncé à une vie brillante et aléatoire pour cet homme qui ne lui avait laissé que la copie de ses manuscrits et les miettes de son existence.'²³

This is in stark contrast to the esteem in which Hugo was held by feminists of his time as is attested to both in primary documentation and in present-day biographies of these women. In *Maria Deraismes: journaliste pontoisienne: une féministe et libre-penseuse au XIXe siècle*, Victor Hugo is identified as one of the leading male supporters of the feminist movement of his time: 'au cours de ce siècle, de fortes personnalités féminines se sont imposées. Cela va de la duchesse de Berry, défendant l'héritage de son fils, à George Sand adoptant dans sa vie privée une grande liberté. Mais il y a aussi Marie Bonneval, Louise Koppe, Louise Michel et enfin Maria Deraismes. L'important courant féministe est soutenu par des hommes prestigieux, Victor Hugo, Victor Schœlcher ou Léon Richer, parmi d'autres.'²⁴ In *Feminist Interpretations of Ayn Rand*, Rand is described as 'an unwavering booster of Victor Hugo.'²⁵ In *Le féminisme au masculin*, Benoîte Groult identifies Hugo as a 'précurseur de féminisme' along with Condorcet.²⁶ George Sand shared an extensive correspondence with

²¹ De la Rochefoucauld, Edmée, *Femmes d'hier et femmes d'aujourd'hui*, (Éditions Bernard Grasset: Paris, 1969), p. 79.

²² De Beauvoir, Simone, *Le deuxième sexe*, (Gallimard: Paris, 1949), p. 125.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 31.

²⁴ Singer, Claude, *Maria Deraismes: journaliste pontoisienne: une féministe et libre-penseuse au XIXe siècle*, (Editions Karthala: Paris, 2001), p. 71.

²⁵ Sheaffer, Robert, 'Reading Rand on Gender in the Light of Paglia,' in *Feminist Interpretations of Ayn Rand*, ed. Mimi Reisel Gladstein & Chris Matthew Sciabarra, (Pennsylvania State University Press: Pennsylvania, 2009), p. 306.

²⁶ Groult, Benoîte, *Le féminisme au masculin*, (Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle: Paris, 2010), p. 87.

Hugo,²⁷ while Hubertine Auclert was moved by Hugo's writings of women to join in the struggle for women's rights in Paris. Maria Deraismes and Léon Richer similarly looked to Hugo to consolidate their vast campaign for women's rights, while Hugo wrote for amnesty for Louise Michel following her arrest during the Paris Commune.

However, while there is a distinct lack of specific and in-depth research on Hugo's feminism in current Hugolian studies, the current trend adopted by biographers and critics alike, to highlight the modernity of Hugo's thought, nonetheless shows positive signs that Hugo's defence of women's rights is finally receiving due attention in the context of his combat against social misery and oppression. Several studies which examine the far-sightedness and modernity of Hugo's thought have rightly identified his support for women's rights as one of the many issues in his vast vision of social, moral, and judicial reform in 19th century French society. In *Victor Hugo and the visionary novel*, Victor Brombert observes that 'Hugo specifically prides himself on having pleaded for the underprivileged, rehabilitated the outcasts, defended women's rights, and called for schools instead of prisons to fight misery and crimes.'²⁸ In *The Temptation of the Impossible: Les Misérables*, Mario Vargas Llosa argues that 'one important aspect of the novel, which gives it a modern feel...is the treatment of women.'²⁹ Llosa argues that 'the novel denounces in resounding terms the abuses suffered by women' who are referred to as 'slaves of the Western World.'³⁰ He argues that 'rather than a class struggle over vested interests, what causes conflict in the novel are prejudices, social, moral, and sexual prejudices' as evidenced by Fantine's tragic fate and that 'for that reason, the narrator is convinced that the remedy for crime and prostitution is schooling.'³¹ Laurence Porter argues that Hugo's portrayal of Fantine has not received 'due credit for anticipating the naturalist movement in the chapters devoted to her life both in Paris and in her hometown: 'Naturalism tends to depict drudgery. In the Paris scenes, however, Hugo depicts the grisettes...at play rather than at work. And he emphasizes the inequities of their sexual exploitation by middle-class

²⁷ The correspondence between Victor Hugo and George Sand has been compiled in audio format and in *Correspondance et éloge funèbre, George Sand, Victor Hugo*, narrated by Anne Trémolières and Jean-Yves Patte, (Éditions Eponymes: 2011)

²⁸ Brombert, Victor, *Victor Hugo and the visionary novel*, (Harvard University Press: Boston, 1984), p. 36.

²⁹ Llosa, Mario Vargas, *The Temptation of the Impossible: Victor Hugo and Les Misérables*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2007), pp. 120-121

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 120.

³¹ *Ibid*

men in a way Zola, with his sexual insecurities could not. (Zola's *Nana*), 1880 depicting female sexuality as a monstrous source of social corruption.'³²

Likewise, Josette Acher comments on how Hugo's portrayal of Fantine is reflective of his wider critique of the penal and judicial system in nineteenth century France which he condemns as 'cette *anankè* policière [qui] trouve chez les misérables son champ de prédilection; Javert garde, respecte et défend le droit absolu de la propriété des riches, pouvoir effectif de cette époque succédant au pouvoir aristocratique: d'un côté "Monsieur Bamatabois, qui est électeur et propriétaire de cette belle maison à balcon", de l'autre Fantine, une créature en dehors de tout.'³³ In *Victor Hugo: un combat pour les opprimés*, Pascal Melka further argues that Fantine is portrayed by Hugo not just as a victim of the injustices and sexual prejudices inherent in bourgeois society but a victim also to the criminality which inevitably arises among the most impoverished and miserable groups in a society which endorses incarceration rather than rehabilitation: 'Fantine meurt de la misère et des injustices de la société bourgeoise. Mais elle meurt aussi de l'exploitation inique que lui impose Thénardier...Hugo montre ici que, bien souvent, ce sont les classes pauvres et misérables qui sont les premières victimes de la criminalité de certains individus venus de ces mêmes classes. C'est pourquoi la lutte contre la criminalité est un élément nécessaire de la politique sociale.'³⁴ Such studies bode extremely well for the study of Hugo's contribution to the struggle for female emancipation in that they demonstrate how his defence of women's rights is grounded by his wider vision of social reform and an end to all forms of injustice, misery, and oppression and thus reflect Hugo's own view on the 'woman question' in the 19th century: 'Le dix-huitième siècle a proclamé le droit de l'homme; le dix-neuvième proclamera le droit de la femme [...]'³⁵

Furthermore, recent developments in studies on the women in Hugo's works have demonstrated the fulsome advantages of re-evaluating the complexity of Hugo's

³² Porter, p. 130.

³³ Acher, Josette, 'L'Anankè des Lois' in *Lire Les Misérables*, ed. Anne Ubersfeld Anne and Guy Rosa, (Librairie José Corti: Paris, 1985), p. 117.

³⁴ Melka, Pascal, *Victor Hugo, un combat pour les opprimés: étude de son évolution politique*, (La Compagnie Littéraire: Paris, 2008), p. 117.

³⁵ *Actes et Paroles II*, (P. Ollendorff: Paris, 1937-1940), pp. 53-54

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb322627986> [Accessed 19 January 2015]

female characterisations rather than looking at Hugo's female characters from a purely autobiographical perspective and from the perspective of his Romanticism. Such an enterprise bodes extremely well for feminist appraisals of Hugo's female characterisations by countering the well-established negative stereotypes attributed to women in his works. The most resounding and long-held criticism wielded against Hugo's female characters is that they present a very one-dimensional image of femininity whereby women fit neatly into the narrow categories of virginal girlhood or devoted motherhood while women who transgress these roles are presented as grossly unnatural and monstrous aberrations of their sex. Many critics have bemoaned the interchangeable traits which have come to define the archetypal Hugolian mother. As Danièle Gasiglia Laster observes: 'S'il y a quelques beaux personnages de mères, dans son œuvre, comme Fantine ou La Flécharde, on rencontre aussi beaucoup de mères terribles, de la Sachette...à la Thénardier...en passant par Lucrece Borgia...ou alors, la mère est absente et c'est le père qui prend en charge son rôle.'³⁶ Roche identifies the 'central composing element'³⁷ in Hugo's archetypal mothers as 'their principal trait of self-sacrifice'³⁸, while Moore identifies the universal traits which unite Hugo's mother-prostitutes as part of 'Victor Hugo's romantic tendency to idealize prostitutes.'³⁹ Porter takes a far more critical line in relation to the depth of autobiographical investment in Hugo's female characters by going so far as to argue that a great many of the women in Hugo's works are nothing more than vapid 'tokens of value',⁴⁰ while Piroué argues that it is because 'Hugo se méfie de la femme' that he cannot perceive women in any other terms but those of virginal purity or devoted, sublime motherhood.⁴¹ Albistur and Armogathe argue that while Hugo may have been favourable to the social emancipation of women, 'rien n'a sollicité davantage l'imagination de Hugo que le mystère de la nature féminine'⁴² while J.C. Ireson argues

³⁶ *Ibid*

³⁷ Roche, Isabel, *Character and Meaning in the Novels of Victor Hugo*, (Purdue University Press: West Lafayette, 2007), p. 70.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 73. (For more, see pages 73-78)

³⁹ Moore, Olin H., 'How Victor Hugo created the Characters of Notre-Dame de Paris', in *Modern Language Association*, 1942, (57): 1, p. 262.

⁴⁰ Porter, p. 34. 'Like Marion Delorme, or like the queen in *Ruy Blas*, Doña Sol exists mainly as a token of value: the heroine's love identifies the worthiest man.'

⁴¹ Piroué, George, *Victor Hugo: romancier ou les dessus de l'inconnu*, (Éditions Denoël: Paris, 1964), p. 100. 'Une femme qui devient femme à ses yeux se défigure et qu'elle obéisse à la nature, à sa nature, la dénature.'

⁴² Albistur, Maïté, & Armogathe, Daniel, *Histoire du féminisme français: du moyen âge à nos jours*, (Éditions des femmes: Paris, 1977), p. 255.

that, despite Hugo's 'lyrical observations on the conditions which destroy the natural innocence of women', the 'chivalric view of the fair sex remains standard throughout Hugo's writings.'⁴³

Recent studies have shown however that Hugo's female characterisations are in fact far more complex and multi-faceted than he is generally given credit for, presenting a far more dynamic and nuanced vision of femininity. One of the most groundbreaking studies in recent times is Nicole Savy's 'Cosette: un personnage qui n'existe pas' which has effectively turned on its head prevailing critical perceptions of Cosette as Hugo's quintessential 'femme simple' by demonstrating how his entire characterisation of Cosette tends towards her erasure. Fiona Cox has examined how Hugo invokes Greek mythology in his depiction of Fantine's descent into the depths of social deprivation and decrepitude.⁴⁴ The mythical dimensions of Hugo's literary representations of femininity have also received critical attention from Agnès Spiquel who has illustrated how Hugo's re-appropriation of the mythical Goddess Isis is particularly pertinent in his recurring literary depictions of prostitution.⁴⁵ The most recent and complete collection of studies examining the place of women in Hugo's works is *Victor Hugo 3: Femmes*⁴⁶ which presents a deeply compelling and suggestive introduction to a reassessment of the place of women and femininity in Hugo's *œuvre*, highlighting such rich and diverse issues as Hugo's ambivalent portrayal of maternity, the problem of androgyny in his works, and Hugo's affinity with the female experience of suffering. Apart from Fantine, Hugo's lesser-studied female heroines have also garnered feminist appraisal in recent times, most notably Éponine⁴⁷, while the

⁴³ Ireson, J.C. *Victor Hugo: A Companion to his Poetry*, (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1997), p. 67.

⁴⁴ Cox, Fiona, 'Pygmalion and the Prostitute: Processes of exchange in Hugo's *Les Misérables*' in *Money and Culture*, ed. Hans Walter-Schmidt-Hannisa, (Peter Lang: Berlin, 2007), pp. 143-158

⁴⁵ Spiquel, Agnès, *La Déesse cachée: Isis dans l'œuvre de Victor Hugo*, (Honoré Champion: Paris, 1997)

⁴⁶ *Victor Hugo 3: Femmes*, textes réunis par Danièle Gasiglia-Laster, (Lettres Modernes Minard: Paris, 1991) The volume compiles 11 deeply engaging studies exploring the representations of women and femininity across a wide-range of Hugo's texts. Christine Planté argues that the text 'fait assez peu de place au féminisme, aux mouvements sociaux, aux positions des grands contemporains sur les femmes et l'égalité des sexes, ce qui aurait permis de mieux situer Hugo', as this wasn't the 'visée principale du volume' whose strength lies in responding to the question of how 'des femmes du XXe siècle finissant voient-elles [...] des femmes cotoyées, imaginées, racontées par un écrivain du XIXe siècle qui a parlé de leurs droits et de leur avenir ?' Christine Planté, 'Geneviève Fraise et Michelle Perrot', ed. *Histoire des femmes. Le XIXe siècle* Dorothy Kelly, *Fictionnal Gendres Victor Hugo 3: Femmes*, ed. D. Gasiglia-Laster, in *Romantisme*, 1992, 22:(77), p. 110.

⁴⁷In *Les Guérillères*, Monique Wittig explores the role of the lesser known heroin Éponine in shaping the history of the Revolution. (Viking Press: New York, 1971) Nicole Savy argues that Hugo

widespread popularization and dramatisation of Hugo's works in film and theatre has brought Esmeralda to centre stage as a strong-willed feminist heroine.⁴⁸

If the issue of feminism has not yet emerged as a subject worthy of singular enquiry in Hugolian scholarship to date, such re-evaluations of Hugo's female characters from a feminist perspective, as well as the studies which situate Hugo's defence of women as part of his wider vision of social reform clearly indicate that a singular, in-depth study devoted to Hugo's feminism could greatly contribute to these lines of research, while proving a critical, timely, and worthy subject of investigation in its own right. We may know just about everything about Hugo's private relationships with women, but we know comparatively very little about how Hugo was regarded by feminist women, or indeed about the precise nature and extent of his participation in the feminist struggle of his time. This thesis has thus chosen as its title: 'The contribution of Victor Hugo to the liberation, emancipation, and changing perceptions of women in 19th century French society.'

As such an investigation adopts a new approach to Hugo's attitudes towards women and explores a little documented aspect of his social activism, it is fitting that such a study will also be based on the largely neglected and lesser-known aspects of Hugo's *œuvre*. Hugo's somewhat despairingly large output has certainly made it easy for much of his public discourse on women's rights to go unnoticed. This thesis will thus focus on Hugo's largely unknown and unstudied public and private discourse on women's

superimposes a feminist and idealistic discourse on women in *Les Misérables* whereby Fantine and Éponine are seen to represent the misery of the socially oppressed and working woman whereas Cosette represents the privileged, passive, bourgeois woman who is only brought into existence through the love of a man, and who is never the agent of her own destiny. Nicole Savy, 'Cosette: Un personnage qui n'existe pas,' pp. 135-138) Agnès Spiquel examines the way in which Hugo reappropriates the myth of Lilith and Isis in his portrayal of Éponine who is deformed by misery yet saved by love. Agnès Spiquel, 'La dissémination du mythe d'Isis dans les romans hugoliens de l'exil' in *Mythe et récit poétique*, sous la direction de Véronique Gély-Ghedira, (Université Blaise-Pascale: Paris, 1998), See pages 175-176

⁴⁸ Laurence Porter comments on how the 1996 Walt Disney Corporation animate version of *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* transforms Esmeralda into a feminist heroine: 'La Esmeralda becomes an assertive feminist heroine. As she is dueling the captain of the guard, Gaston Phœbus, to a standstill, he admiringly remarks: "You fight almost as a man!" "Funny", La Esmeralda replies, "I was just about to say the same about you."' (p. 154.) Annalee R. Ward examines how the character of Esmeralda in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, despite adopting some contemporary feminist attitudes, most notably her assertiveness, her physical strength, and self-sufficiency, and by presenting a more positive view of gypsies, ultimately her character fits neatly into Disney's worldview of female societal roles by finding fulfilment only through romantic love.' See *Mouse Morality: The Rhetoric of Disney Animated Film*, (University of Texas Press: Texas, 2002), pp. 18-128

rights. Such material principally includes his funeral eulogies which have for so long been considered as commemorations of ‘grand hommes’ like Balzac, when in fact Hugo dedicated eulogies to such leading 19th century feminists as George Sand and Louise Julien. Another major primary source of material will include Hugo’s correspondences with women which provide a vital insight into the specific way in which Hugo frames his discourse on women’s rights, but also the way in which Hugo was regarded by his diverse female correspondents, from leading French and international feminists, to afflicted and oppressed women from around the world.

While this thesis sets out to establish the precise nature of Hugo’s feminism, it does not however set out to explicitly align Hugo with any specific brand of 19th century feminism. At any rate, such conformity would be antithetical to Hugo’s thought. Rather it seeks to situate Hugo’s feminism in relation to the most progressive and enlightened feminist thinkers of his time. Moreover, by demonstrating the profoundly moral and humanistic underpinnings of his engagement in the movement for female emancipation, this thesis seeks to show how Hugo’s place in the feminist struggle of his time should be seen as a distinct, though little documented aspect of his wider campaign against injustice and his life-long personal devotion to social reform.

Further, while this thesis presents a new point of access to existing research on Hugo and women with its dominant autobiographical focus, its purpose is not intended to excuse or exonerate Hugo’s private behaviour towards women, nor is it unaware of the immense challenges of vaunting the feminism of a man who will always be considered as a ‘pseudo-féministe’⁴⁹ according to the precepts of contemporary feminist thought. Rather, by bringing to light the extent and depth of Hugo’s contribution to the struggle for women’s rights, this thesis seeks to balance the one-sided accounts of Hugo’s treatment of women by presenting a more wholly-rounded view of his attitudes towards women. If the current trend in Hugolian research is to see Hugo as a ‘figure of extreme contrasts as opposed to simple contradictions’⁵⁰, then it more than timely that Hugo’s feminist convictions as well as his concrete contribution to the feminist struggle of his time should be brought into focus just as

⁴⁹ De Beauvoir, p. 125.

⁵⁰ Stephens, Bradley, ‘État présent: Victor Hugo,’ in *French Studies*, 2009, (63): 1, p. 69.

sharply as his infamous sexual reputation, his Romantic veneration of femininity, and his over-bearing paternalism.

Finally, in *État présent: Victor Hugo*, Bradley Stephens identifies one aspect which would benefit from fresh initiatives in current Hugolian research as his ‘sometimes unhelpful image as a *grand homme*.’⁵¹ He argues that while ‘the alpha male qualities that Hugo is seen to exert in his literary career tie in neatly with his notorious sexual reputation with women’, this stereotypical image of Hugo as the ‘poetic *voyant*’ and the ‘sexual *viveur*’ has ‘only reinforced the often crude patriarchal likeness that is now so readily associated with him.’⁵² He argues that ‘the scope of Hugo studies in emphasizing Hugo’s complexities could be reiterated and indeed broadened by probing the overt masculine sexuality that his extraordinary egotism and *galanterie* are seen to represent.’⁵³ Drawing upon Bob Pearce’s claim that ‘masculine subjectivities betray internal tensions’ and as such ‘masculinities are not fixed but can be renegotiated and unsettled’,⁵⁴ he argues that ‘such unsettling would be entirely in keeping with the prevalent trends in Hugo studies, whereby various binaries mix into an unsteady hybrid of meaning, rather than become fused into an integrated whole.’⁵⁵ While ‘Hugo’s masculine self-interest as regards his personal and literary treatment of women cannot of course be denied...it can most certainly be complicated so as to bring another rich dimension of analysis to his work.’⁵⁶ Stephen’s own study ‘“Baisez-moi, belle Juju!”: Victor Hugo and the joy of Juliette’⁵⁷ takes a different approach to studies which depict Juliette Drouet as a victim of Hugo’s love and egotism by examining the way in which Hugo came to depend greatly on this relationship to achieve a sense of constancy and stability in a life beset by personal tragedy and deep-seated insecurities. While Hugo’s valorisation of women’s maternal essence as the fundamental nature of their sex alienates him from much of contemporary feminist theory, an enquiry into the precise nature of Hugo’s feminism in fact presents a highly valuable subject of interest for contemporary feminist research

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 74.

⁵² *Ibid*

⁵³ *Ibid*

⁵⁴ Pearce, Bob, *Recreating Men: Postmodern Masculinity Politics*, (Sage: London, 2000), p. 35.

⁵⁵ Stephens, p. 74.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

⁵⁷ Stephens, Bradley, ‘“Baisez-moi belle Juju!”: Victor Hugo and the joy of Juliette’, in *Joie de vivre in French Literature and Culture: Essays in Honour of Michael Freeman*, ed. Harrow, Susan, & Unwin, Timothy, A., (Editions Rodopi: Amsterdam, 2009), pp. 211-225

in that it confronts the pertinent and ongoing issue of defining the place of men in feminism.

In a real-life event which inspired Fantine's arrest in *Les Misérables*, Hugo gave his signature to secure the release of a prostitute who had been assaulted on the streets of Paris, saying: 'Si la liberté de cette femme tient à ma signature, la voici.'⁵⁸ This thesis will illustrate the extent to which Hugo's name merits a place in the struggle for the liberation, emancipation, and changing perceptions of women in 19th century France.

⁵⁸ *Œuvres inédites de Victor Hugo, Choses vues*, (G. Charpentier: Paris, 1888), p. 56.
<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb322629695> [Accessed 22 January 2015]

The Feminist Deathbed: Hugo's Funeral Eulogies to Women.

The eulogy as a vector for Hugo's feminism.

The eulogies written by Victor Hugo for several leading figures in the French feminist movement during the 19th century provide a unique, insightful, and highly revealing primary account of Hugo's direct and personal involvement in the feminist activism of his time, his close relationships with leading pioneers of female emancipation, and his deep commitment to the struggle for women's rights.

While these eulogies are a celebration of the life of these feminists and a praiseful recognition of their contribution to the struggle for female emancipation, they are also a powerful social and political critique of the successive French governments which continued to repress women, to quell feminist emancipation efforts, and to punish feminist activity. In particular, they provide a fascinating insight into Hugo's support for feminist activity during the turbulent years of the Second Empire when he was exiled for professing views contrary to those upheld by government, and following his return to the Third Republic when he became actively involved in the renewed efforts for female emancipation.

As such, these eulogies illustrate Hugo's multi-layered and complex stance on the feminist question. While his orations provide abundant examples of Hugo's sympathy, respect, and admiration for these women, they also reveal the inherent ambiguities and sometimes limitations of his feminism and the degree of freedom and change which he felt should be afforded to women by the burgeoning feminist movement. What distinguishes Hugo from other male feminists in 19th century France is the far-reaching nature of his feminism. Hugo supported some of the most radical feminist movers such as Hubertine Auclert, George Sand, Louise Michel, and Flora Tristan. He supported universal suffrage and the full participation of women in the political sphere which was opposed by other notable male feminists such as Léon Richer who actively campaigned for the female attainment of social equality and civil rights but rigorously opposed any female involvement in politics. Hugo's feminism also extended beyond that of many of his contemporaneous male feminists like Ernest Legouvé who advocated equal education and instruction for women, improved employment opportunities and social and economic equality, but was unwavering in his adherence to the monogamous, patriarchal, structure of marriage.

He was also notably open-minded and flexible regarding the issue of marriage, strongly advocating the right to divorce and denouncing the condemnation of adultery by the Catholic Church.⁵⁹ Similarly Hugo's feminist ideals were much more progressive than those revered by the Utopian socialists of the 1830s such as the Saint-Simonians under the leadership of Prosper Enfantin who glorified women's sanctity and maternal nature but overlooked the true reality of women in society. While Hugo did believe in 'la liberté de l'amour'⁶⁰, his ideas regarding female sexuality were much more temperate and accessible to the vast majority of feminists than the controversial ideas of sexual emancipation expressed by Enfantin in *La Femme Libre*.⁶¹ Hugo's concept of "free love" was certainly poles apart from the radical ideas of sexual harmony elaborated by Charles Fourier who believed in a harmonious society whereby all sexual desires would be fulfilled and the granting of sexual favours would contribute to a more industrious and productive economy.⁶² Such radical beliefs

⁵⁹ It has to be said however that while Hugo publicly advocated the right to divorce and denounced the condemnation of adultery by the Catholic Church, he, like other feminists in the 1830s such as Flora Tristan and Pierre Leroux, believed that the family was the single social unit of the community but that it was in need of radical reshaping. Indeed, few French feminists and socialist reformers in the early 19th century were prepared to consider women as completely autonomous entities and the regeneration of the family unit assumed pivotal importance at a time when growing industrialisation and urbanisation appeared to be endangering the morality of the people. The huge increase in female employment which accompanied the rise of capitalism was a source of great concern among socialists and Marxist thinkers. Engels blamed capitalism for the dissolution of the family as it made women and children instruments of production and reduced the family to mere money relations. (*On women and the family, Marx, Engels, Lenin*, (Repsol: Dublin, 1983), p. 118. He argued that the increase in female employment was responsible for degrading both sexes – while men were 'unsexed' (*Ibid*, p. 119.) by their confinement to domestic duties, women were equally degraded to mere objects of capital production within the workplace. (*Ibid*, p. 25.) While Engels did favour women's contribution to labour, he called for a radical reshaping of the family unit whereby women would be granted equal rights (*Ibid*, p. 92.), where domestic duties would be socialized, where child-rearing would be collectively shared among the community, where marriage would become dissoluble, and the abolition of private property relations would lead to the end of the centrality of the family within capitalist production. (*Ibid*, p. 128.)

⁶⁰ 'La liberté de l'amour' or 'Free-love' was a contentious conception of love which was strongly advocated by the Saint-Simonians and Fourierists which proposed that men and women form couples according to their sexual or emotional inclinations instead of adhering to familial, class, or socio-economic needs. 'Free-love' was thus couple-orientated as opposed to family-orientated and advocates of the doctrine believed that it would lead to better, more harmonious marriages.

⁶¹ *La Femme Libre*, Prosper Enfantin's radical work on sexual emancipation sparked huge controversy at the time of its publication due to widespread criticism and suspicion of Enfantin's arguments for 'free-love' and the 'rehabilitation of the flesh' which were seen to incite sexual promiscuity, to contradict Catholic doctrine, and to threaten the patriarchal structure of society. As well as criticism from the government and the Catholic Church, Enfantin's radical theories encountered criticism from members of the Saint-Simonian sect and were the source of major dissension among its members.

⁶² Hugo's concept of 'free-love' reflected his support of divorce and for diminishing the interference of the state in the institution of marriage. It has to be said however, that the concept of 'free-love'

regarding female sexuality ultimately proved too extreme for the Saint-Simonian and Fourierist feminist followers and became the source of serious dissent among the female members of their societies.

However, despite the evolutionary, progressive, and far-sighted nature of Hugo's feminism, in other ways his support for the feminist cause reveals limitations and inconsistencies. In describing his conception of the ideal woman, Hugo reverts to the Romantic veneration of the femininity espoused by Michelet, Musset, and Vigny in his exaltation of traditional feminine qualities such as beauty, grace, gentleness and mysticism, and his profound distaste for the manifestation of harsh, unfeminine qualities in women.

These eulogies written by Hugo in commemoration of several of the most active women in the feminist struggle in 19th century France therefore provide a deeply revealing, primary account of Hugo's close-knit associations with the feminist struggle, his political disposition during the uneasy years of the Second Empire and the Third Republic, and his feminist vision which is at once far-reaching and restrictive.

However, in order to fully understand the importance of Hugo's funeral eulogies in the context of their feminist agenda, it is necessary to elucidate the wider social and political importance of the funeral ceremony in 19th century France as a fervid site of manifestation, revolt, and contestation in a time of great social change and political upheaval.

was also very appealing to Hugo because of his notorious adulterous ways and his avid sexual appetite which he satisfied through his endless extra-marital affairs.

The politicised state funeral in 19th century France.

The French Revolution had a complex, ambivalent relationship with the dead. The commemoration of the dead during the turbulent years of the Revolution became deeply entrenched with the ambiguous social, cultural, and political conflicts of the time. From the barbaric violence of the guillotine, the increased secularism of state funerals, and the cult of heroism surrounding the deaths of military leaders, the commemoration of the dead during the Revolution subsumed the many contradictory values which came to the fore during the period.

The widespread use of the guillotine to exterminate all those deemed traitorous to the Republic was in direct opposition to the cult of heroism which emerged as one of the most evocative and influential features of state funeral commemorations during the Revolutionary period. The funerary commemorations bestowed on revolutionary leaders formed a vital part of what Michel Vovelle refers to as ‘les processus d’héroïsation, ou de fabrication posthume des grandes figures révolutionnaires...’⁶³ This ‘processus d’héroïsation’, whereby revolutionary leaders were exalted to the status of national heroes by the granting of state funeral ceremonies was deeply informed by the ‘culte des grands hommes’ which emerged as one of the most influential philosophies on death during the late 18th and 19th centuries. The ‘culte des grands hommes’ was a philosophy which drew heavily on the progressive ideas of the Enlightenment to expand the restrictive, hierarchical system surrounding the commemoration of the dead which prevailed during the Ancien Régime, and which reserved funeral commemorations solely to members of royalty, military leaders, and to those officially declared saints by the Catholic Church, by extending the title of ‘grand homme’ to illustrious men whose contributions to the various domains of science, art, literature, politics, and public life afforded them the honour of a state commemoration and a place in national memory.

Il serait un peu vain de se demander s’il a existé plus de ‘grands hommes’ au XIXe siècle qu’au XVIIIe ou au XXe. On doit seulement pouvoir affirmer que c’est au cours du XIXe siècle...qu’ils ont été les plus systématiquement recherchés, célébrés et donnés en exemple [...] Il fallut l’esprit des Lumières

⁶³ Vovelle, Michel ‘L’Historiographie de la Révolution Française à la veille du bicentaire’, in *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, (1988): 272, p. 122. www.persée.fr [Accessed 11 February 2014]

pour considérer qu'un citoyen qui n'était ni un saint, ni un prélat, ni un prince, ni un guerrier, méritât la même reconnaissance.⁶⁴

While the French Revolution assumed an inegalitarian, elitist, and contradictory position in relation to the commemoration of the dead, nevertheless the various state funeral ceremonies which took place during the revolutionary years such as that of Descartes⁶⁵, Marat, and Lepelletier provided an important template for the state funerals which developed in France throughout the 19th century by introducing many of the essential features of such ceremonies including the cult of 'le grand homme', the separation of church and state in civic state ceremonies,⁶⁶ and the inauguration of the Panthéon as a burial site for political and revolutionary leaders.

The 19th century can be described as a golden age for state funeral ceremonies in France. During the century, the civic funeral ceremony occupied a unique position within the wider culture of street manifestations which proliferated throughout France. Maurice Agulhon identifies state funerals in France during the 19th century as 'grands événements', describing how the funerals of distinguished public figures were transformed into momentous historical, national, and political events:

Mais lorsque l'homme célèbre est Victor Hugo (symbole d'une République encore contestée, et d'une mort refusant 'toutes les Églises') l'enterrement est événement.⁶⁷

The civil funeral was a ceremony which was entirely financed, planned, and overseen by the state. Throughout the 19th century, state funerary ceremonies were awarded to a variety of diverse public figures from military leaders such as général Lamarque and Général Foy to political figures such as Proudhon and

⁶⁴ Agulhon, Maurice, 'Nouveaux propos sur les statues de "grands hommes" au XIXe siècle' in *Romantisme*, 1998, 28(100), p. 11. www.persée.fr, [Accessed 19 July 2014]

⁶⁵ Anne Duprat comments on how Descartes was among the intellectual 'grand hommes' for whom a commemorative statue was built in his honour: 'D'autres intellectuels comme Buffon, Descartes, Newton ou encore Benjamin Franklin ont été statufiés [...]' (Duprat, Anne, 'Thomas W. Gaehtgens et Gregor Wedekind (dir.), *Le culte des grands hommes 1750-1850*' in *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, para 5 of 6, [URL://http://ahrf.revues.org/11973](http://ahrf.revues.org/11973) [Accessed 24 July 2014]

⁶⁶ The official commemorations which took place during the Revolution were the site of opposing religious and secular tensions. While the official commemoration of Marat in 1793 was invested with a strong sense of religious sentiment, the religious crisis in France in 1791 gave rise to increasingly secular funeral ceremonies. The use of the Panthéon also came under attack for its association with secularism. The use of the Panthéon for the funeral arrangements of Voltaire epitomises the tension as the Panthéon was chosen specifically to celebrate a national genius and to exclude the Church from the commemoration.

⁶⁷ Agulhon, Maurice, 'A propos de la Révolution Française: Réflexions sur l'événement exemplaire' in *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome, Italie et Méditerranée*, 1992, (104): 1, p. 184. www.persée.fr [Accessed 19 July 2014]

Lamennais, and national figures such as Hugo, Quinet, and Michelet. During the century, funeral ceremonies became one of the most politicized, contentious, and grandiose of all state ceremonies and street manifestations in France.

From the outset, the various political regimes which reigned in France throughout the 19th century capitalised on the political capacity of state funeral ceremonies to promote feelings of loyalty, unity, and cohesion among the public, to garner support for their political order, and to legitimise their claim to leadership. However, the political dimension of the state ceremony served a double-function – while the ceremony provided a congenial public forum for prevailing political regimes to generate support for their leadership, it also provided an instrumental site of political manifestation and protest for opposing parties to manifest their discontent with the existing leadership and to establish themselves as a legitimate oppositional party. Arising from the widespread cult of street manifestations in France during the century which adopted a revolutionary spirit of revolt and became uproarious sites of protest of successive monarchical governments, the state funeral became a site of political agitation, unrest, and protest during the tumultuous political years of the 19th century.

Aux confins du cortège honorifique et de la manifestation contemporaine, s'est inventé dans le Paris des années 1820 une nouvelle geste politique, intégrée au répertoire moderne d'action collective, l'enterrement d'opposition.⁶⁸

One of the earliest state funerals to undergo intensive politicization in France in the early 19th century was the liberal funeral ceremony which commemorated the deaths of elite inner members of the liberal party who represented the majority of the opposition to the Bourbon Restoration. Liberal funeral ceremonies were bestowed on the general Sébastien-Maximilien Foy (1825), Nicholas Lallemand, Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt (1827), Jacques-Antoine Manuel, François-Joseph Talma (1826), Benjamin Constant (1830), all of whom were members of the elite inner circle of the liberal party.⁶⁹ During the Restoration, the liberal funeral ceremony became a powerful and sustained site of opposition to the political power of the Ultras by fostering a spirit of political unrest among the crowd and by reinforcing the political

⁶⁸ Fureix, 'Un rituel d'opposition sous la Restauration: Les funérailles libérales à Paris (1820-1830)' in *Genèses*, (2002):46, p. 77. www.cairn.fr [Accessed 14 April 2012]

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 80.

unity of the liberals through the collective act of mourning. Suzanne G. Lindsay comments on how ‘the peaceful conduct of most such funerals was compromised by the violence that erupted in a few at the beginning’: ‘Lallemand’s funeral procession on June 6 condemned the government and this violent death through its size (about 3,000 participants) and its constituency (the liberal opposition, workers, and students. After Lallemand’s burial...members of the procession went to the Place XV, where they clashed with government troops and again later, on June 9, resulting in 50 wounded and one fatality.’⁷⁰

The particular format of the liberal funeral ceremonies which unfolded in France during the 1820s and 1830s constituted a considerable rupture with the various ceremonial rituals and funerary practices associated with the French Revolution. While the funeral ceremonies which took place during the Revolutionary period were extravagant, pompous events which engaged in overt forms of political manifestation through the use of excessive political iconography,⁷¹ the liberal funeral ceremonies which unfolded during the Restoration were considerably more restrained and sober affairs⁷² which adopted a more passive and subliminal form of political opposition.

One way in which the liberal funeral ceremony engaged in passive opposition was the formulation of a political discourse of opposition through the diffusion of clandestine texts, brochures, and images bearing subliminal messages of contestation at the time of the funeral ceremony or, occasionally, even before the ceremony itself, in a bid to mobilise a spirit of revolt among the crowd. Fureix describes how the distribution of clandestine political messages coincided with some of the most influential liberal funerals ceremonies during the Restoration:

Des portraits lithographiés du défunt-au moins dans le cas du général S.M. Foy-parfois des médailles à son effigie, frappées à la hâte, sont distribués au sein du cortège ou aux abords du cimetière. Des feuilles volantes circulent également le

⁷⁰ Lindsay, G. Suzanne, *Funerary Arts and Tomb Cult: Living with the Dead in France, 1750-1850*, (Ashgate Publishing Ltd.; Surrey; Burlington, 2012), p. 48.

⁷¹ The funeral ceremonies which unfolded during the Revolution were characterised by the considerable use of religious and political iconography. Such examples of the various iconography featured in Revolutionary funerals include the extensive use of effigies, ceremonial decorations, black drapes, signs, statues, and various commemorative paraphernalia.

⁷² In *Les fêtes royales sous la restauration ou l’Ancien Régime retrouvé*, Françoise Waquet gives an intricate account of the specific decor associated with the royal liberal funeral ceremonies and their relative modesty in comparison to revolutionary funeral ceremonies. (Librairie Droz: Paris, 1981) pp. 79-88

long des cortèges, forme méconnue de réplique au travail de la censure, profitant de la tolérance politique au deuil...⁷³

However, the liberal funeral ceremony was also the site of more direct, aggressive forms of political opposition. Françoise Waquet comments on the military ceremony of the prince de Condé in 1818: ‘La translation du corps du prince, du Palais Bourbon...jusqu’à Saint-Denis...revêtit une allure triomphale à laquelle contribuèrent un fort concours populaire et une profusion d’insignes militaires.’⁷⁴ One of the most evocative and controversial strategies of opposition adopted by the liberals was the practice of carrying the coffin of the deceased through the public procession, which became one of the most identifiable rituals of liberal funeral ceremonies:

La contestation s’exprime aussi dans les gestes iconoclastes, a priori dépourvus de sens politique, et qui pourtant engendrent discussions, tumultes, violences parfois: le port à bras du cercueil. Ces gestes d’abord isolés, nées de la volonté de quelques étudiants, finissent par se répéter, jusqu’à deviner l’une des séquences obligées du répertoire funèbre libéral.⁷⁵

The various forms of political opposition which developed during the liberal ceremonies of the 1820s and 1830s forged an important template for further revolutionary and oppositional funeral ceremonies during the early 19th century. The turbulent economic and political climate which pervaded the reign of the July Monarchy gave rise to one of the most active periods of revolutionary manifestations in 19th century France. In the initial three years of the Monarchy, the economic crisis provoked a succession of workers’ street manifestations on the streets of Paris during which a broad spectrum of professions including bakers, weavers, builders, jewellery-makers, printers, locksmiths, marshals, silk-workers and carpenters actively engaged in street protests against a number of common complaints such as rising unemployment, poor salaries, and the influence of mechanization in the workplace.⁷⁶ Alain Faure comments on how the July Revolution of 1830 initiated a spirit of revolt among the working-class which led to a frenzy of contentious workers’ manifestations

⁷³ *Ibid*

⁷⁴ Waquet, pp.81-82

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 87.

⁷⁶ Faure, Alain, ‘Mouvements populaires et Mouvement ouvrier à Paris (1830-1834)’ in *Le Mouvement social* Jul.-Sep., 1974 p.56

on the streets of Paris between 1830-1833, many of which were violent and had to be forcibly repressed by government authorities.⁷⁷

It is against this tumultuous backdrop of economic hardship and political dissent that the uproarious funeral ceremony of the General Maximilien Lamarque took place on the 5 June 1832. General Lamarque was among the most high-profile victims of the cholera outbreak of 1832 along with the Orleanist President of the Council Casimir Périer. On the occasion of Périer's death, the government decided to grant him a state funeral in order to commemorate his contribution to the Monarchy as a formal ally of Louis XVIII and soldier of the Empire. However, on the occasion of the death of General Lamarque, the Republicans seized on the opportunity presented by the death of a former revolutionary hero to stage a counter demonstration in opposition to the Monarchy.⁷⁸

The funeral ceremony of General Lamarque provided the catalyst for a violent, bloody and tumultuous Republican insurrection on the streets of Paris between June 5 and 6. In an eye-witness account of the ceremony which appeared in *L'Echo de la Fabrique*, the journalist Antoine Vidal describes how the diversity of the crowd as well as the strategically chosen trajectory of the funeral cortege which included an array of Revolutionary monuments, transformed the ceremony into a poignant site of national commemoration:

Je viens d'être témoin d'une fête dont rien n'égalera le grandiose, la simplicité, la pompe vraiment nationale. Tout Paris, ou du moins... toute la population virile de Paris, 150,000 à 200,000 hommes accompagnent la dépouille de Maximilien Lamarque, couvre la vaste étendue de plus d'une lieue qui sépare la Madeleine de la place de la Bastille. Dès huit heures du matin, malgré une pluie battante, dans tous les quartiers de Paris...des groupes de gardes nationaux, de citoyens, d'étudiants, s'étaient formés, et par pelotons de 10, 20, 100, 200, s'avançaient...⁷⁹

The dramatic events which accompanied the funeral of General Lamarque powerfully illustrate the subversive, revolutionary nature of public funerals in France during the

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 'Quoi qu'il en soit, la victoire politique offrit soudain aux ouvriers parisiens des perspectives inespérées sur le plan revendicatif, et lança ce mouvement gréviste dont l'auteur eût été bien moindre sans elle. Les nombreux échecs, la répression gouvernementale et patronale endiguèrent le mouvement.'

⁷⁸ General Lamarque was a Napoleonic veteran who had fought alongside Napoleon during the Hundred Years War and became one of the leading military heroes of the Revolution of 1830 and one of the most vigorous opponents of the Liberal regime.

⁷⁹ Serieys, Jacques, '5 juin 1832: Les funérailles du général Lamarque. Une insurrection républicaine et révolutionnaire,' posted on 19 April 2012.

19th century. By the end of the two-day insurrection, one of the bloodiest witnessed during the the July Monarchy, some 800 people were killed, 82 people were tried in the *Cours d'Assises*, seven of whom were sentenced to death and contemporary estimates place the total number of insurgent casualties between 80 to 100 dead, with 200 to 300 wounded.⁸⁰

Although the Republicans had suffered a severe defeat in the uprising, the implications of the insurrection had a powerful mobilising effect on the Republican opposition who continued to use public funeral ceremonies as a rallying site of political protest and revolt throughout the July Monarchy. The funeral of Armand Carrel, the editor of the Republican newspaper *Le National*, which was attended by a crowd of 10,000 mourners, also became a site of Republican resistance. As was customary during state funerals in the 19th century, a subscription was collected from the crowd in order to erect a statue in honour of Carrel.

The funeral ceremonies which coincided with the Revolution of 1848 further reveal the fervent, oppositional nature surrounding the development of such ceremonies and the diverse ideological, symbolic and pedagogical values with which they became associated. Louis Bergeron comments on how the cult of revolutionary manifestations initiated by the French Revolution and developed through the dynamic use of street festivals by the Saint-Simonians⁸¹ engendered the pedagogical, didactic, and mobilising function assumed by the revolutionary manifestations of 1848:

C'est là un tournant important dans l'efflorescence des différents types de la fête révolutionnaire. Car c'est à partir de ce moment, où elle devient pédagogique et didactique, où elle se fait manifestation de propagande politique, idéologique, philosophique, que la fête révolutionnaire commence se scléroser en se ritualisant. Elle se charge de symboles, s'entoure de décors allégoriques.⁸²

Agulhon describes how the theatrical dimension surrounding the public display of the bloody dead victims of the 1848 Revolution transformed official revolutionary ceremonies into crude public spectacles:

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 60-61

⁸¹ The Saint-Simoniens made widespread use of public festivals as a means of educating the public on their social agenda and garnering support for their social and industrial reforms.

⁸² Bergeron, p. 128

Il y a cependant quelque chose de commun entre le défilé dramatique qui appelle aux armes en escortant le chariot remplie de corps sanglants, et le défilé aux lanternes vénitiennes...qui emplissait les heures précédentes. C'est la même tendance à la démonstration-spectacle, et à ce qu'il faut bien appeler...la mise en scène.⁸³

While funeral ceremonies during the Revolution of 1848 assumed a complex social and political position, which reflected the conflicting values of the Revolution, the funeral ceremonies that evolved in the 1850s and 1860s under the reign of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, were much more organised and effective sites of political opposition. Roger Price describes how the active forms of Republican dissidence which erupted at Republican funeral ceremonies coincided with the other means of subversive resistance employed by Republicans during the Second Empire such as the spread of Republican propaganda, the growth of secret societies, and the spread of the *cabarets*:

There was also the constant irritation caused by the use of the funerals of known republicans for political demonstrations. For the police to have intervened when in July 1852, at Joigny (Yonne), around 250 'democrats' had remained in a nearby bar as a priest intoned the *office des morts* and then re-appeared to escort their dead comrade to his grave would have been counter-productive, however.⁸⁴

The successful Republican politicization of state funerals during the turbulent political years of the Second Empire was most greatly intensified during the Third Republic, which became one of the most potent and influential periods for the political, social, and historical evolution of these ceremonies. The funerary ceremonies which proliferated during the Third Republic represented much more than acts of national commemoration – they were also involved in a complex process of establishing the legitimacy of a new-found political regime. As Ben-Amos observes, '[...] these ceremonies were not mere funerals; rather they were rites of commemoration through which the regime attempted to mould national memory.'⁸⁵ Philip Nord further comments on the unique political position assumed by state funerals in the Third Republic: 'Cependant le mouvement républicain ne se contenta pas d'agir seulement par la parole. Les

⁸³Agulhon, Maurice, 'Fête spontanée et fêtes organisées à Paris en 1848,' in *Les fêtes de la Révolution*, ed. by Ehrard, Jean, & Viallaneix, Paul, (Société des études robespierristes: Paris, 1977), p. 248.

⁸⁴ Price, Roger, *The French Second Empire: An Anatomy of Political Power*, (Cambridge University Press: London, 2001), p. 157.

⁸⁵ Ben-Amos, Avner, 'The Other World of Memory: State Funerals in France during the Third Republic,' in *History and Memory*, 1(1989), p. 86.

militants exploitèrent habilement des événements symboliques pour faire naître et former une conscience politique républicaine encore imparfaite.⁸⁶ The outbreak of violence during these ceremonies was reflective of the changes in the political climate in France at the time.

Il semble bien que 1870 correspond à un tournant important pour la raison suivante. La chute de l'Empire ramena en France des républicains proscrits qui, du temps de leur exil en Belgique, s'étaient affilés à une société dite d' 'affranchissement' qui se proposait de libérer l'homme des préjugés, spécialement en ce qui concerne la mort et les funérailles. [...] Il ne faut pas sans doute négliger non plus le rôle des épisodes anticléricaux de la Commune. Ainsi se multiplièrent ces inhumations civiles, notamment autour de deux pôles.⁸⁷

One of the most distinctive features surrounding the rites of commemoration which evolved during the Third Republic was the zealous renewal and elaboration of the 'culte du grand homme' in the funerals granted to Republican leaders and distinguished Republican figures. The integral position assumed by the 'culte du grand homme' in these funerals was deeply informed by the Republican political and pedagogical agenda which aimed to provoke feelings of loyalty and support for the regime, to spread republican values, and to forge national memory by promoting the figure of the 'grand homme' as an idealised model of Republican heroism to which all citizens could aspire, irrespective of their background or diverse social positions. Nord comments on how republican funerals were designed to cristallise the public feeling of the time: '[...] les funérailles furent à plusieurs reprises une occasion de cristallisation du sentiment populaire. Ce sentiment pouvait être insurrectionnel, comme dans le cas des funérailles de Victor Noir en 1870. Ou elles pouvaient être commémoratives, comme dans le cas du magnifique rituel officiel organisé en l'honneur de Victor Hugo en 1885.'⁸⁸ Ben-Amos and Eyal Ben-Ari comment on how this particular ceremony was uniquely positioned to promote the 'culte du grand homme' as 'it was the only civic holiday that was also a personal rite of passage.'⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Nord, Philip, 'Les origines de la Troisième République en France (1880-1885) in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 1997, (116): 116-117, p.62. www.persée.fr [Accessed 21 July 2014]

⁸⁷ Lalouette, Jacqueline, 'Les enterrements civils dans les premières décennies de la Troisième République' in *Ethnologie française, nouvelle série*, 1983, 13(2) pp. 115-116

⁸⁸ Nord, p. 62.

⁸⁹ Ben-Amos, Avner & Ben-Ari, Eyal, 'Resonance and Reverberation: Ritual and Bureacracy in the State Funerals of the French Third Republic' in *Theory and Society*, 1995, 24(2) p. 168. For a

Hugo's state funeral became the archetypal model for the commemoration of the 'grand homme' during the Third Republic, one which all Republican ceremonies thereafter attempted to emulate. The spectacular ceremony subsumed all of the quintessential aspects associated with the commemoration of the 'grand homme'; Hugo's body lay in state in the most symbolic historical monument – the Arc de Triomphe; a sprawling procession of over one million people joined the cortege; the procession gave rise to tumultuous scenes of political dissent; one person died amid the uproar while another gave birth.⁹⁰ As Jean-Pierre Arthur Bernard comments, Hugo's funeral was both a Parisian and national event: 'Ce sont les funérailles de Victor Hugo, en 1885, qui illustrent le mieux cette communion mystique d'un grand rassemblement de peuple dans un deuil, à la fois parisien et national. Les foules présentes sont le reflet du pays tout entier, la province est en effet venue se recueillir devant le catafalque du grand homme et suivre son convoi [...]'⁹¹ Coverage of Hugo's funeral dominated all Republican and oppositional news publications in the days and weeks following the event, while the memory of the day still captures the public imagination and remains vividly alive in French national memory.⁹² Hugo's central role within the evolution of state funeral ceremonies in 19th century France thus placed him in a unique position to deliver eulogies which had mass public appeal, deep political resonance, and resounding emotional impact both in France and beyond, during the 19th century.⁹³ It is in this context that Hugo's eulogies to several leading feminists of his time can be read as powerful public manifestations of his support

discussion on the contribution of mass media to the politicisation of funeral ceremonies during the Third Republic, the funeral of Hugo's son Charles, for instance, see Ben-Amos, Avner, 'Victor Hugo et les enterrements civils', in *Romantisme* 2003, (19), p. 36.

www.persée.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/roman [Accessed 19 February 2012]

⁹⁰ Robb, Graham, *Victor Hugo*, (Picador: London, 1997), p. 531.

⁹¹ Bernard, Jean-Pierre Arthur, *Les deux Paris: les représentations de Paris dans la seconde moitié du XIXe*, (Editions Champ Vallon: 2001), p. 133.

⁹² For more on the subject of Hugo's funeral, see Avner Ben-Amos 'Les funérailles de Victor Hugo. Apothéose de l'événement spectacle' in *Lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, (Gallimard: Paris, 1986), pp. 473-518 ; Jouanel, Cécile, *La foule aux funérailles de Victor Hugo et de Jules Vallès*, Mémoire de DEA, I.E.P. de Grenoble, 1994; Robb, Graham, *Victor Hugo*, pp. 525-532

⁹³ Hugo's extensive funeral addresses began during his exile when Hugo quickly seized on the public platform afforded by the funeral ceremony to denounce the Bonaparte regime and invoke a spirit of revolt among the exile community and the French people. During his exile, Hugo delivered eulogies to several members of the exile community, and to close personal friends including Jean Bousquet, Hennemont de Kesler, and Félix Bony. The funeral eulogies delivered by Hugo following his return to the Third Republic consolidated his immense role in the politicisation of state funeral ceremonies in 19th century France.

for the liberation, emancipation, and changing perceptions of women in 19th century French society.⁹⁴

A background to Hugo's eulogy at the graveside of Louise Julien on 26 July 1853.

Following the proclamation of the Republic in 1848, feminists were heartened to have friends and allies among the democratic socialists in the provisional government. In the initial phases of the Republic, the lifting of press restrictions and greater freedoms of assembly permitted feminists to regroup, to organise an electoral campaign, and to demand protection from the regime.⁹⁵ In March 1848, Eugénie Niboyet established a feminist journal entitled *Voix des Femmes* which had several male contributors including Jean Macé and Victor Hugo.⁹⁶ There was also a revival of feminist clubs at this time including the *Société de la Voix des Femmes*, the *Comité des Droits de la Femme*, *l'Union des femmes*, *le Collège Médical des Femmes*, *the Cours de Droit social des Femmes*, and the *Société de l'Emulation des Femmes*. The feminist ideals espoused by these women was strongly socialist and bore strong influences of the utopian socialist ideals of the Saint-Simonians, with its emphasis on "pacific" methods of activism, and its concept of male/female dualism.⁹⁷ However, the brand of feminism they now advocated had moved on considerably from the Saint-Simonian ideal of the saintly, ethereal woman and rejected much of the notions of womanhood such as the idea of the love-priestess which exalted women to an unattainable image of perfection, while overlooking the reality of their lived experience and continuing to deny their right to speak.⁹⁸ These feminists envisioned the ideal woman as a real, identifiable,

⁹⁴ While the funeral ceremonies which developed during the 19th century venerated the 'grand homme' as the exemplary citizen, women were nonetheless present at these funerals and their participation in such events reflects their changing social position during the century. During the funeral ceremony of Victor Noir, women formed an active part of the revolt. See Olwen H. Hufton for an account of the militant presence of women at the funeral of Marat. (*Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution*, (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1992)p. 31. References were made to the sacred role of republican mothers in the eulogies delivered during the state funerals of the Third Republic: 'Dans les discours, il est fréquemment fait allusion aux qualités politiques de la mort. On salue "la femme et la mère vraiment républicaine.'"(Hufton, *Op cit*, p. 120.)

⁹⁵ Moses, Clare Goldberg, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 128. (State University of New York Press: New York, 1984), p. 128.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 132.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 132-133. For more on Saint-Simonian feminism, see Grogan, Susan K., *French socialism and sexual difference: women and the new society, 1803-44*, (Macmillan: London, 1992), Wallach

living being – as a mother who had the power to effect dramatic social transformation. Clare Goldberg describes how these feminists subverted the concept of motherhood to redefine female identity and to justify female participation in politics:

Now...the image of woman as mother became the linchpin of the feminist rationale for sexual equality. In much the same way as *Enfantin* had earlier borrowed the patriarchalist concept of woman as Eve (woman defined primarily by her sexual aspect), but then turned it upside down and used it to justify woman's superiority, 1848 feminists transformed the concept of motherhood. Woman's unique role as mother would no longer explain her confinement to domestic life; it would justify her participation in the public sphere.⁹⁹

Women like Jeanne Deroin, Eugénie Niboyet, Désirée Gay and Pauline Roland were at the forefront of feminist political activity during this time and repeatedly appealed to the National Assembly to extend voting rights to women.¹⁰⁰ However, women were not able to vote in the April elections in 1848 and their allies among the social democrats only received a slim majority of the votes.¹⁰¹ Dreams of a socialist, democratic republic were thus quickly dispelled with the emergence of a conservative government following the elections.¹⁰² The new government was strongly anti-feminist and quickly began their efforts to repress feminist activity – club meetings of the *Voix des Femmes* were invaded by the police authorities and women were not permitted membership to political clubs.¹⁰³ A split began to emerge among republican and socialist feminists amid fears of government retaliation, giving rise to a feminist movement characterised by a strong socialist agenda.¹⁰⁴ At the forefront of this socialist campaign were Jeanne Deroin, Suzanne Voilquin, Désirée Gay, and Pauline Roland who remained undeterred by the government threats, and actively led the socialist suffragette campaign for women and campaigned for women's social rights and improved working conditions. To further their aims, they set up a number of socialist associations, national workshops and mutual aid societies such as the *Association Fraternelle des Ouvriers Lingères*.¹⁰⁵ However, the accession of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte to power in December 1851 dealt a severe and devastating blow

Scott, Joan, *Only paradoxes to offer: French feminists and the rights of man*, (Harvard University Press: Boston, 1996)

⁹⁹ Moses, p. 133.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 139.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 141.

¹⁰² *Ibid*

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 142.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 147.

to the growing feminist activity of the late 1840s. Louis-Napoléon implemented strict repressive measures to put a definitive end to all feminist activity.

Although feminists continued their involvement with the workers' associations from August 1848 to Spring 1849, the most powerful of which was the *Association Solidaire et Fraternelle de toutes les Associations Réunies*, which was initiated by Jeanne Deroin and which continued to recruit members until May 1850, they were severely punished for their actions.¹⁰⁶ In May 1850 all the members were arrested at Deroin's home and Deroin and Roland were sentenced to trial and both received prison terms of six months.¹⁰⁷ Louis-Napoléon's seizure of power in the coup d'état of December 1851 provoked a mass repression on opponents to his regime.¹⁰⁸ One of the many female arrestees was Pauline Roland who was deported to penal colony in Algeria, and despite having obtained a release with the help of influential friends, died on her return journey to Paris. Thus by 1852, the sustained violence, repression, and punitive measures enforced by Louis-Napoléon's regime had effectively quelled the feminist movement of the late 1840s. The dramatic impact of Bonaparte's virulent anti-feminist campaign had devastating effects on the progress of the French feminist movement in the mid-nineteenth century. Goldberg comments on the dramatic long-term effects of Louis Napoléon's oppression of feminism:

The effectiveness of the government repression of the 1848 feminists cannot be overexaggerated. It would be almost twenty years before feminists would regroup. After 1852, all their leaders were either scattered-Suzanne Voilquin to the United States, Jeanne Deroin to London, Eugénie Niboyet to Geneva, Désirée Gay to Belgium – or dead. [...] In 1848-49, the French feminist movement was the most advanced and the most experienced of all Western feminist movements. Yet for the next twenty years, feminists would be unable to move forward. They would have to contend with attacks from the Left as well as the Right. And the only weapons that they would be able to employ would be their pens.¹⁰⁹

Victor Hugo, who had been exiled to Jersey for openly denouncing Napoléon III as a traitor, was among the leftist allies in exile who supported the feminist cause in France from a distance.¹¹⁰ During his exile, Hugo continued to denounce Bonaparte's reign

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 147-148

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 148.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 149.

¹¹⁰ During his time in exile, Hugo published a vehement pamphlet against Napoléon III, entitled *Napoléon le Petit* in which Hugo launches an incendiary attack against the imperialist, dictatorial regime of Louis Napoléon dissolved the powers of the parliament, excluded oppositional parties,

by publishing a series of political pamphlets against the leader, which although banned from France, nevertheless had a strong impact there. The funeral eulogy written by Hugo for the French feminist Louise Julien is a powerful testament of Hugo's critique of Bonaparte's oppressive politics and his solidarity and support for the feminist cause.

Hugo's eulogy to Louise Julien.

At the time of Louise Julien's death in July 1853, Hugo had been in exile in Jersey for two years. He thus had the opportunity to personally deliver his eulogy at Louise Julien's graveside in the Cimetière de Saint-Jean on the 26 July 1853, a fact which renders the raw emotion and intense feeling of his speech all the more stirring and immediate.

Firstly, Hugo addresses the speech not just to the present congregation but to all 'Citoyens', making clear that he is addressing all equal citizens of France. Hugo begins the speech with an expressly morose four-line verse in which he comments on the series of recent deaths among French exiles: 'Trois cercueils en quatre mois. La mort se hâte, et Dieu nous délivre un à un [...] Cette fois, l'être inanimé et cher que nous apportons à la tombe, c'est une femme.'¹¹¹

These sombre opening lines immediately draw attention to the fractured and broken nature of France under the unlawful¹¹² regime of Napoléon III where loyal citizens were condemned to exile and death for expressing opposition to the authoritarian regime. The fact that 'cette fois...c'est une femme', who has died is significant as the loss of a female exile is seen as even more tragic and unjust. Having opened his speech with these scornful lines evoking France's current state of disrepair, Hugo then launches into a deeply descriptive narrative account of Julien's arrest and the harrowing events leading to her death. Firstly, he describes Julien's arrest: 'Le 21

exploited universal suffrage for its own political advantage, and which disinformed the public by imposing strict censorship on all news and literary publications entering France.

¹¹¹ Hugo, Victor, *Actes et Paroles II, Pendant l'exil*, p. 51. (Librairie P. Ollendorff: Paris, 1937-1940), <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb322627986> [Accessed 14 July 2014]

¹¹² It has to be said that this was Hugo's own personal and unchanging opinion on Bonaparte. Hugo remained one of the most virulent and consistent opponents of the Bonapartist regime under the reign of Louis-Napoléon. He objected most ardently to the imperialist nature of the regime which diminished the powers of the Parliament, excluded opposition, and exiled Republicans. Hugo's sustained denunciation of Louis-Bonaparte, from his exile on the Channel Islands, assumed a notably personal and vindictive nature, drawing unsavoury comparisons between 'Napoléon le Grand' and 'Napoléon le Petit', and posturing himself as the enlightened visionary of a new French Republic and Louis-Bonaparte as its traitorous and doomed usurper.

janvier 1853, une femme fut arrêtée chez elle par le sieur Boudrot, commissaire de police à Paris.’¹¹³ His use of language is notably sympathetic and emotive: ‘Cette femme, jeune encore, elle avait trente-cinq ans; mais estropiée et infirme, fut envoyée à la Préfecture et enfermée dans la cellule no. 1, dite *cellule d’essai*.’¹¹⁴

Hugo vehemently attacks the ill-treatment of prisoners by the police prefecture and the grossly inhumane, decrepit, and unsanitary conditions of the cell in which Julien was detained: ‘Cette cellule, sorte de cage de sept à huit pied carrés à peu près, sans air et sans jour, la malheureuse prisonnière l’a peinte d’un mot; elle l’appelle: *cellule-tombeau* [...]’¹¹⁵ Having been subjected to the abject squalor of the prison cell, Hugo describes how Julien contracted consumption following her imprisonment: ‘La proscrire sortait du cachot d’essai avec les germes de la phthisie.’¹¹⁶ His traumatic description of how Julien’s illness was aggravated by her horrendous experience of exile powerfully illustrates Hugo’s deep sense of compassion and injustice at the inhumane treatment of women by the state: ‘Elle quitta la France et gagna la Belgique. Le dénûment la força de voyager toussant, crachant le sang, les poumons malades, en plein hiver, dans le nord, sous la pluie et la neige, dans ces affreux wagons découverts qui déshonorent les riches entreprises des chemins de fers.’¹¹⁷ His sense of indignation and outrage is further seen in his strongly accusatory tone and violent choice of words: ‘[...] elle était chassée de France, la Belgique la chassa.’¹¹⁸

Hugo’s description of Julien as ‘La proscrire, je devrais dire la condamnée à mort...’¹¹⁹ is of particular significance as Hugo’s campaign against the death penalty was one the most prominent features of his social activism and his fight against oppression.¹²⁰ He equates Julien’s arrest with a condemnation of death as the inhumane conditions of her imprisonment precipitated a wretched illness that soon afterwards claimed her life. Hugo’s bitter sense of injustice at Julien’s inhumane treatment at the hands of the

¹¹³ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 51.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, (emphasis in original)

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, (emphasis in original)

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 52.

¹²⁰ Hugo’s novel *Le dernier jour d’un condamné* (1828) is one of his most influential works in favour of the abolition of the death penalty. In the novel, Hugo evokes the inherent inhumanity and injustice of the death penalty through the eyes of a nameless convict. Such is the far-reaching appeal of Hugo’s novel that it is still used today by Amnesty International as part of their ongoing worldwide campaign against capital punishment.

Bonaparte government is tragically evoked in his description of how Julien was swept away just when she had safely arrived in Jersey, having survived her horrendous journey: ‘Puis, espérant un peu de printemps et de soleil, elle vint à Jersey.’¹²¹ His description of Julien, eerily emerging from the sea mist, shivering, and moaning beneath her shrouded dress, creates a deeply haunting impression on the listener: ‘On se souvient encore de l’y avoir vue arriver par une froide matinée pluvieuse, à travers les brumes de la mer, râlant et grelottant sous sa pauvre robe de toile toute mouillée. Peu de jours après son arrivée, elle se coucha; elle ne s’est plus relevée. Il y a trois jours elle est morte.’¹²²

Hugo continues his contemptuous attack against the French government when he reveres Louise Julien as a true citizen of France, a patriot, a champion of the poor and working-class who committed her life to the service of her country: ‘Vous me demanderez ce qu’était cette femme et ce qu’elle avait fait pour être traitée ainsi; je vais vous le dire. Cette femme, par des chansons patriotiques, par de sympathiques et cordiales paroles, par de bonnes et civiques actions, avait rendu célèbre, dans les faubourgs de Paris, le nom de Louise Julien sous lequel le peuple la connaissait et la saluait.’¹²³ He commends Julien’s long-standing duty to her country and to her people: ‘Ouvrière, elle avait nourri sa mère malade; elle l’a soignée et soutenue dix ans. Dans les jours des luttes civiles, elle faisait de la charpie; et, boiteuse et se traînant, elle allait dans les ambulances, et secourait les blessés de tous les partis.’¹²⁴ Hugo’s language draws particular attention to Julien’s socialist sense of patriotism and to her active involvement in politics, describing her as a ‘femme du peuple’: ‘Cette femme du peuple était un poète, cette femme du peuple était un esprit; elle chantait la République, elle aimait la liberté, elle appelait ardemment l’avenir fraternel de toutes les nations et de tous les hommes; elle croyait à Dieu, au peuple, au progrès, à la France; elle versait autour d’elle, comme un vase, dans les esprits des prolétaires, son grand cœur plein d’amour et de foi. Voilà ce que faisait cette femme. M. Bonaparte l’a tuée.’¹²⁵

¹²¹ *Actes et Paroles, II*, p.52.

¹²² *Ibid*

¹²³ *Ibid*

¹²⁴ *Ibid*

¹²⁵ *Ibid*

The noble traits which Hugo attributes to Julien, notably her strong sense of republicanism and patriotism, her libertarian and egalitarian ideals, her progressive sense of nationhood and fraternity among nations, her literary disposition, her religious faith, and her solidarity with the working classes are extremely telling of Hugo's support and admiration for socialist feminists such as Julien who embodied all the ideals which Hugo envisioned for the Republic. By declaring Julien as 'la femme du peuple', Hugo is indicating his support for the progressive and evolutionary concept of socialist feminism which emerged in the late 1840s and 1850s which redefined women's identity as social, political, and economic beings, as active participants in society, who had much to contribute to the regeneration of society and to the construction of a productive, just, and egalitarian Republic. However, while declaring Julien as a 'femme du peuple' and alluding to her multiple roles in society, Hugo's use of language also reveals certain inconsistencies in relation to his attitude towards women, most notably when he says that Julien will contribute to 'l'avenir fraternal de toutes les nations et de tous les hommes' while simultaneously excluding her through his use of gendered and fraternalist phrases such as 'l'avenir fraternel' and 'de tous les hommes.'¹²⁶

There is also a distinctly political dimension to his eulogy to Julien. Hugo seizes on the sombre occasion of Julien's death to stir up patriotic socialist passions and to invoke French citizens everywhere to rise against tyranny and to overthrow the despotic rule of Bonaparte¹²⁷: [...] 'les peuples...croient inaccessibles et imprenables ces citadelles de la parole...et ils disent: la tribune est indestructible. Ils se trompent; ces tribunes-là peuvent être renversées. Un traître vient, des soldats arrivent, une bande de brigands se concertent, se démasque, fait feu, et le sanctuaire est envahi [...]'¹²⁸ For Hugo, the killing of women such as Louise Julien who embodied the very essence of Frenchness with their unwavering sense of socialist patriotism, liberty, and fraternity,

¹²⁶ *Ibid*

¹²⁷ The historical legacy of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte is far more ambiguous than Hugo's one-dimensional representations of his despotic leadership. Among the positive achievements of his regime were the radical modernisation of Paris, the development of France's infrastructure, growth in foreign trade, and the re-alignment of France's relationship with Great Britain. Furthermore, while the initial years of the Bonapartist regime were characterised by oppressive totalitarianism, the liberalisation which accompanied the latter years of his reign (1860-1870) reflected Bonaparte's desire to create a more liberal and democratic regime once he had firmly established power.

¹²⁸ *Actes et Paroles, II*, p. 52.

was the very proof of the tyrannic rule of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, and Hugo was determined to provoke mass retaliation against his unlawful government.¹²⁹

Hugo is adamant that these women's lives would not be lost in vain. He lists the many names of other leading French feminists who, like Julien, were subjected to immense suffering by the state for their acts of heroism and patriotism: 'Pitié!...ce mot que je viens de prononcer, il a jailli du plus profond de mes entrailles devant ce cercueil, cercueil d'une femme, cercueil d'une sœur, cercueil d'une martyre! Pauline Roland en Afrique, Louise Julien à Jersey, Francesca Maderspach à Temeswar, Blanca Téléki à Pesth, tant d'autres, Rosalie Gobert, Eugénie Guillemot, Augustine Péan, Blanche Clouart, Joséphine Prabeil, Elizabeth Parlès, Marie Reviel, Claudine Hibruit, Anne Sangla, veuve Combescure, Armadine Huet, et tant d'autres encore, sœurs, mères, filles, épouses, prosrites, exilées, transportées, torturées, suppliées, crucifiées, ô pauvres femmes!'¹³⁰ The rhetorical gravitas of this long listing of names reveals Hugo's deep awareness of the plight of women under the Bonaparte regime. His mentioning of women such as Pauline Roland reveals his support for issues such as divorce and the emancipation for women from the servitude of domestic life. Pauline Roland translated Milton's 'Traité du divorce' and foreshadowed Simone de Beauvoir by declaring her refusal to marry so long as the inequality between men and women persisted. Again, the violence of his rhetoric serves to reinforce the tyranny and injustice which Hugo associates with Bonaparte's regime: '[...] exilées, transportées, torturées, suppliées, crucifiées...'

However, Hugo's language also reveals his own personal sense of mourning and his keenness to display his empathy with the plight of these women; 'Pitié!...ce mot que je viens de prononcer, il a jailli du plus profond de mes entrailles devant ce cercueil' [...] Faibles, souffrantes, malades, arrachées à leurs famille, à leurs maris, à leurs parents, à leurs soutiens, vieilles quelquefois et brisées par l'âge [...]'¹³¹ The depth of Hugo's sympathy, compassion, and admiration is further seen when he heralds the women who were actively engaged in feminist and socialist activity in 19th century

¹²⁹ The violent 'coup d'état' which brought Bonaparte to power in 1851 was the unlawful premise upon which his dictatorial regime was founded. The bloody repression following the 'coup d'état' saw some 26,000 opponents of the regime imprisoned, 10,000 of whom were deported.

¹³⁰ *Actes et Paroles, II*, p. 53.

¹³¹ *Ibid*

France, as heroes: '[...] toutes ont été des héroïnes, plusieurs ont été des héros!'¹³² This declaration is deeply revealing of Hugo's far-reaching, liberating, and broad-minded feminist sensibilities as here Hugo is not only heralding the heroic status of these women for making the ultimate sacrifice for their country, but by making the subtle distinction between 'héroïne' and 'héros', he is acknowledging that these women have attained equal status with the men who have sacrificed everything for their country through their heroic acts of self-sacrifice and patriotism. He is explicitly positioning women within a male sphere of self-sacrifice and combat. Not only does Hugo proclaim these women as 'héros', he heralds Louise Julien as 'la femme' of the 19th century, the very embodiment of the newly-emerging, progressive, and evolutionary feminist women who rightfully demanded an equal claim to full citizenship and to complete social and civic equality¹³³: 'Ce n'est pas une femme que je vénère dans Louise Julien, c'est la femme; la femme de nos jours, la femme digne de devenir citoyenne; la femme telle que nous la voyons autour de nous, dans tout son dévouement, dans toute sa douceur, dans tout son sacrifice, dans toute sa majesté!'¹³⁴

Hugo's veneration of Louise Julien as the quintessential woman of the 19th century provides an enlightening insight into his response to the burgeoning socialist feminism in France in the mid-nineteenth century which advocated social, political and economic equality for women, voting rights, civil equality, equal access to education and instruction, and improved working conditions. Hugo further shows his support for these feminist demands by declaring Julien as 'la femme digne de devenir citoyenne', echoing de Gouge's pioneering use of the word in her *Déclarations des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* in 1791. He acknowledges the oppressed status of women in 19th century France 'la femme...dans tout son dévouement,' and the sacrifices they have endured '[...] dans tout son sacrifice.'¹³⁵ His use of 'dévouement' is significant as this word frequently appeared in republican discourse which venerated women's

¹³² *Ibid*

¹³³ The issue of citizenship was particularly important for feminists in the 19th century who were effectively denied citizenship in the *Code civil* (1804) which assigned women the inferior status of wives and mothers, which denied them the right to vote or to engage in public life. Under the terms of the *Code*, women occupied the most inferior position in society, possessing less social status and personal freedoms than children.

¹³⁴ *Actes et Paroles, II*, p.53.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*

role in republican motherhood as one of devotion. Republicans such as Michelet frequently used the word when justifying women's natural confinement to domestic life. In *Amour*, Michelet describes the chaste young bride as 'la plus aimante, la plus dévouée.'¹³⁶ Hugo invokes the 'dévouement' displayed by women such as Julien towards the Republic not as the basis for their confinement to domestic life but as a justification for their inclusion and equality within the newfound Republic.

However, while Hugo clearly supports the social and political revendications of leading socialist feminists such as Julien, Déroin, Roland, Niboyet, and while he heralds Julien as 'la femme de nos jours' in recognition of the changing role of women in the mid-nineteenth century, in his description of Julien, he combines her feminist ambitions, her socialism, and her patriotism, with the pre-eminently Romantic qualities of gentleness and softness, the 'deux qualités éminemment féminines'¹³⁷ which Hugo expects from all the women. This is nonetheless a much more far-reaching vision of femininity than the purely Romantic and utopic qualities which critics of Hugo's feminism condemn him for: 'Ainsi, chez le plus grand des romantiques, la théorie des 'deux poids, deux mesures' comsttue le lien qui unit, dans sa mythologie, les images contradictoires de la femme. L'éternel féminin vit une existence séparée; la femme est indispensable à l'homme, mais pour que l'homme soit plus grand encore.'¹³⁸

Hugo envisions 'la femme de nos jours' as someone who is self-sacrificing and patriotic but also as one who is endowed with the traditional, feminine qualities of gentleness, beauty, majesty and mysticism. Hugo declares that 'la femme de nos jours' with her noble ideals of fraternity, patriotism, and liberty will play an invaluable role in the creation of a just, egalitarian, and democratic republic: 'Amis, dans les temps futurs, dans cette belle, et paisible, et tendre, et fraternelle république sociale de l'avenir, le rôle de la femme sera grand [...]'¹³⁹ He acknowledges how this reconfiguration of women's multi-faceted role in the republic could not have been possible were it not for the selfless martyrdom of women such as Louise Julien: '[...] mais quel magnifique prélude à ce rôle que de tels martyres si vaillamment

¹³⁶ Michelet, Jules, *Amour*, (L. Hachette: Paris, 1870), p. 160.
<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb30943151n> [Accessed 14 July 2014]

¹³⁷ Guillemin, *Op cit*, p. 54.

¹³⁸ Armogathe, Daniel & Albistur, Maïté, *Op cit*, p. 257.

¹³⁹ *Actes et Paroles, II*, p.53.

endurés !'¹⁴⁰ Hugo's description of Louise Julien as a 'martyre' is particularly important as it resonates deeply with the patriotic language employed in his eulogies to male exiles such as Félix Bony: 'D'ailleurs on n'importune pas la tombe, et surtout la tombe des martyres, en parlant d'espérance.'¹⁴¹ Hugo's use of the word 'martyre' in his funeral eulogies during the Second Empire is in a sharp contrast to his use of the words 'tyran' and 'despote' in his attacks on Bonaparte and thus reveals how Hugo believed that female exiles such as Julien were the rightful martyrs of France for their heroic acts of self-sacrifice and heroism in the face of the despotic acts of the Bonaparte regime.

In this eulogy, Hugo proclaims one of his most iconic statements in support of female emancipation in 19th century France: 'Hommes et citoyens, nous avons dit plus d'une fois dans notre orgueil: – le dix-huitième siècle a proclamé le droit de l'homme; le dix-neuvième proclamera le droit de la femme [...]'¹⁴²¹⁴³ Here Hugo is pledging his full support for the feminist movement in 19th century France and declaring that the time has finally come to prioritise the question of female emancipation and equality. He welcomes the fact the the issue of female equality has finally come to the forefront in this century of change after so many years of neglect and hampered progress: '[...] le dix-neuvième siècle proclamera le droit de la femme; mais, il faut l'avouer, citoyens, nous ne nous sommes point hâtés; beaucoup de considérations, qui étaient graves, j'en conviens, et qui voulaient être mûrement examinées, nous ont arrêtées [...]'¹⁴⁴

Hugo uses the opportunity afforded by the public funeral address to demonstrate his understanding of the challenges of the feminist struggle of his time when he notes that while the 19th century is a time of great progress, there are still many distinguished minds in France who fail to recognise the equality between men and women and the need to extend equal civil rights to women: '[...] et à l'instant où je parle, au point

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 88.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, pp. 53-54

¹⁴³ Olympe de Gouges was the first woman to demand equal citizenship for women in *Déclarations des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* published in 1791. Hugo's pioneering use of the word reflects the progressive way in which Hugo's contemporaneous nineteenth-century feminists such as Maria Deraismes and Hubertine Auclert used the word in their discourse on women's rights, and thus demonstrates Hugo's awareness of the need for language to respond to women's changing position in nineteenth-century society.

¹⁴⁴ *Actes et Paroles, II*, p. 54.

même où le progrès est parvenu, parmi les meilleurs Républicains, parmi les démocrates les plus vrais et les plus purs, bien des esprits excellents hésitent encore à admettre dans l'homme et dans la femme l'égalité de l'âme humaine, et, par conséquent, l'assimilation, sinon l'identité complète des droits civiques.'¹⁴⁵ By professing 'l'égalité de l'âme humaine', Hugo is highlighting the depth of his belief in the basic equality of the sexes and distinguishing himself from many of his contemporaneous republican male thinkers such as Proudhon and Jules Michelet, or even those as progressive as Legouvé, who believed in an inherent difference in the nature of men and women. Moreover, by distinguishing himself from such men, Hugo is positioning himself as a visionary of social change whose role is to enlighten those who are still blinkered by prejudice, while also demonstrating his awareness of the need for men to speak on behalf of women's rights.

Laurence M. Porter argues that Hugo's perennial valorisation of 'l'essentiel féminin' reveals a far less progressive attitude towards femininity than that found in the works of his contemporary novelists such as Stendhal who choose to see women as they were and not in terms of their venerated femininity: 'Subliminally the traumatic separation from his mother was later to lead Hugo the novelist to a striking fictional overvaluation of women, an idealization that frequently turns his fictional women into vapid tokens.'¹⁴⁶ He argues 'in this respect, Hugo's fiction resembles Balzac's rather than Stendhal's, Flaubert's or Zola.'¹⁴⁷ However, upon inspection of his public discourse on women, it can be seen that Hugo's belief that no natural pre-existing inferiority exists to justify the inequality of the sexes closely echoes the views of Enlightenment feminist thinkers such as Condorcet and Mary Wollstonecraft who argued that no natural basis justified the subordination of women, but rather that the cause of women's inferior intellect and subordinate social position was a direct result of their defective education and social confinement.

Hugo further demonstrates the progressiveness of his support for female emancipation when he condemns women's long history of oppression and misery and their deliberate exclusion from the Republic: 'Disons-le bien haut, citoyens, tant que la prospérité a duré, tant que la République a été debout, les femmes, oubliées par nous,

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁴⁶ Porter, *Op cit*, p. 12.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.22.

se sont oubliées elles-mêmes; elles se sont bornées à rayonner comme la lumière; à échauffer les esprits; à attendrir les cœurs, à éveiller les enthousiasmes, à montrer du doigt à tous le bon, le juste, le grand et le vrai. Elles n'ont rien ambitionné au-delà. Elles qui, par moments, sont l'image de la patrie vivante, elles qui pouvaient être l'âme de la cité, elles ont été simplement l'âme de la famille.'¹⁴⁸ He describes how the French Revolution compelled women to break free from their traditional mute and passive roles as comforters of their husbands, as inspiration for rebellions, and as homemakers, to immerse themselves fully alongside men in the struggle to restore their country; 'À l'heure de l'adversité, leur attitude a changé, elles ont cessé d'être modestes...elles nous ont dit: – 'Nous ne savons pas si nous avons droit à votre puissance, à votre liberté, à votre grandeur; mais ce que nous savons, c'est que nous avons droit à votre misère. Partager vos souffrances, vos accablements, vos dénûments, vos détresses, vos renoncements, vos exils, votre abandon...c'est là le droit de la femme... – Ô mes frères! et les voilà qui nous suivent dans le combat, qui nous accompagnent dans la proscription, et qui nous devancent dans le tombeau !'¹⁴⁹

By invoking the mandate of these women, Hugo is affirming his place in the feminist movement – as a voice of support in the feminist struggle and he uses the power of speech to solidly affirm his position of sympathy and solidarity within the struggle. Although Hugo was unable to directly participate in the feminist movement in France during his exile, he nonetheless lent his support to the feminist campaign which no doubt had a resounding effect on the struggle in France: 'Citoyens, puisque cette fois encore vous avez voulu que je parlasse en votre nom, puisque votre mandat donne à ma voix l'autorité qui manquerait à une parole isolée; sur la tombe de Louise Julien, comme il y a trois mois, sur la tombe de Jean Bousquet, le dernier cri que je veux jeter, c'est le cri de courage, d'insurrection et d'espérance!'¹⁵⁰ Hugo uses his power of voice to make a dramatic plea to the French people to avenge the death of Louise Julien and the spate of other exiled victims of Bonaparte's tyrannic government. Hugo makes effective use of the public and emotive power of the eulogy to publicly affirm his personal support for female exiles and for the various struggles for women's rights unfolding in France at the time. His tone is notably combative and inspiring: 'Oui,

¹⁴⁸ *Actes et Paroles, II*, p. 54.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*

des cercueils comme celui de cette noble femme qui est là signifient et président la chute prochaine des bourreaux, l'inévitable écroulement des despotismes et des despotes. Les proscrits meurent l'un après l'autre; le tyran creuse leur fosse; mais à un jour venu, citoyens, la fosse tout à coup attire et engloutit le fossoyeur.'¹⁵¹

He ends the speech with a final incendiary attack on Louis-Napoléon and on all violators and oppressors of women: 'Malédiction aux fouetteurs des femmes!'¹⁵² Throughout his speech, Hugo's emotive outpouring of grief for the suffering endured by Louise Julien and her many feminist counterparts who were oppressed, persecuted, and exiled at the hands of Bonaparte, his stirring display of solidarity for the socialist, civic, and political aspirations of the feminist women of the late 1840s and early 1850s, and his appeal to French citizens everywhere to proclaim the equality of women, makes it clear that the 'République Universelle'¹⁵³ envisioned by Hugo was one in which women would be treated as equal citizens, in which they would play a vital role in the social and moral regeneration of the fraternal, inclusive, and universal Republic.

Hugo's eulogy to George Sand.

On the occasion of George Sand's death in Nohant on the 8 June 1876, it had been six years since Hugo's return from his prolonged exile in Guernsey. Since his return to France in 1870, Hugo had been actively involved in the resurgent feminist movement which emerged during the 1870s. The major difference between the feminist movement during the Third Republic and that of earlier decades was better and more effective organisation. After almost twenty years of forced inactivity, the early years of the Third Republic saw a rapid growth in feminist activity with the establishment of numerous feminist organisations such as the *La Société pour l'Amélioration du Sort des Femmes* and the *Ligue française pour le droit des femmes*, the creation of a widely-diffused feminist press, and the organisation of frequent public lectures and conferences for women throughout Paris. None of the feminists who were at the forefront of earlier feminist struggles were involved in the feminist movement of the Third Republic which was led mainly by Republican feminists.¹⁵⁴ The most

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p. 55.

¹⁵³ Hugo ends his eulogy with the words: 'VIVE LA RÉPUBLIQUE UNIVERSELLE.' *Ibid*

¹⁵⁴ The two major groups of feminists who emerged during The Third Republic were Republican feminists who supported the Republic and revolutionary socialist feminists who opposed the existing Republic. Divisions also emerged between conservative feminists such as Maria Déraisimes and Léon

influential figures of the new feminist movement were Maria Deraismes, Léon Richer, and Hubertine Auclert.

As we have seen from Hugo's eulogy to Louise Julien, written during his early years in exile in 1853, Hugo's main contribution to the feminist movement in France during the tumultuous years of the Second Empire was in lending the gravity, authority, and resounding power of his voice to the feminist struggle in France.

The eulogy written by Hugo in honour of George Sand and delivered at her graveside on the 10 June 1876 by Paul Meurice is another eloquent testimony to Hugo's solidarity and support for the feminist cause in 19th century France.

Unlike his eulogy to Louise Julien in which Hugo seizes on the tragic death of a female exile to launch a vehement attack against the Napoleonic regime and to incite his fellow French citizens to contest his despotic reign, his eulogy to George Sand contains no such combative language and is decidedly more personal and intimate in tone. From the outset, Hugo addresses Sand in the first person, reflecting his long personal correspondence with Sand which spanned over twenty years. He begins by expressing his own personal grief for Sand, and by acknowledging the immortality and grandiosity of her life: 'Je pleure une morte, et je salue une immortelle.'¹⁵⁵ His use of the first person resonates deeply with Derrida's use of direct addresses in his eulogy to Emmanuel Levinas as a way of fulfilling his need to find a suitable language to cope with the silence occasioned by the death of a loved one:

Often those who come forward to speak...publicly, thereby interrupting the animated whispering, the secret or intimate exchange that always links one, deep inside, to a dead friend...those who make themselves heard in a cemetery, end up addressing *directly, straight on*, the one who...is no longer living, no longer there, who will no longer respond. With tears in their voices they sometimes speak familiarly to the others who keep silent...apostrophizing him, even greeting him or confiding in him. This is not necessarily out of respect for convention, not always simply part of the rhetoric of oration. It is rather so as to traverse speech at the very point where words fail us, since all language that would return to the self, to us, would seem indecent, a reflexive discourse that would end up coming back to the community [...]¹⁵⁶

Richer who supported passive form of activism and radical, anti-clerical feminists such as Hubertine Auclert who sought recourse to violent mechanisms of feminist activity.

¹⁵⁵ Hugo, *Actes et Paroles III*, (Librairie P. Ollendorff: Paris, 1937-1940), p. 242.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb322627986> [Accessed 13 July 2014]

¹⁵⁶ Derrida, Jacques, *The Work of Mourning*, ed. Pascal-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2001), p. 200.

This is further revealed in the salutary tone adopted by Hugo in his eulogy to Sand: ‘Je l’ai aimée, je l’ai admirée, je l’ai vénérée [...]’¹⁵⁷ He recalls one of his personal letters to Sand in which he thanked her for greatness: ‘Je vous remercie d’être une si grande âme.’¹⁵⁸ The letter to which Hugo is referring here is a letter sent by Hugo to Sand from Hauteville-House, his long-term residence in Guernsey on the 8 February 1870 in response to a letter from Sand in which she gives a personal appraisal of several of Hugo’s theatrical works. In the letter, Hugo hails Sand as the woman of the 19th century, a noble spirit among all people, a kind of living heritage: ‘Vous êtes la grande femme de ce siècle, une âme noble entre toutes, une sorte de postérité vivante, et vous avez le droit de parler haut. Je vous remercie.’¹⁵⁹ His heralding of Sand as ‘la grande femme de ce siècle’ echoes his heralding of Louise Julien as ‘la femme du peuple.’ He sees these women as strong, pioneering, representative figures of the feminist struggle in 19th century France as they both embody the broad ideals associated with the movement. Both women are representative of the newly-emerging and pioneering women of the 19th century whose courage, outspokenness, and social activism helped to empower oppressed women and to redefine the role of women in society. His use of the definite article in his descriptions of Julien and Sand as ‘la grande femme de ce siècle’ and ‘la femme du peuple’ is of considerable significance as it demonstrates Hugo’s firm belief that the 19th century would be the century to finally proclaim women’s equal place in society and purposely echoes the discourse surrounding the ‘grand homme’ in 19th century France.

As well as proclaiming Sand’s immortal place in history, Hugo also describes her unique place in present history: ‘George Sand a dans notre temps une place unique.’¹⁶⁰ He re-echoes the words in his personal letter to Sand by declaring that while others were great men, Sand is the great woman: ‘D’autres sont les grands hommes; elle est la grande femme.’¹⁶¹ Once again on the occasion of Sand’s death, Hugo is acknowledging Sand’s equality among her male contemporaries and identifying her as one of the foremost agents of social change for women in France in the 19th century. He describes how the struggle for female equality in the century would not have been

¹⁵⁷ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 242.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁹ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 317.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*

possible were it not for the presence of ‘la grande femme’ in the person of George Sand: ‘Dans ce siècle qui a pour loi d’achever la Révolution française et de commencer la révolution humaine, l’égalité des sexes faisant partie de l’égalité des hommes, une grande femme était nécessaire.’¹⁶² The French Revolution was marked by a vibrant explosion of female activity during which women opened the debate over the relations of the sexes, questioned the notion of women’s role in culture and politics, challenged female subordination, and engaged pressing issues for women such as equal citizenship, equal education, marital reform, legal equality, social inclusion and women’s relation to the family and the state through their organisation of military clubs, paramilitary groups, street marching, the widespread issuing of tracts, petitions, and political journals and active participation in combat.¹⁶³ However, despite the female contribution to the Revolution, the French Republic established in 1793 was keen to restore male power and to thwart female inclusion in the socio-political scene, while successive post-revolutionary governments from 1793 until 1945 continued to relegate women to the confinement and oppression of the domestic sphere. Indeed, it is the counter-revolutionary backlash that ensued after the French Revolution that provided much of the impetus for the feminist movement of the 19th century.¹⁶⁴

In contrast to the French Revolution, Hugo sees the 19th century as the time for ‘la révolution humaine’ in which the claim for freedom and equality would be extended to both sexes: ‘l’égalité des sexes faisant partie de l’égalité des hommes [...]’¹⁶⁵ He then goes on to describe the particular qualities which made Sand a ‘grande femme’: ‘Il fallait que la femme prouvât qu’elle peut avoir tous nos dons virils sans rien perdre de ses dons angéliques; être forte sans cesser d’être douce. George Sand est cette preuve.’¹⁶⁶ His description of Sand as a ‘grande femme’ who is at once endowed with the explicitly masculine virile qualities of strength, vigour, and energy and the quintessentially feminine qualities of beauty, gentleness, and grace provides a deeply

¹⁶² *Ibid*

¹⁶³ The role of ordinary women in revolutionary combat will be discussed in a later chapter of this thesis. For more on the subject on women’s diverse contribution to the revolutionary effort, see Hufton, Olwen H. *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution*, (University of Toronto Press: 1992) & Godineau, Dominique, *Citoyennes tricoteuses: Les femmes du peuple à Paris pendant la Révolution française*, (Editions ALINEA: Paris, 1988)

¹⁶⁴ Offen, Karen, M., *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History*, (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2000), pp. 50-65

¹⁶⁵ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 242.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*

illuminating insight into Hugo's particular perception of femininity and the underlying ambiguities of his feminism. Just as Hugo describes Julien 'dans toute son douceur...dans toute sa majesté', his evocation of Sand's 'dons angéliques' reveals how Hugo venerated the virile qualities of physical strength, vigour, and defiance in women such as Sand and Julien but only when these women retained their pre-eminently feminine qualities of softness, grace, and gentleness

Maité Albistur and Daniel Armogathe comment on Hugo's deep-held belief that women should always retain their essential femininity: 'Rien n'a sollicité davantage l'imagination de Hugo que le mystère de la nature féminine. [...] Ainsi, fondamentalement, dans le domaine sexuel, la femme doit-elle conserver son éternelle "féminité" sous peine de déchoir aux yeux du poète: "la femme peut parfois avoir quelque chose de viril; elle ne doit jamais rien avoir de masculin. La femme hommasse réunit toutes les disgrâces des deux sexes."'167 They further comment on how the duality of power/weakness, mysticism/motherhood is one of the most recurring features of Hugo's literary representations of women: 'La femme mythique de Hugo, c'est aussi la mère universelle, celle qui est à l'origine de toute création, et qui se confond bien souvent avec la nature primitive. [...] Il y a là une force qu'il croit obscure et qui excite son imagination. Hugo a besoin de se créer partout des mystères; et la femme répond assez bien à cette nécessité. Plus simplement, Hugo, évoque à maintes reprises, comme ses contemporains, la faiblesse naturelle de la femme et la rouerie féminine.'168 One of the many example of the inherent conflict of strength and weakness within Hugo's literary representations of femininity can be seen in the figure of Lola Montes in *Chansons des rues et des bois*: 'Crains les belles. On se laisse vaincre aisément par Lola. Dieu compose de faiblesse ces toutes puissances-là.'169

However, while Hugo does insist upon women retaining their essential femininity, whether it be his literary heroines, or the real-life women like Julien and Sand whom he exalts as 'héros', there can be no doubt that his personal concept of feminism extended far beyond of many of his male contemporaries, that he keenly supported women's changing roles in society and their entry into traditionally male spheres of

¹⁶⁷ Armogathe, Daniel, & Albistur, Maité, *Op cit*, pp. 255-256

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 256-257

¹⁶⁹ Hugo, Victor, *La Chanson des Rues et des Bois: Nouvelle édition augmentée*, (Arvensa : Paris, 2004), p. 60.

influence. When Hugo exalts Julien as ‘cette femme du peuple’, he is not only commending her socialist patriotism but also her role as a woman of literary genius and spirit: ‘Cette femme du peuple était un poète, cette femme du peuple était un esprit.’¹⁷⁰ Hugo’s eulogy to George Sand can be read as one of the most liberating and far-reaching exaltations of female genius by a 19th century male Romantic.

Within his eulogy, Hugo venerates Sand as an immortal spirit whose ideas will transcend time and live on forever: ‘Transfiguration sublime....George Sand était une idée; elle est hors de la chair, la voilà libre; elle est morte, la voilà vivante.’¹⁷¹ By identifying Sand’s genius with the transcendental experience of male sublime genius, Hugo is instantly defining her genius in equivalent terms with men and thus demonstrating his radically progressive and inclusive perception of female genius. During the Romantic period, the explicitly gendered notions of the sublime as the triumph of man over nature and the manifestation of male power, sexuality, and strength created a framework of exclusion whereby women were precluded from experiencing the sublime on account of their perceived mental, physiological, and cultural inferiority to men. By crediting Sand’s genius with the divine, transcendental qualities of the sublime, Hugo is thus presenting a gender-neutral conception of creativity which differs considerably from the gendered sublime espoused by his male Romantic contemporaries and from his own quintessentially Romantic figurations of female sublime in terms of feminine delicacy and maternal tenderness.

He further attributes Sand with the revered qualities of male sublime genius when he glorifies the immortality, spirit, and grandeur of her genius: ‘je salue une immortelle’, ‘Je vous remercie d’être une si grande âme.’¹⁷² It is by virtue of these qualities that Hugo compares Sand to the ‘grand hommes’ of her time: ‘Elle a été un grand cœur comme Barbès, un grand esprit comme Balzac, une grande âme comme Lamartine.’¹⁷³ He further equates Sand with the qualities of gendered male greatness when he describes her as an ‘haute figure’, ‘un des orgueils de notre siècle’, and ‘cette femme pleine de gloire.’¹⁷⁴ Again Hugo’s descriptions of female genius in terms of absolute equivalence with male genius demonstrate how far his perception of female genius

¹⁷⁰ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 52.

¹⁷¹ *Actes et Paroles, III*, p. 242.

¹⁷² *Ibid*

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, pp. 242-243

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 242

transcends the deep-seated cultural misogyny of the Romantic period which defined women's creative roles as the divine muses of male creativity as for Musset, Vigny, or Baudelaire, or the submissive admirers of male genius as for Keats, and which largely dismissed female creativity as a monstrous transgression of female nature or the threatening manifestation of female madness or illness. Hugo further reveals his radically empowering valorisation of female genius by explicitly linking it with his feminist convictions and his support for female emancipation. In particular, his veneration of Sand as a 'grande femme' links his appraisal of female genius to the inclusive role he envisions for women within the republic. Hugo declares that while 'D'autres sont les grands hommes; elle est la grande femme.'¹⁷⁵

By designating a place for Sand within the 'culte du grand homme' which elevated great republican men to national ancestors by virtue of their supreme moral, civic, and intellectual qualities, Hugo is radically endorsing the inclusion of women within the public and political life of the republic. He further links his appraisal of female genius with female emancipation when he declares that a woman of genius such as Sand was necessary in 19th century France to realise the feminist demands of the French Revolution and to begin the revolution of the sexes: 'Dans ce siècle qui a pour loi d'achever la Révolution Française et de commencer la révolution humaine, l'égalité des sexes faisant partie de l'égalité des hommes, une grande femme était nécessaire.'¹⁷⁶ His acute awareness of the failure of the French Revolution to extend equality to half of the population demonstrates how deeply he perceived the attainment of female emancipation as one of the most pressing social issues of the 19th century upon which depended the equality of the family, the sexes, and society at large.

Furthermore, his explicit linking of female equality with the equality of men is reminiscent of Olympe de Gouges who argued for the extension of equal citizenship for women on the basis of its larger social utility, while also resonating deeply with the socialist vision of Marx and Engels who argued that in any given society, the degree of female emancipation was a measure of general emancipation.'¹⁷⁷ However, while Marx and Engels considered female emancipation as secondary to the

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁷⁷ Engels observed that Fourier was to 'the first to declare that in any given society the degree of woman's emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation.' See Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, (Philip Allen: London, 1990), p. 55.

emancipation of the working-classes, Hugo was acutely sensitive to the specificity of the ‘woman question.’ He identifies the instrumental function of female genius in the attainment of women’s rights when he declares: ‘George Sand meurt, mais elle nous lègue le droit de la femme puisant son évidence dans le génie de la femme.’¹⁷⁸ By privileging the role of female genius in the attainment of women’s rights, Hugo is aligning himself with the distinctly intellectual orientation of late 18th and 19th century feminism which enabled feminists as diverse as Mary Wollstonecraft, George Sand herself, and Maria Deraismes to articulate their demands for women’s rights through the deployment of reason and logic, and which ultimately proved crucial in enabling women to become the rational, thinking agents of their own emancipation.

While Hugo’s appraisal of female genius reveals his ability to transcend the deep-seated gender prejudices inherent in Romantic conceptions of genius and to articulate a perception of female genius which is both radically feminist and socialist in its orientation, Hugo’s appraisal of female genius is nonetheless ultimately constrained by his Romantic perceptions of femininity. The inherent duality within Hugo’s perception of female genius is most explicitly seen when he defines Sand as the embodiment of both male virility and soft angelic femininity.¹⁷⁹ The equation of virility and genius assumed potent importance during the Romantic period which revitalised antiquated perceptions of genius as the overflow of male sexual energy and virility which became displaced as creative or artistic energy. While the male genius was seen to embody a divine fusion of idealised female energy and masculine vigour, women were deemed unable to transcend their sexuality and produce culture. Female artists were thus unable to ‘participate in the creative process without becoming unsexed.’¹⁸⁰

George Sand exemplified the mixture of fear, awe, and repulsion inspired by the ‘unsexed’ woman of genius. Among her most staunch critics, Sand was ridiculed as a monstrous transgression of femininity – as Baudelaire displayed when he declared ‘La femme Sand est le prudhomme de l’immortalité.’¹⁸¹ By contrast, the more Sand’s genius became revered, the more male she was deemed to be – Balzac attributes Sand

¹⁷⁸ *Actes et Paroles, III*, p. 243.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁸⁰ Battersby, Christine, *Gender and Genius: towards a new feminist aesthetics*, (Women’s Press: London, 1989), p. 20.

¹⁸¹ Baudelaire, Charles, *Mon cœur mis à nu*, (Librairie Droz: rue Massot, Genève, 2001), p.26.

with the characteristics of a man.¹⁸² On the other hand, for Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Sand is ‘True genius, but true woman !’¹⁸³ Flaubert’s appraisal is more nuanced and comes closer to that of Hugo by presenting Sand as a ‘grand homme’ with an essentially feminine nature: ‘Pauvre chère grande femme !...Il fallait la connaître comme je l’ai connue pour savoir tout ce qu’il y avait de féminin dans ce grand homme [...]’¹⁸⁴ While Flaubert and Hugo thus present a decidedly liberating perception of female genius for their time by attributing women of genius with the revered masculine qualities of virility and by designating Sand as a ‘grand homme’ imbued with feminine characteristics, just as the male Romantic was elevated to genius by his possession of feminine sensibility, nevertheless, for both Flaubert and Hugo, the presence of genius in women must never be seen to transgress their essential femininity or betray their female nature.

What Hugo admires in Sand is that although she was endowed with virile qualities she never betrayed what he saw as her essentially feminine nature: ‘être forte sans cesser d’être douce.’ The word ‘viril’ assumes rich resonance in the extensive repertoire of Romantic literature. While writers such as Balzac were fascinated by the notion of androgyny in women and women’s ambiguous sexual identity, Hugo abhorred the manifestation of masculine, androgynous features in women – his use of the word ‘viril’ indicates his unwavering belief that women, while asserting themselves in masculine roles, should always retain their essential femininity. The word ‘viril’ thus comes to signify the masculine vigour, energy, bravery which the ideal woman as envisaged by Hugo could assume, without transcending her fundamental femininity. Another associative meaning of ‘viril’ is the use of the word in Republican contexts wherein the word assumed particular resonance during the Third Republic during which time the words ‘viril’ and ‘virilité’ repeatedly appeared in Republican texts and political manifestos. In his ‘Proclamation au peuple français’, delivered in October 1870, Léon Gambetta uses the word in an explicitly political context: ‘Il est temps de nous ressaisir, citoyens, et, sous l’égide de la République que nous sommes décidés à ne laisser capituler ni au-dedans ni au-dehors, de puiser dans

¹⁸² For more on perceptions of Sand’s genius among her contemporaries, see *George Sand: a woman’s life writ large*, Stack, Belinda, (Random House: New York, 2010), pp. 357-360

¹⁸³ This is the first line in Elizabeth Browning’s poem *To George Sand: A Recognition*

¹⁸⁴ Cited in *Gustave Flaubert, critique: Thèmes et structure*, Tondeur, Claire-Lise, (John Benjamin’s Publishing Company: 1984), p. 89. Original citation in a letter sent by Flaubert to Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie, (*Correspondance*, ed. Bruneau, Jean, éditions de la Pléiade XV, 455, 17-6-76).

l'étendue même de nos malheurs le rajeunissement de notre moralité et de notre virilité politique et sociale.'¹⁸⁵

Hugo's use of the word 'viril' is thus deeply revealing of both his support for the public role assumed by George Sand in French society and his inherently Romantic vision of women and femininity. The qualities which made Sand a 'grand homme' were thus not her manifestation of masculine qualities but rather her ability to embody these qualities while always retaining her essential femininity. Such a conception of femininity at once reveals the broad reaches and confining limitations of Hugo's dual perceptions of female identity, the changing roles of women in 19th century French society, and his personal perceptions of female nature. For Hugo, a woman who possesses genius is at once 'un profond talent' and a 'belle âme', a 'grand cœur' and an 'esprit charmant.'

Hugo's eulogy to Emily de Putron.

While Hugo's eulogies¹⁸⁶ to Louise Julien and George Sand express his public support for feminist activity, women's participation in politics, and the changing roles of women in society, his personal eulogy to Emily de Putron, the wife of his youngest son François-Victor, provides a vivid account of Hugo's personal perception of

¹⁸⁵ Gambetta, Léon, Proclamation au Peuple français delivered in Tours on 30 October 1870.

¹⁸⁶ While Hugo's eulogy to Emily de Putron is the last to be discussed in detail in this chapter, Hugo also delivered a eulogy to Mme Louis Blanc, the English wife of his close friend Louis Blanc, at the 'cimetière du Père Lachaise' on 26 1876. Within his eulogy, Hugo describes Mme Louis Blanc in decidedly Romantic terms as 'une figure sereine et calme.' Unlike the virile femininity he attributes to Julien and Sand, Hugo describes Mme Louis Blanc in entirely relational terms as a selfless companion who is glad to be eclipsed by her husband's illustrious shadow: 'la compagne modeste d'un illustre exilé [...]' His eulogy also presents a profoundly essentialist view of womanhood in which he reduces the fundamental role of women to that of a provider of love: 'Elle remplissait la grande fonction obscure de la femme, qui est d'aimer' and in which he firmly relinquishes the role of women in society to the private domain of love and affection while men are responsible for work, thought, creation, and combat: 'L'homme s'efforce, invente, crée, sème, moissonne, détruit et construit, pense, combat, contemple; la femme aime.' (*Actes et Paroles III*, pp. 239-240) Unsurprisingly, the death of Mme Louis Blanc made Hugo reflective of the unfailing companionship of Juliette Drouet who recognised Hugo's private message to her within his eulogy to Mme Louis Blanc: 'Sous ce portrait, apparaissent en filigrane les traits de Juliette Drouet, sa maîtresse. Celle-ci le comprend de cette façon puisqu'elle lui envoie un message après les funérailles: "Je te remercie avec une sainte émotion [...] d'avoir un peu pensé à moi dans l'admirable et sublime éloge que tu as fait hier de la douce et noble femme de Louis Blanc.'" (Ben-Amos, Avner, 'Victor Hugo et les enterrements civils,' p. 44.) Thus while Hugo venerates the active, combative exile of women such as Louise Julien and Pauline Roland, the humble, submissive terms in which he describes Mme Louis Blanc as the dignified companion to an illustrious male exile reveals how Hugo's private treatment continued to be defined by his deeply Romantic perception of women, and his restrictive and often stifling behaviour towards women in his personal life.

women and the deep-rooted Romanticism which underlines his personal vision of women and femininity.

Emily de Putron died during the family's early years in exile in Guernsey. Hugo's eulogy to Emily, delivered personally at her graveside, reveals the deeply-ingrained Romantic sensibilities which informed his personal view of women and femininity, and provides a striking contrast to his eulogies to Sand and Julien, in which he explicitly displays his support for the changing roles of women in society, and their inclusion within the traditionally male spheres of politics and revolution. Furthermore, the overtly Romantic language of this eulogy is in sharp contrast to the combative, provocative rhetoric adopted by Hugo in his eulogies to Julien and Sand, which became a way for Hugo to publicly lend the authority of his voice to the feminist struggle in France during the 19th century.

His eulogy to Emily provides a searing expression of Hugo's private grief at the tragic loss of a family member. In his eulogy, Hugo is responsible not just for giving expression to his own personal grief but also for expressing the extended grief of his family and for leading the mourning process.

The tender age at which Emily died, as well as the sudden, untimely nature of her death just days after her sister's wedding celebrations, created a massive outpouring of grief among the exile community in Guernsey. Hugo's role in leading the commemoration process for Emily is reflected from the outset of his eulogy by his shift from the first personal pronoun which he habitually uses in his eulogies to the plural form 'nous': 'En quelques semaines, nous nous sommes occupés des deux sœurs; nous avons marié l'une, et voici que nous ensevelissons l'autre. C'est là le perpétuel tremblement de la vie...Inclinons-nous avec espérance. Nos yeux sont faits pour pleurer, mais pour voir; notre cœur est fait pour souffrir, mais pour croire.'¹⁸⁷ His language 'inclinons-nous' reflects the humble, self-effacing, stance which Hugo adopts when grieving for the death of his daughter in *Les Contemplations*, which is in direct opposition to the grandiosity of his public persona and his image as an over-bearing, quintessential 19th century patriarch.

¹⁸⁷*Actes et Paroles II*, p. 213.

The fact that he is leading his family in the mourning process is of considerable interest as mourning is conventionally perceived as an inherently feminine activity whereas the concept of male mourning is perceived as a latent, personal, and private activity. The particular mourning conventions which evolved during the 19th century firmly positioned women as chief mourners in the funeral ceremony while the men formed part of the solemn, unified cortege which led the procession and provided structure to the ceremony. John Tosh comments on how the ‘code of manliness at the end of the century was...uncoupled from domesticity’, while ‘pain and emotion were repressed, and individuality curtailed, in the cause of producing a type.’¹⁸⁸ By engaging in the ostensibly feminine act of mourning, Hugo is expressing his desire to identify compassionately with the suffering of women and to distance himself from the long-held gendered perceptions of mourning as a passive, vulnerable, inferior feminine position which necessarily places men in a superior, dominant position of triumphant survival. While his ability to adopt a distinctly feminine position proves crucial for his feminism, the decidedly paternalist role which Hugo assumes within the eulogy reinforces the conflicted nature of Hugo’s attitudes towards women whom he saw as both decisive agents of their own emancipation yet beautiful, demure, and ethereal creatures who eternally excite his imagination and fascination.

Significantly, within his eulogy, Hugo asserts that it is his unique position as an exile that affords him the authority to speak on behalf of Emily and not his role as a patriarch. His language is notably humble and self-effacing as he describes his position within the larger exile community: ‘De quel droit viens-je adresser la parole à la mort? Qui suis-je? Rien. Je me trompe, je suis quelque chose. Je suis un proscrit. Exilé de force hier, exilé volontaire aujourd’hui.’¹⁸⁹ Hugo’s engagement with the inherently feminine act of mourning¹⁹⁰ through his leading role in the mourning process reflects

¹⁸⁸ Tosh, John, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1999), p. 189.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 214.

¹⁹⁰ Hugo also led the mourning procession, along with Pradier, for Claire Pradier, the daughter of his long-term lover Juliette Drouet in the cimetière de Saint-Mandé. Jacques Seebacher comments on how the double tragedy of Claire’s death in 1846, so soon after that of Léopoldine, helped Hugo and Juliette to reconcile following his infidelity with Léonia Biard: ‘La mort de la fille de Juliette, Claire, réalise en 1846 cette autre étoile double du deuil, qui montrera aux vieux amants désunis le chemin magique du salut après la révélation tardive du constat à l’adultère, en 1845, entre le Pair de France ‘inviolable’, et Léonie d’Aunet alias Thérèse de Blaru, épouse Biard, et leur permettre de surmonter l’espèce de tentative d’assassinat à laquelle se sont livrées la femme du peintre officiel et la vicomtesse Hugo en expédiant à Juliette, fin juin 1851; les lettres de Victor à Léonie.’ Seebacher,

his willingness to identify with the experience of female suffering, while his careful self-positioning as a marginalised victim of exile again reflects his desire to identify with the experience of female suffering. Such an explicit identification with maternal grief can be seen in *Les Contemplations* wherein Hugo presents himself as a grieving mother when mourning the death of his daughter Léopoldine: ‘Aujourd’hui, moi qui fus faible comme une mère [...]’¹⁹¹

However, despite his keenness to adopt a distinctly feminine standpoint in his eulogy to Emily, the language employed by Hugo is deeply couched in his Romantic sensibilities and reveals at times a deeply paternalistic vision of femininity and the role of women in society. He attributes Emily with the ethereal Romantic qualities of beauty, grace, purity, tenderness, and nobility: ‘Emily de Putron était le doux orgueil d’une respectable et patriarcale famille. Ses amis et ses proches avaient pour enchantement sa grâce et pour fête son sourire. Elle était comme une fleur épanouie dans la maison [...]’¹⁹² His use of language is deeply revealing of the tension which exists between his progressive and liberating public activism for women’s rights and the inherently Romantic views which underpinned his personal perception of women. This underlying tension within Hugo’s perception of women is made explicit in lines such as ‘le doux orgueil’ which is reminiscent of Hugo’s description of George Sand as both ‘viril’ and ‘angélique.’ His graceful description of Emily as ‘le doux visage’, ‘cette fleur de joie épanouie,’ is also reminiscent of his serene depictions of Julien ‘dans toute sa douceur...dans toute sa majesté,’ and his depiction of Madame Louis Blanc as ‘une figure sereine et calme.’ As with Hugo’s description of Madame Louis Blanc, his definition of Emily’s role in society is firmly anchored within her family life and her fundamental role as a wife and daughter: ‘Je bénis cette morte...dans sa maison qu’elle laisse désolée.’¹⁹³ Hugo defines Emily’s role primarily in terms of her capacity to give love. While Madame Louis Blanc ‘remplissait la grande fonction

Jacques, ‘Circonscription de l’abîme’ in *Victor Hugo: romancier de l’abîme*, ed. J.A. Hiddleston, (European Humanities Research Centre, University of Oxford, 2002), p. 71.)

¹⁹¹ *Les Contemplations*, IV, XV, (Flammarion: Paris, 1995), p. 214.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, p. 213.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 215.

obscur de la femme, qui est d'aimer'¹⁹⁴, Emily 'avait grandi heureuse, et, recevant du bonheur, elle en donnait; aimée, elle aimait.'¹⁹⁵

Hugo's eulogy is deeply reminiscent of *Les Contemplations* wherein he endows Léopoldine and Claire Pradier, the daughter of Juliette Drouet, with the same Romantic ideals of soft, graceful femininity which he attributes to Emily. Like Léopoldine, whose angelic presence lingers over his entire *Contemplations*, Hugo envisions Emily as a celestial, angelic being who is illuminated by the divine light of the afterlife: 'C'est nous qui sommes dans l'ombre. Elle, elle est dans l'aurore. Elle est dans le rayonnement, dans la vérité, dans la réalité, dans la récompense.'¹⁹⁶¹⁹⁷ His image of Emily 'dans sa robe blanche du sépulchre' echoes the whiteness which pervades his descriptions of Léopoldine's death in *Les Contemplations*. The deeply Romantic view of women depicted in Hugo's eulogy to Emily is overtly evident within Hugo's use of language which subliminally excludes women from a predominantly masculine society with phrases such as 'Ce refus du néant est la grandeur de l'homme,'... 'cet évanouissement, s'il était à la fin de l'homme ôterait à notre existence toute sanction,'... 'Quiconque aime sait et sent qu'aucun des points d'appui de l'homme n'est sur la terre',... 'Aimer, qui est le but de l'homme, serait son supplice [...]'¹⁹⁸

Furthermore, the decidedly paternalist role which Hugo adopts within the mourning process is evident when he describes Emily as 'le doux orgueil d'une respectable et patriarcale famille.'¹⁹⁹ Such a Romantic description of Emily as 'le doux orgueil' is in stark contrast to his appraisal of Sand as an independent solitary ego. His language further reveals his deep-seated Romantic sensibilities when he attributes Emily with essentially feminine qualities – Emily incarnates Hugo's eternal fascination with

¹⁹⁴ *Actes et Paroles III*, p.239.

¹⁹⁵ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 213.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 214.

¹⁹⁷ Here Hugo's use of language, particularly 'aurore' and 'ombre' draws deeply upon the light/darkness dichotomy of *Les Contemplations* which opens in Book I with *Aurore*, which Hugo figures as the dawn of his children's lives, when in reality the entire volume is in fact overshadowed by Léopoldine's death. Her death is the ever-present 'ombre' which pervades Hugo's personal autobiography.

¹⁹⁸ *Actes et Paroles II, Ibid*, p. 213.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*

‘l’essentiel féminin’ and ‘la mère universelle’: ‘Ses amis avaient pour enchantement sa grâce, et pour fête son sourire.’²⁰⁰

The deep-seated Romanticism which informs Hugo’s description of Emily is further reflected in the spiritual transcendence which Hugo associates with her death. In death, Emily is exalted to the status of a divine, supernatural, being: ‘Ici l’âme ressaisit l’infini; ici elle recouvre sa plénitude; ici elle rente en possession de sa mystérieuse nature...déliée du fardeau, déliée de la fatalité.’²⁰¹ His contemplation of Emily’s death draws heavily on his quasi-spiritual notions of the afterlife and immortality:²⁰² he equates her death with the transcendence of the soul in the afterlife, the attainment of a higher form of perfection, and the sublimation of the self: ‘Emily de Putron est allée chercher là-haut la sérénité suprême, complément des existences innocents. Elle s’en est allée, jeunesse, vers l’éternité; beauté, vers l’idéal; espérance, vers la certitude; amour vers l’infini; perle, vers l’océan; esprit, vers Dieu. Va âme!’²⁰³

Simone de Beauvoir comments on how the figure of the woman has been associated with a venerated spirituality since the beginning of Christianity: ‘On voit combine depuis l’apparition du christianisme la figure de la femme s’est spiritualisée. La beauté, la chaleur, l’intimité que l’homme souhaite saisir à travers elle ne sont plus des qualités sensibles: au lieu de résumer la savoureuse apparence des choses, elle devient leur âme; plus profond que le mystère charnel, il y a en son cœur une secrète et pure présence dans laquelle se reflète la vérité du monde. Elle est l’âme de la maison de la famille, du foyer.’²⁰⁴ She argues that Romantic male writers revitalised the age-old veneration of female beauty in their exultation of female death: ‘Alors la femme n’est plus chair, mais corps glorieux, on ne prétend plus la posséder, on la vénère dans sa splendeur intouchée; les pâles mortes d’Edgar Poe sont fluides comme l’eau, comme le vent, comme le souvenir; pour l’amour courtois, pour les précieux, est dans toute la

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 214.

²⁰² Hugo’s personal religion evolved throughout his lifetime from his early Catholic upbringing towards Deism. In the later years of his life in particular, Hugo’s personal sense of spirituality was heavily influenced by his strong beliefs in the existence of a higher being, the transcendence of the immortal soul, and the existence of an afterlife.

²⁰³ *Actes et Paroles II, Ibid*

²⁰⁴ De Beauvoir, p. 283.

tradition galante la femme n'est plus une créature animale mais un être éthéré, un souffle, une lumière.'²⁰⁵

Hugo's evocation of Emily's youth and childlike innocence and her transformation into an idealised, sublime metaphysical presence in the afterlife is strongly reminiscent of the visionary experiences of female death described by a great many of the Romantics. In particular, his depiction of Emily's death resembles the vision described by Novalis following the death of his friend Sophie von Kühn. Novalis was so traumatised by the death of Sophie that he wished for his own death. However, his grief was greatly appeased when he experienced a visionary of Sophie at her graveside: 'Then, at her grave on 13 May 1797, he experienced a visionary exaltation that seemed to lift him out of time and space': In the evening I went to Sophie. There I was indescribably joyful – moments of enthusiasm blazed with me – I blew the grave away before me like dust – centuries were as moments – I could feel her presence – I thought she would appear to me at any instant.'²⁰⁶ Glyn Tegai Hughes describes Novalis' language as 'the language of conversion' which 'bears, however unconsciously, the Moravian assurance'²⁰⁷, in their case the certainty of God's overruling that inhibits the fear of death' and 'leads to an intense cultivation of the inner life.'²⁰⁸

His eulogy to Emily de Putron bears striking resemblance to Novalis' description of Sophie. Like Emily, Sophie von Kühn was a young girl who also died of illness. In his eulogy, Hugo repeatedly evokes Emily's youth, purity, and childlike innocence: 'Ces jeunes mortes qui n'ont fait aucun mal dans la vie sont les bienvenues du tombeau [...]'²⁰⁹ His expression of grief over Emily's death is also strongly reminiscent of Wordsworth's grief at the death of his daughter. Like Hugo following the death of Léopoldine, Wordsworth similarly took solace from his vision of his daughter living

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 286.

²⁰⁶ Hughes, Glyn Tegai, *Romantic German Literature*, (Butler and Tamer Ltd: London, 1979), p. 162.

²⁰⁷ The Moravian Church originated from the Protestant tradition and the Moravian Assurance was a belief in the salvation of the soul which was greatly influenced by John's Wesley's teachings on "the inner witnesses of the Spirit" which were enshrined in his religious doctrines. Wesley's works focused on the experience of the role of the Holy Spirit in the different stages of one's lifetime and had a deep influence on Romantic conceptions of spirituality and the afterlife.

²⁰⁸ Hughes, *Ibid*

²⁰⁹ Hugo, *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 214.

on in the afterlife and in his memory: ‘Through what power, even for the least division of an hour, have I been so beguiled as to be blind to my grievous loss!’²¹⁰²¹¹

Hugo evokes the sublime, transcendental existence bestowed on Emily in the afterlife: ‘[...] leur tête monte doucement hors de la fosse vers une mystérieuse couronne.’²¹² Like Novalis, Hugo is deeply comforted and consoled by the immortal vision of Emily as a ‘créature immortelle’²¹³ who has attained her idealised form of feminine perfection in the afterlife through her ‘ascension éblouissante et sacrée’²¹⁴ while still being present in the living world as a source of comfort for those who remain ‘des âmes souriant à nos yeux en larmes.’²¹⁵ The reanimation of the figure of the dead woman as a divine, other-worldly being in Romantic literature feeds into what Elisabeth Bronfen calls the Romantic desire for ‘a vicarious and mitigated experience of death’: ‘[...] woman inspires in the poet a knowledge of nature he lacks, the poetic act, producing an autonomous text, serves to efface the materiality woman stands for. As the poet repeats the depths and silence and the fecund night in his artistic representations – images which one could say are drawn from the enmeshed paradigms of femininity and death – he seemingly triumphs over his own mortality, his material facticity.’²¹⁶

Hugo’s reanimation of Emily de Putron as a divine, supernatural being provides him with reassurance of the existence of an afterlife, a life beyond the living, material world, in which everything tends towards an idealised form of perfection: ‘La mort, c’est la montée de tout ce qui a vécu au degré supérieur...Celui qui n’a été qu’honnête sur la terre devient beau, celui qui n’a été que beau devient sublime, celui qui n’a été que sublime devient bon.’²¹⁷ The conflation of beauty and death which appears within Hugo’s exultation of Emily’s death is firmly anchored within the ‘cult of beautiful death’ synonymous within Romantic aestheticisations of female death as an idealised,

²¹⁰ Wordsworth, William, *Surprised by Joy*, cited in *William Wordsworth*, Durrant, Geoffrey, (Cambridge University Press: London, 1969), p. 150.

²¹¹ For more on how Wordsworth’s visionary power impinged on his experiences of grief, see O’Meara, John, *On Nature and the Goddess in Romantic and post-Romantic Literature*, (iUniverse: 2012), pp. 44-47

²¹² *Ibid*

²¹³ *Ibid*, p. 213.

²¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 214.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*

²¹⁶ Bronfen, *Ibid*, p. 361.

²¹⁷ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 214.

sublimated form of feminine perfection. This aesthetic appropriation of female death provided inspiration for male creative genius, but also allowed male Romantics to conquer their innate fears surrounding their own death and the loss of plenitude which it occasions. While death immortalises women in a state of feminine perfection, it also bolsters the male poet's sense of an afterlife: 'L'éternel nous attire vers le haut.'²¹⁸ Bronfen observes that the 'cult of beautiful death' espoused by the Romantics envisaged 'a blissful reunion of domestic life in heaven.'²¹⁹ His description of Emily presents just such a domesticisation of the afterlife when he evokes the consoling, tender presence she continues to exert on her family: 'Présence inexprimable des âmes aimées, souriant à nos yeux en larme.'²²⁰

Hugo further presents a deeply Romantic perception of female death when he equates Emily's death with the attainment of a divine, feminine sublime: 'Celui qui n'a été qu'honnête...devient beau, celui qui n'a été que beau devient sublime [...]'²²¹ The sublimation of female death by male Romantics again reflects their desire to replace the horror of death with an exalted image of female perfection. Hugo's description of female death in terms of superlative beauty also reflects Poe's perception of 'feminine death as the most poetical topic' which Bronfen argues 'is intimately connected not only with the protection that fantasies of gender afford, but also with the apotropaic power ascribed to the imaginary faculty in the face of death.'²²²

Laurence M. Porter observes how the visionary experience which the male Romantics associated with female death has a rich history in male literature and describes how Hugo's depiction of Léopoldine's death is like that of many 'other famous deceased women in men's high visionary literature – Dante's Beatrice, Petrarch's Laura, Goethe's Marguerite [...]'²²³ In the same way that Léopoldine becomes 'Hugo's psychopomp, a guide for the soul,'²²⁴ whose angelic transformation brings comfort to the Romantic poet, the visionary experience which Hugo describes in his eulogy to Emily brings comfort to the grieving poet and his family. If 'all women...serve Hugo

²¹⁸ Goethe, *Second Faust* – cited by de Beauvoir, p. 287.

²¹⁹ Bronfen, p. 87.

²²⁰ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 214.

²²¹ *Ibid*

²²² Bronfen, p. 64.

²²³ Porter, p.110.

²²⁴ *Ibid*

as embodiments of the feminine principle,²²⁵ then Léopoldine and Emily are immortalised by Hugo as ideal embodiments of soft, angelic, and gentle femininity. Hugo concludes his eulogy to Emily by again exalting her with the Romantic qualities which he most prized in her life as in her death: ‘Je bénis l’être noble et gracieux qui est dans cette fosse. [...] je bénis cette morte; je la bénis dans sa beauté, dans sa jeunesse, dans sa douceur, dans sa vie et dans sa mort.’²²⁶

While Hugo’s eulogies to Louise Julien and George Sand reveal his support for the attainment of womens’ rights, the participation of women in public life, and the extension of women’s roles in society, his eulogy to Emily de Putron, one of his most personal eulogies, reveals the deep-seated Romanticism which inform his personal conceptions of women and femininity. In this eulogy, Hugo firmly positions himself within a paternalist role, while Emily assumes the defenceless position of the innocent child, the beautiful, graceful, serene woman, the loving daughter and wife. The deeply Romantic idealization of women evoked in this eulogy to a close family member reveals the inherent conflict surrounding his public and private conceptions of women, and the inevitable constraints that Hugo’s deep-seated Romantic sensibilities placed upon his vision of femininity and the role of women in society. Reading this eulogy certainly testifies to the view that: ‘Il y a des phrases énigmatiques dans l’œuvre de Victor Hugo, qui permettraient peut-être d’unir la mort de ses proches, de ses enfants, à cette quête ténébreuse des femmes.’²²⁷

However, if these eulogies provided Hugo with an opportunity to contemplate women, their role in society, and their legacy, then the sublime vision of femininity which emerges from this ‘quête ténébreuse de la femme,’²²⁸ reveals far more than an immortalised vision of women as mythical, charming, other-worldly beings or Romantic muses of poetic creativity. Rather these eulogies celebrate women as social beings who, although forgotten by history, by the Revolution, and by the legal system, are at the bedrock of social and historical change in 19th century France: ‘L’antiquité a eu la femme romaine; l’âge moderne aura la femme française. Le siège de Paris nous a montré tout ce que peut être la femme: dignité, fermeté, acceptation des privations

²²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 168.

²²⁶ *Actes et Paroles, III*, pp. 214-215

²²⁷ Albistur & Armogathe, pp. 256-257

²²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 25.

et des misères, gaîtés dans les angoisses. Le fond de l'âme de la femme française, c'est un mélange héroïque de famille et de patrie.'²²⁹The 'grande femme' who emerges from Hugo's eulogies is a woman who, although endowed with the pre-eminently Romantic qualities of devotion, softness, and grace, is a woman of genius, a martyr, and a worthy equal citizen in a just, egalitarian, and democratic republic.

Further, Hugo's eulogies reveal far more than a Romantic sublimation of female death figured as the male Romantic's triumph over his own mortality. As we have seen, the aesthetic appropriation of the female body by the male Romantics can be seen as a desire to displace their own fear of death, and for many of the Romantics, such a sublimation of female death involves 'an excess of self-referentiality that turns to conflate the articulating self with its object of articulation.'²³⁰In this 'self-reflexive double substitution', Bronfen argues that "'an image'" replaces a destabilised body, but this "'image'" is also the body' and that 'by effacing the death of the Other death is effaced in proxy.'²³¹ Kristeva similarly argues that 'l'orientation romantique vers le surnaturel, la parapsychologie, la folie, le rêve, les forces obscures...relève de cette aspiration à saisir l'étrange et, en le domestiquant, à en faire une partie intégrante de l'humain.'²³² She associates death and the feminine with the uncanny as both represent an unknowable state of abjection and alterity which is frightening and threatening to men as it reminds them of their own mortality: 'La mort, le féminin...sont-ils toujours prétextes à inquiétante étrangeté.'²³³

For Kristeva, the 'feminine...is seen as marginalised by the symbolic, patriarchal order,'²³⁴and women are thus 'unable to extricate themselves from abjection.'²³⁵ However, she argues that it is only when one recognises the alterity inherent in oneself that one can accept the Other. Such an identification with the 'étranger' necessarily requires us to align ourselves with 'les vaincus' and relinquish our sense of ourselves as solid beings: 'Le choc de l'autre, l'identification du moi avec ce bon ou mauvais

²²⁹ *Ibid*

²³⁰ Bronfen, p. 72.

²³¹ *Ibid*, p. 88.

²³² Kristeva, Julia, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, (Gallimard: Paris, 1991), p. 267.

²³³ *Ibid*, p. 274.

²³⁴ Smith, Anna, *Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement*. (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1996), p. 116.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 21.

autre...viole les limites fragiles du moi incertain [...]’²³⁶ When we accept the alterity s inherent in ourselves however, the abject quality of the Other disappears ‘l’étrange est en moi, donc nous sommes tous des étrangers,’²³⁷ and ‘l’aliénation de l’étranger cesse dans l’universalité de l’amour pour l’autre.’²³⁸

Just as Hugo’s own private grief over Léopoldine’s death, the single most devastating event of his life, enabled him to identify with the common suffering of humankind,²³⁹ so his eulogies to women reveal his deeply humanistic desire to identify compassionately and empathetically with the suffering of women, an identification which necessarily requires Hugo to relate to women’s unique experience of marginality and alterity. The manner in which Hugo engages with the experience of female suffering in his eulogies through his identification with maternal grief and the feminine act of mourning, and through his deliberate self-positioning as an exile, reveals his insertion within a ‘feminising position.’²⁴⁰ This self-identification with the suffering of women on the basis of his innermost experiences of suffering, alienation, and grief entails the loss of a solid sense of self and the recognition of one’s own limitations,²⁴¹ which Kristeva sees as being necessarily implicated in the identification with the alterity she sees as inherent in the female condition.

Such a self-alignment with the experience of female suffering thus reveals Hugo’s masculinity to be far less rigid and stable than his notoriously virile and paternalistic self-posturings would have us believe, and gives weight to Bradley Stephens’ argument that a probing into Hugo’s seemingly forthright masculinity allows for a broadening and re-iteration of the complexities of his character²⁴², in particular the complexities of his attitudes towards women. Not only do Hugo’s eulogies to women reveal how far his attitudes towards women extended beyond his Romantic, chivalric worldview and the excessive ‘self-referentiality’ which underpinned the appropriation

²³⁶ Kristeva, p.278.

²³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 284.

²³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 124.

²³⁹ In the préface to *Les Contemplations*, Hugo writes: ‘Ma vie est la vôtre, votre vie est la mienne, vous vivez ce que je vis; la destinée est une.’ p. 26.

²⁴⁰ Smith, p. 24.

²⁴¹ In *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, Kristeva writes: ‘Étrange aussi, cette expérience de l’abîme entre moi et l’autre qui me choque – je ne le perçois même pas, m’annihile peut-être parce que je le nie. Face à l’étranger que je refuse et auquel je m’identifie à la fois, je perds mes limites [...] je me sens “perdue”, “vague”, “brumeuse” [...]’ (p. 276.)

²⁴² Stephens, *État présent*, p. 74.

of female death by male Romantics, they also reveal how Hugo's own masculine self-assuredness was deeply unsettled by his intensely alienating personal experiences of grief, exile, and bereavement.

While these experiences may have deeply fragmented Hugo's sense of self however, they proved indispensable in enabling him to achieve an empathetic and compassionate standpoint when speaking on behalf of women, which is seen as one of the principal determining factors underlying the ability of men to engage in feminism. As Léo Thiers-Vidal observes: 'C'est...en refusant d'empathiser avec les femmes que les hommes engagés demeurent liés au groupe social des hommes en général. Seul un travail...personnel sur cet aspect de la subjectivité masculine permettra de briser le lien avec le groupe social des hommes et d'élaborer une conscience antimasculiniste.'²⁴³

Hugo's eulogies to women thus reveal the precise nature of his feminist voice which is by turns resounding in his arguments on behalf of women's rights, exalted in his appraisal of women's genius and martyrdom, but above all, deeply compassionate and empathetic in his identification and commiseration with the plight of women.

²⁴³ Thiers-Vidal, Léo, 'De la masculinité à l'anti-masculinisme: penser les rapports sociaux de sexe à partir d'une position sociale oppressive,' in *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*, 2002, 21(3), p. 75.

The letters of a ‘great artist’: Hugo’s epistolary correspondences with women during his exile.

Hugo’s letter-writing practices.

As with the great contemporary artists of his time including Balzac, Flaubert, George Sand and Stendhal, Victor Hugo assumed a dominant presence within epistolary correspondences throughout the 19th century. Just as his artistic and literary works became an extension of Hugo’s public activism, so his correspondences reflect the diverse range of social, moral, and political causes to which he devoted his life. As one of the most prolific public figures of the century, Hugo’s letter correspondences provide a vivid insight into his instrumental contribution to 19th century French society through his commitment to social issues, his engagement in politics, and his extensive literary output. However, a deep reading of his letters also furnishes profound insights into his inner thoughts, personal temperament, and deep-seated psychological beliefs. In the preface to an edition of Stendhal’s personal letters, Calmann Lévy describes how the private correspondences of a great artist provide an extra dimension to their literary works which enables us to explore the divergences and complexities of their work and character:

Et l’on y verra, croyons-nous, apparaître un peu de l’âme nue du personnage à travers le laisser-aller du correspondant fraternel; on y surprendra quelque chose de la philosophie vraie de l’écrivain dans le déshabillé de sa pensée.²⁴⁴

Hugo demonstrated his awareness of the importance of letters in the life of a great artist to ensure the smooth transfer of the author’s work to posterity, in his own preface to Voltaire’s correspondences, and in the particular instructions outlined in his will regarding the publication of his own letters post-humously.²⁴⁵ He entrusted to his close friends Paul Meurice and Jules Simon the lofty task of publishing the entire collection of his letters.²⁴⁶ However, the sheer volume and diversity of his correspondences presented a formidable challenge for Hugo’s initial and subsequent editors with regards how best to categorize and classify his letters. Sheila Gaudon comments on how ‘the principle of completeness’ which emerged as a trend in the editing of

²⁴⁴ Stendhal, *Lettres intimes*, (Ancienne Maison Michel Lévy Frères: Paris, 1802), ed. Calmann Lévy, p. 2.

²⁴⁵ Gaudon, Sheila, ‘On editing Victor Hugo’s Correspondence’, in *Yale French Studies*, 1986: (71), pp. 177-198

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 180.

correspondences as early as Louis Moland's 1880 eighteen-volume edition of Voltaire's letters, as well as the renewal of interest in the epistolary relations between two correspondents²⁴⁷, has been applied to the most recent edited volumes of Hugo's correspondences: 'Our first concern – that it should be as complete as possible – led us to concentrate on the formidable task of collecting letters written by Hugo over a period of seventy years to men and women from all walks of life and from all corners of the world. We decided...to abandon the monologue in favour of a dialogue, of a *correspondence* in the full etymological sense of the word.'²⁴⁸ Gaudon further reveals how the particular characteristics of Hugo's epistolary voice, which is far less open and confessional than that of his contemporaries, also presented a considerable challenge for editors of his correspondences: 'It has always been considered that one of the characteristics of Romanticism was a hypertrophy of the self. [...] This is true of Victor Hugo who, although, one of the least openly 'confidential' writers of his age, is also the one who uses most often the first person singular.'²⁴⁹

However, the greatest challenge with which editors have had to contend is the sheer volume of his correspondences, which comprise 14,000 letters held by the Maison de Victor Hugo and 271 surviving letters to Juliette Drouet. This vast profusion of letters can be broadly categorised according to his public correspondences, including letters calling for the reprieve of prisoners on death row; political correspondences, including letters of defence for independence movements in Italy, Greece, Crete, & Poland, letters of opposition to Napoléon III, & letters to the Legislative Assembly between 1848-1851; 3,000 family correspondences; literary correspondences including frequent letters to his literary editors, most notably Paul Meurice and Pierre-Jules Hetzel, letters to his peers such as Flaubert and Balzac, and letters to aspiring writers and poets; love letters, most notably to Juliette Drouet which span the 50 years of their relationship; and travel letters detailing Hugo's summer vacations, including those written during his summer excursions in the Rhine Valley between 1838 and 1840.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ The 1904 edition of the 13-year correspondence of George Sand and Gustave Flaubert gained much success and was followed by a second edition of their correspondences the following year.

²⁴⁸ Gaudon, p. 182.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 183.

²⁵⁰ For a more detailed account of the range of Hugo's letter correspondences, see 'On editing Hugo's Correspondence' by Sheila Gaudon. (publication details as before)

The broad spectrum of responses elicited by his letters as well as the diverse range of correspondents who sought his writerly attention further reveal the gravitas attached to Hugo's words during his lifetime to plead the cause of the afflicted and impoverished, to defend victims of oppression and injustice, and to lend the political weight and credence of his voice to campaigns for freedom, justice, and equality.

One group in particular who sought Hugo's correspondence were the female activists who participated in various ways in the movement for women's rights in 19th century France. The diversity of female activists who corresponded with Hugo reveals the esteem in which Hugo was held as a defender of women's rights, a public spokesperson for female emancipation, and an ally for oppressed women everywhere.

As we have seen from his eulogies to women, the particular nature of Hugo's feminism is often problematic and conflicted: at once progressive and innovative, utopian and revolutionary, Hugo's awareness of the practical issues concerning female emancipation such as equal laws, female education, and equal citizenship situate him within a decidedly materialist, progressive, and forward-thinking feminism for his time, yet the inherent Romanticism underlying his perceptions of women reveals that his feminism was both conflicted and constrained by his Romanticism.

Hugo's correspondences in defence of moral causes during his exile in the Channel Islands:

Hugo's political exile became one of the most productive periods of his career. The diverse literary output produced by Hugo during his prolonged exile reveals the trajectory of emotions which characterised his experience of exile – while overtly politicised texts such as *Napoléon le Petit* reflect his fervent opposition to the Bonaparte regime, texts such as *Les Contemplations* reveal how his solitary experience of exile inspired him to re-visit painful events of his past, while *Les Misérables* reflects the critique of social and moral injustice which remained one of Hugo's most steadfast commitments throughout his lifetime. The formidable success of such texts both in France and throughout the world enabled Hugo to not only retain his influence in France but also to continue to influence public life during the 19th century. However, Hugo's literary works were not the only means by which he maintained his connections with France and manifested his universal support for moral and social causes; the vast collection of public letters produced by Hugo throughout his exile

reveal how he appropriated the public dimension of his published letters to lend the power and gravitas of his voice to his life-long campaigns against the death penalty, slavery, despotism, and all forms of injustice and inequity.

While Hugo's exile was often coloured by feelings of isolation and solitariness, his public letters reveal how Hugo consciously exploited his marginal and oppressed status as an exile in order to forge a discourse of equality with his correspondents, and to position himself as a public voice of support for oppressed people everywhere. Just as political and moral convictions had motivated his exile, so the long years of Hugo's exile were marked by the continuity of his public activism. In his detailed contemplation of exile in 'Ce que c'est que l'exil', Hugo describes how the marginality of his exiled status endow him with a greater ability to represent the plight of the oppressed and bestow new potency on his role as a public figure: 'Un homme tellement ruiné qu'il n'a plus que son honneur, tellement dépouillé qu'il n'a plus que sa conscience, tellement isolé qu'il n'a plus près de lui que l'équité, tellement renié qu'il n'a plus avec lui que la vérité... voilà ce qu'un proscrit.'²⁵¹ The devotion to justice which occasioned his exile is a source of immense pride for Hugo: 'N'avoir plus rien à soi, n'avoir plus rien sur soi, c'est la meilleure condition de combat. Cette absence d'armure prouve l'invulnérable. Pas de situation plus haute que celle-là, être tombé pour la justice.'²⁵² The superior access to truth, honesty, and moral conscience which Hugo attributes to the experience of exile leads him to define his own role as an exile as that of a compassionate voice for humanity and a representative voice for oppressed, marginalised, and disenfranchised people everywhere: 'Un représentant proscrit pour le peuple fait un acte de probité. Il a promis, il tient sa promesse.'²⁵³

The language employed by Hugo within his public letters abounds with examples of his attempts to position himself as a self-effacing, humble voice for the oppressed in his defence of moral, social, and political causes. In a letter calling for the reprieve of the condemned American prisoner John Brown, Hugo lends the power of his 'conscience humaine' to the campaign for the abolition of the death penalty: 'Quant à moi, qui ne suis qu'un atome, mais qui, comme tous les hommes, ai en moi toute la

²⁵¹ *Actes et Paroles II*, (J. Hetzel: Paris), p. 5. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb373094302>
[Accessed 15 December 2012]

²⁵² *Ibid*, p. 39.

²⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 37.

conscience humaine, je m'agenouille avec larmes devant le grand drapeau étoilé du nouveau monde, et je supplie à mains jointes...de sauver John Brown [...]'²⁵⁴ Hugo further declares that the solitude and isolation which accompanies his exile enable him to envisage a clearer, more universal vision of the future: 'Le proscrit est un homme chimérique...C'est un aveugle; voyant du côté de l'absolu, aveugle du côté du relatif.'²⁵⁵

As with Hugo's extensive oratory in exile, his public correspondences adopt an overtly political discourse which is profoundly shaped by the political convictions which defined his exile.²⁵⁶ In particular, his public letters are replete with references to his visions of a democratic, fraternal, egalitarian French republic, his evolving political ideals towards universal politics and a 'United States of Europe': 'Mais non, la république n'est pas morte!'²⁵⁷[...] 'Fraternité des peuples. États-Unis d'Europe, – grande, libre, fière, tendre, sereine...la France, la vraie France vient à vous [...] Ainsi, la persécution et la douleur, c'est aujourd'hui; les États-Unis d'Europe, les Peuples-Frères, c'est demain.'²⁵⁸ The impassioned political rhetoric and mass dissemination of Hugo's public letters in exile had a dramatic impact on public and political life in France and throughout the world. One of the most significant and lasting achievements of his public speeches and correspondences was his contribution towards the abolition of the death penalty²⁵⁹ which assumed global dimensions during his exile with Hugo seeking clemency for such high-profile convicts as Emperor Maximilian I of Mexico, and Armand Barbès. His public campaign succeeded in effecting important changes regarding the removal of the death penalty from constitutional law in Geneva, Columbia, and Portugal, and, on several occasions, Hugo's intervention succeeded in

²⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 297.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 32.

²⁵⁶ During his exile, Hugo remained implacably committed to the formation of a Republic in France and seized on every opportunity to condemn the Bonaparte regime. However, during his exile Hugo's political views also evolved with regards international politics – having observed the failure of national revolutions in countries such as Crete, Greece, and Poland, Hugo began to espouse the idea a United States of Europe whereby the nations of Europe would be united by links of fraternity, equality, and liberty.

²⁵⁷ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 51.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 55.

²⁵⁹ Hugo's campaign against the death penalty began as early as 1828 with the publication of *Le Dernier jour d'un Condamné*. He continued his public fight against the death penalty during his time in the Higher Chamber as a 'pair de France.' However, the culmination of Hugo's protest against the death penalty occurred during Hugo's time in exile when his public activism against the death penalty effected far-reaching changes with regard the abolition of the death penalty and spared the lives of several condemned prisoners.

granting clemency for condemned prisoners: the correspondence between Hugo and Pedro De Brito Aranha reveals his direct role in the abolition of the death penalty in Portugal, while Hugo's public letter calling for the reprieve of nine convicts in Charleroi in Belgium received wide publication in both English and Belgian newspapers and led to the clemency of seven of the nine condemned prisoners.

Such was the immense global prestige attached to Hugo's public correspondences that he was constantly inundated with public letters from all classes of people and from all over the world. Indeed, Hugo viewed his public correspondences as an extension of his literary and public activities and devoted considerable time to responding to his voluminous correspondence. An account given by Hugo's son, Charles, reveals the zeal with which Hugo approached his public correspondences during exile: 'Il se réveille content et se couche satisfait. Il marche, cause, travaille...écrit vingt pages et dix lettres dans la journée, respire la force, l'espérance et la certitude du lendemain, et sourit à l'avenir comme à un ami qui vient.'²⁶⁰ In a letter to Paul Meurice on 31 March 1867, Hugo describes the considerable challenge of responding to 50 letters a day: 'Il est minuit, et je commence à être fatigué, étant debout depuis cinq heures du matin. Je reçois cinquante lettres par jour.'²⁶¹

Hugo's correspondences thus afforded him a global public platform from which to defend victims of oppression, inequity, and misery, to propagate his political ideals, and to continue to shape the course of the 19th century. One largely undocumented group of disenfranchised people who were moved by Hugo's fervent public campaigns against injustice and oppression were the female victims of international revolutionary struggles, and women involved in the feminist struggle of the mid-nineteenth century, who eagerly sought his correspondence in support of their cause. While Hugo's public correspondences with women unfolded primarily during the latter years of his exile in Guernsey, several examples of his support for female emancipation appear within his public correspondences during exile.

In *Ce que c'est que l'exil*, Hugo's support for female suffrage, women's right to divorce, and the improved civil and legal status of women assume equal importance

²⁶⁰ Hugo, Charles, *Les Hommes de l'Exil*, ed. Alphonse Lemerre, (E. Heutte: Paris, 1875), p. 341.

²⁶¹ Hugo, Victor, & Meurice, Paul, *Correspondance entre Victor Hugo et Paul Meurice*, ed. Eugène Fasquelle, (Bibliothèque-Charpentier: Paris, 1909) p. 248.

within his social vision of a democratic, universal, French Republic along with his arguments for the abolition of the death penalty, an end to war, and the introduction of free, secular education: ‘Plus de guerre, plus d’échafaud, l’abolition de la peine de mort, l’enseignement gratuit et obligatoire...la femme de mineure faite majeure, cette moitié du genre humaine admise au suffrage universel, le mariage libéré par le divorce [...]’²⁶² The new republic which Hugo envisions is one in which women possess the right to vote and where women are no longer subjected to slavery and domestic tyranny: ‘Quoi ! la femme voterait...la mère de famille ne serait plus une sujette et une servante, le mari n’aurait plus le droit de tuer sa femme.’²⁶³

He also evokes the plight of women within his public correspondences against the death penalty. In a letter responding to M. Bost in support of the abolition of capital punishment in Geneva, Hugo vehemently condemns the use of the death penalty against women: ‘L’Angleterre, où règne une femme, vient de pendre une femme [...]’²⁶⁴ He recalls a harrowing experience during his early years in Paris²⁶⁵ during which he witnessed the public execution of a young woman in front of the Palais de Justice for domestic theft and describes how the display of such cruelty and inhumanity instigated his life-long fight against the death penalty: ‘Cette femme était coupable de ce que la jurisprudence appelle vol domestique [...] J’ai encore dans l’oreille, après plus de quarante ans, et j’aurai toujours dans l’âme l’épouvantable cri de la suppliciée. Pour moi, c’était une voleuse, ce fut une martyre. Je sortis de là déterminé – j’avais seize ans – à combattre à jamais les mauvaises actions de la loi.’²⁶⁶

Hugo further condemns the abject use of the death penalty on women in England where a teenage girl of 17 was put to death. Here again his language bitterly exposes the inhumanity and arbitrariness of capital punishment and highlights the young girl’s humanity: ‘Le 20 avril 1849, une servante, Sarah Thomas, une fille de dix-sept ans, fut exécutée à Bristol pour avoir, dans un moment de colère, tué d’un coup de bûche

²⁶² *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 12.

²⁶³ *Ibid*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 300.

²⁶⁵ Hugo dates the event to the summer of 1818 or 1819. (*Ibid*, p. 301). The disdainful public spectacle which surrounded the girl’s execution and the inhumane torture to which she was subjected alerted Hugo to the profound injustice, illogic, and inhumanity of the death penalty in which all levels of society are complicit, and initiated his life-long, global campaign against corporal punishment.

²⁶⁶ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 302.

sa maîtresse qui la battait. La condamnée ne voulait pas mourir. Il fallait sept hommes pour la traîner au gibet. On la pendit de force. Au moment où on lui passait le nœud coulant, le bourreau lui demanda si elle avait quelque chose à faire dire à son père. Elle interrompit son rôle pour répondre: “oui, oui, dites-lui que je l’aime.”²⁶⁷ Hugo’s condemnation of the use of the death penalty on women in his public letter correspondences is reflected in his 1832 preface of *Le Dernier Jour d’un Condamné* in which he gives a chilling account of a female execution in Dijon. Loïc Guyon comments on how this literary castigation of the death penalty ‘relate en effet un autre exemple d’un curieux dysfonctionnement de la mécanique de la peine capitale impliquant...un personnage de condamné à mort féminin’²⁶⁸: ‘A Dijon, il ya trois mois, on a mené au supplice une femme. (Une femme!) Cette fois encore, le couteau du docteur Guillotin a mal fait son service. La tête n’a pas été tout à fait coupée. Alors les valets de l’exécuteur se sont attelés aux pieds de la femme, et à travers les hurlements de la malheureuse, et à force de tiraillements et de soubresauts, ils lui ont séparé la tête du corps par arrachement.’²⁶⁹ For Hugo, the use of the death penalty against women is the very epitome of the abject horror and arbitrariness of capital punishment: ‘Si un dysfonctionnement similaire, mais impliquant un condamné à mort masculin, est aussi relaté dans sa préface, la parenthèse “(Une femme!)” place clairement l’exécution du personnage féminin à un degré supérieur d’intensité dans l’horreur et l’inacceptable.’²⁷⁰

As well as condemning its use against women, Hugo also evokes the plight of women within his arguments against the devastating social implications of the death penalty on men, which, in punishing the condemned man, makes his wife and children bear the punishment of his crime: ‘Est-ce que la peine de mort est la justice ? Oui, dit la théorie; l’homme était coupable, il est puni. Non, dit la pratique; l’homme est puni, c’est bien, il est mort, c’est bon; mais qu’est-ce que cette femme ? [...] Le mort a laissé cela derrière lui. Veuve et orphelins, c’est-à-dire punis et pourtant innocents.’²⁷¹ Hugo fiercely contests the ruinous social consequences occasioned by the death penalty

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 302-303

²⁶⁸ Guyon, Loïc, ‘Le sex-appeal de la Veuve: guillotine et fantasmes romantiques’ in *Pleasure and Pain in Nineteenth-century French Literature and Culture*, ed. David Evans & Kate Griffiths, (Rodopi: Amsterdam; New York, 2008), p. 105.

²⁶⁹ Hugo, *Le Dernier Jour d’un Condamné*, (Le Seuil: Paris, 1963), p. 209.

²⁷⁰ Guyon, p. 106.

²⁷¹ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 307.

when he describes how the destitute wives of condemned men are forced into prostitution while their orphaned children are in turn forced into a life of crime: ‘Oui dit la théorie; le cadavre nous laissera tranquilles. Non, dit la pratique; car ce cadavre vous lègue une famille; famille sans père, famille sans pain; et voilà la veuve qui se prostitue pour vivre, et voilà les orphelins qui volent pour manger.’²⁷² Such a defence of women’s rights and a condemnation of female oppression are reflected throughout Hugo’s public letters to women during his later years in exile in which he lends the public weight and credence of his voice to the international struggle for female emancipation.

Hugo’s letter to the women of Cuba:

In 1870, Cuba was in the throes of a violent war²⁷³ which sought to liberate the country from Spanish colonialism. The Spanish forces violently responded to the revolution with widespread massacres against the Cuban population in their attempts to repress the insurrection. During the war, the city of New York became a crucial place of refuge for Cuban exiles, with large numbers of Cuban women fleeing there to escape persecution. One of the many independent societies which were formed in New York during this time was the *League of the Daughters of Cuba* (1869) which united and mobilised women involved in the struggle for independence in Cuba and raised funds for the supply of arms for rebel forces.²⁷⁴ In early 1870, while still in exile in Guernsey, Hugo received a petition from the Cuban women residing in New York, with over 300 signatures, seeking his intervention in their struggle for independence. Hugo’s

²⁷² *Ibid*, pp. 307-308

²⁷³ Cuba fought three major wars in order to seek independence from Spain: The Ten Years War (1868-1878); the Little War (1879-80); and the Cuban War of Independence (1895-1898).

²⁷⁴ In ‘Cuban Women in the United States’, María Cristina García describes the decisive role taken by Cuban women in New York in the struggle for Cuban independence: ‘Women also established their own organisations to assist the independence movement, among them the *Hijas des Pueblos* in New Orleans and the *Junta Patriótica de Damas de Nueva York*. These organizations raised money to buy supplies for the rebel forces and rallied public support for the Cuban cause. In New York in 1869 Emilia Casanova, the wife of author Cecilio Villaverde, founded the *Liga de las Hijas de Cuba*, which sent a petition with over 300 signatures from Cuban women on the island to French author Victor Hugo, asking him to publicly speak on behalf of the Cuban cause.’ (García, María Cristina, ‘Cuban Women in the United States’, in *Handbook of Hispanic Cultures in the United States* www.latinoteca.com/.../Cuban%20Women%20in%20the%20U [Accessed 18 November 2012])

response to the women reveals his deep compassion for their plight, and his eagerness to adopt an empathetic standpoint with these women on the basis of his own displaced status as an exile.

In the opening address of his letter, Hugo explicitly connects his oppressed and marginalised status as an exile with the plight of the Cuban women who were rendered destitute widows, fugitives, and orphans by the war: ‘Femmes de Cuba, j’entends votre plainte. Ô désespérées, vous vous adressez à moi. Fugitives, martyres, veuves, orphelines, vous demandez secours à un vaincu.’²⁷⁵ Hugo presents himself as a natural ally to the Cuban women owing to his own state of exile: ‘Proscrites, vous vous tournez vers un proscrit; celles qui n’ont plus de foyer appellent à leur aide celui qui n’a plus de patrie.’²⁷⁶ Given that one of the most contentious and ongoing issues surrounding the participation of men in feminism is the fear that men, acting within patriarchy, will, either consciously or unconsciously, exercise male privilege in ways that may be deemed oppressive to women, Hugo’s wilful self-figuration as a humble, vanquished exile illustrates his eagerness to adopt an empathetic, non-beneficiary standpoint in the struggle for female emancipation, and thus assumes potent importance in the cultivation and articulation of his feminist voice.

In *Les Contemplations*, Hugo’s musings on poetic voice posit a veritable equivalence between poetic exile and the exile of women: ‘Toi, n’es-tu pas, comme moi-même, Flambeau dans ce monde âpre et vil, Ame, c’est-à-dire problème, Et femme, c’est-à-dire exil?’²⁷⁷ However, if such a musing demonstrates, as Christine Planté²⁷⁸ observes, the way in which Hugo’s allegorical assumption of a feminine voice transcended his Romantic writings, it also illustrates how Hugo identified exile with a sense of de-rootedness and incompleteness inherent in the female condition, and women’s shared experience of alienation in society. By thus identifying the victimhood, isolation, and marginality of the exilic experience with the wider, collective plight of women in society, Hugo is drawing upon the age-old associations of exile and women’s experience of social and cultural deprivation.

²⁷⁵ Hugo, *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 309.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷⁷ Hugo, *Les Contemplations*, VI, XV, *A Celle qui est voilée*, (Flammarion: Paris, 1995), pp. 322-323

²⁷⁸ Planté, Christine, ‘Quel compte fais-tu des femmes ?’ in *Romantisme*, 1994(85) p. 68.

www.persée.fr [Accessed 26 November 2014]

As far back as the 10th century, *The Exeter Book: an anthology of Anglo-Saxon poetry* features elegies like *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* which evoke the bleakness and isolation of female exile. Marilynn Desmond comments on how these old English elegies can be interpreted in a feminist context as an articulation of women's wider cultural exile and an expression of women's longing and desire for social and marital unity: 'The voice of exile in these poems is not a veiled, inner voice but a public rhetorical one, "the common voice singing out of door," echoed by Woolf ten centuries later...Indeed, if we read these two poems as women's language we do more than simply open up a space for a female voice; we also begin to envision a feminist literary history that might include medieval texts and culture...Rather, English literary historians might date the beginning of women's language, if not women's literature, not in the fifteenth century with Margery and Julian, but five centuries earlier in the heroic world of Anglo-Saxon England.'²⁷⁹ Kristeva observes how the origins of subjectivity are implicated by the poetic language of exile: 'It has an infinite, ecstatic quality that eluded mastery of human consciousness. The landscape of literature then, is inhabited by a foreignness that deflects the traveller and divides us from ourselves. We become, in other words, exile.'²⁸⁰ For Kristeva, women are always in a state of exile as they are always a 'heterogeneous exception to the constitution of homogenous group.'²⁸¹ In the context of 19th century French feminist arguments for female enfranchisement, Léon Richer attributes women's state of exile to their lack of enlightened education and their exclusion from society: 'Les femmes sont des exilés de l'intelligence, des prosrites de la vérité [...] Voilà pourquoi je vous dis: N'excluons pas les femmes du droit de la liberté.'²⁸²

In contrast to dominant perceptions of the male experience of exile as a loss of totality, plenitude, and the fragmentation of individual identity, the female experience of exile is perceived as a shared, collective, experience which speaks to the common suffering and alienation experienced by all women through the ages. Hugo's wilful self-identification with women as a victim of exile can thus be seen as an attempt to forge

²⁷⁹ Desmond, Marilynn, 'The Voice of Exile: Feminist Literary History and the Anonymous Anglo-Saxon Elegy' in *Critical Enquiry*, 16(3): 1990, p. 590.

²⁸⁰ Smith, Anna, *Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement*, (Macmillan Press: Basingstoke, 1996), p. 11.

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 28.

²⁸² Richer, Léon, *La femme libre*, (E. Dentu: Paris, 1877), p. 191.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb31213349z> [Accessed 30 January 2013]

a discourse of equality with women in his arguments for women's rights, and to identify his place in the struggle for female emancipation in the mid-nineteenth century, namely as a public voice of support for oppressed women everywhere. However, while providing Hugo with a veritable rhetorical standpoint from which to defend the rights of women, and identify himself as an empathetic ally to their cause, his keen identification with the wider, collective plight of women on the basis of his own personal, solitary experience of exile also has far deeper implications for the cultivation of his feminist voice. If the position of men in feminism is suspect owing to their privileged status as bearers of patriarchy, and the fundamental association between feminism and women's uniquely shared experience as women and as mothers, then the challenge which arises for men who lack the shared, collective experience of female oppression, yet wish to engage in feminism, thus depends not only on their ability to adopt a distinctly female standpoint in their discourse on women's rights, but also on their ability to engage with, and form a relational connection to, women's uniquely shared experience of oppression in society.

This need to form a relational connection to the experience of female oppression necessarily requires men to relinquish their privileged male subjectivity in order to engage effectively in feminist discourse. As Léo Thiers Vidal observes: 'Il faudrait...transformer la subjectivité masculine afin qu'elle intègre pleinement l'existence des femmes et leur vécu opprimé, ce qui implique pour les hommes une remise en cause personnelle et une rupture avec leur groupe social et avec la masculinité.'²⁸³ By expressly aligning his oppressive experience of exile with the larger social oppression of women, Hugo can thus be seen to be attempting to overcome one of the most pertinent and ongoing obstacles surrounding the position of men in feminism, namely the need for men to abandon their position of power and privilege and internalise women's collective experience of oppression, in order to better defend the cause of women, and speak on their behalf. Hugo's eager attempt to establish a relational and experiential connection with women on the basis of his exile is explicitly seen in his letter to the women of Cuba wherein he connects his own oppressed status as an exile with the women's collective experience of oppression: 'Femmes de Cuba, J'entends votre plainte. O désespérées, vous vous adressez à moi.

²⁸³ Vidal, p. 77.

Fugitives, martyres, veuves, orphelines, vous demandez secours à un vaincu.²⁸⁴ Such an attempt by Hugo to engage personally and compassionately with the collective experience of female oppression adheres exactly to the ‘clear moral imperative’²⁸⁵ which Harry Brod identifies as the determining factor underlying the engagement of men in feminism. Indeed, just as Hugo invested his role as an exile with a heightened sense of conscience, truth, honesty, and equity in his campaigns against capital punishment, despotism, and all forms of social injustice and inequality, so his commitment to the struggle for female emancipation during his exile is underpinned by profoundly humanistic and moralistic motives.

However, while presenting himself as a natural ally to the Cuban women in their fight against oppression, the language employed within his public letter also reveals the underlying contradiction which exists between Hugo’s egalitarian perceptions of gender relations on the one hand, and his authoritative, even somewhat chauvinistic attitude towards women on the other. In the next lines of his letter, Hugo outlines the weak, submissive role of the Cuban women in their struggle for independence, while asserting the authority of his own role: ‘Certes, nous sommes bien accablés; vous n’avez plus que votre voix, et je n’ai plus que la mienne; votre voix gémit, la mienne avertit. Ces doux souffles, chez vous le sanglot, chez moi le conseil, voilà tout ce qui nous reste.’²⁸⁶

Hugo’s assumption of a superior, authoritative role within the struggle of the Cuban women reflects the tension which persists in contemporary feminism today regarding men’s place in feminism and contribution thereto. Stephen Heath observes that the fundamental tenet of feminism requires that women be the ‘subjects of feminism, its initiators, its matters in force’, while men necessarily ‘are the objects, part of the analysis, agents of structure to be transformed [...]’²⁸⁷ Men’s place within feminism has been treated with fear and suspicion as they are ‘representatives in, carriers of the patriarchal mode.’²⁸⁸ The idea that women share a unique collective experience casts doubt on the inclusion of men within feminism, and the ability of men to identify with

²⁸⁴ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 309.

²⁸⁵ Brod, p. 199.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid*

²⁸⁷ Heath, Stephen, ‘Male Feminism’ in *Men in Feminism*, ed. Alice Jardine & Paul Smith, (Routledge: New York, 1987), p. 1.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*

the experience of female oppression: ‘The contradictions that may exist between, say a woman’s experience in her family in the defined roles of wife and housewife and mother which may be felt by her as the authentic terms of her being where she is really “herself” and the perspective feminism will give on that experience, those defined roles, on her position as a woman, are what feminism is about.’²⁸⁹ The idea that women share a unique collective experience casts doubt on the inclusion of men within feminism, and the ability of men to identify with the experience of female oppression.

However, the self-proclaimed profeminist Harry Brod argues that ‘when men act as feminists, they do not act as men, but as some other kind of being. Perhaps as non-gendered moral agents or perhaps as beings who have somehow managed, at least temporarily to adopt the standpoint of women.’²⁹⁰ Brod further argues against the perception that men are engaged in feminism for their own personal benefit and identifies a clear ‘moral imperative’ underlying the engagement of men in feminism: ‘I am not arguing that the basis of profeminist men’s politics should be to see what’s in it for us, to identify our interests as men, and only act as where we see such interests. Quite the opposite. I think the reasons for one’s activism are the clear moral imperatives behind feminist demands for justice, the demands that we give up our unjust share of power, whether or not we want to, whether or not we think we have things to gain.’²⁹¹ Brod argues that ‘what enables men to do feminism effectively is a vision of men and of feminism in which their positive vision of themselves as men, which is what is meant by the ideal of being “male affirmative.”’²⁹² Speaking from a male feminist perspective, Brod argues that ‘being “male affirmative” is an essential component of profeminism’, while his sense of ‘the requirements of sustained, effective political action’ leads him to argue ‘that while principles of gender justice are the basis of our actions, the moral demand that we act effectively and politically to implement these values creates a moral imperative to go beyond mere moral imperatives, a moral imperative to find a political basis upon which to motivate significant numbers of men to profeminism.’²⁹³

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*

²⁹⁰ Brod, p. 197.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 199.

²⁹² *Ibid*, p. 198.

²⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 199.

This tension surrounding the place of men in feminism is explicit within Hugo's letter to the women of Cuba wherein he adopts both an identificatory, empathetic standpoint with the women of Cuba by connecting his marginalised, fragmented identity as an exile with women's shared collective experience of marginality and exclusion, while simultaneously positioning himself in an authoritative, superior role within their struggle. While the feelings of marginality, oppression, and acute sensitivity to social difference occasioned by Hugo's experience of exile afforded him a rich affective ideological standpoint from which to defend the cause of female emancipation, there are times nonetheless when aspects of Hugo's zealous attempts to identify with the cause of women, lead him to assume an overly-protective and paternalistic stance in the struggle for women's rights, even going so far as to designate men as the ultimate, rational, thinking agents of female emancipation while women are figured as defenceless, emotional victims in need of male protection.

There are times too when Hugo's zealous attempts to display his solidarity with the plight of the Cuban women are over-stated and fall back upon inherently Romantic and essentialist perceptions of women as divine, fragile beings in need of male protection: 'Femmes de Cuba, qui me dites si éloquemment tant d'angoisses et tant de souffrances, je me mets à genoux devant vous, et je baise vos pieds douloureux.'²⁹⁴ In these moments, Hugo is much less the 'humble proscrip' who seeks a complementary union of forces with the plight of oppressed women everywhere, than the 'illustre maître' who assumes a controlling, superior position in the international struggle for women's rights. Hugo's assumption of a controlling, authoritative role in the collective struggle of the Cuban women also reveals a profoundly essentialist view of femininity and gender relations which posits women as the emotional victims of social oppression, while men are identified as the rational, thinking agents of social change: 'Ces deux souffles, chez vous le sanglot, chez moi le conseil [...]'²⁹⁵

However, Hugo's clear 'moral imperative' to defend women's rights outweighs the sometimes authoritative terms which frame his support for female emancipation. As a fervent defender of all oppressed, disfavoured, and disenfranchised people, his commitment to female emancipation is underpinned by the same humanistic motives

²⁹⁴ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 310.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 309.

which defined his support for social reform, equality, and an end to all forms of social injustice and oppression. So, while the terms in which Hugo sometimes articulates his support for female emancipation may all too easily be misconstrued as sexist, authoritative, and evidential of the ongoing fear which still exists in relation to men's position in feminism today, one has to acknowledge that his support for the feminist cause is always, first and foremost, underpinned by a 'moral imperative' whether it be to abolish the enslaving system of regulated prostitution, to argue for women's rights to social and political equality, or to answer their pleas for assistance, as is the case with the women of Cuba.

Furthermore, Hugo's wilful self-identification with women's collective experience of exile on the basis of his own solitary experience of exile demonstrates his keenness to adopt a distinctly female as opposed to male standpoint when arguing for women's rights. Edward Said comments on how the experience of exile makes one profoundly aware of a loss of self and the need to create a new universe: 'L'exilé consacre la majeure perte de sa vie à compenser une perte qui la désoriente en se créant un nouveau univers à maîtriser.'²⁹⁶ He further describes how exiles are able to exploit their acute sensitivity to social difference in order to persuade others of their points of view: 'Agrippé à sa différence comme à une arme qu'il manie avec une détermination inébranlable, l'exilé insiste scrupuleusement sur le droit qu'il a de refuser de se sentir à sa place. Cette attitude se traduit généralement par une intransigeance qui ne passe pas inaperçue – l'obstination, l'excessivité, l'exagération, autant de traits de caractère dont font preuve les exilés et des stratégies visant à forcer le monde à accepter leurs points de vue [...]'²⁹⁷ Said's summation of the exilic experience is reflected in the instrumental way in which Hugo connects the loss of plenitude, alienation, and sensitivity to social difference occasioned by his own experience of exile to women's shared experience of exclusion and marginality. In this way, Hugo can be seen to foreshadow one of the major issues which confront men in contemporary feminism – namely, the need for men to speak not from a privileged standpoint as the beneficiaries of feminism or the bearers of patriarchalism, but from an empathetic, profeminist perspective.

²⁹⁶ Said, Edward, *Réflexions sur l'exil: et autres essais*, (Actes Sud: Arles, 2008), p. 250.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 251.

Hugo's letter to Josephine Butler and the women of the Ladies' National Association:

The condemnation of prostitution assumed potent importance within Hugo's public activism on behalf of women's rights during his time in exile. In his epic social novel *Les Misérables*, Hugo powerfully illustrates the devastating social injustice of prostitution through the moral, physical, and social disintegration of Fantine, a young woman who is forced into the seedy and fatalistic world of prostitution by the lust-driven, remorseless, Parisian society in which she lives. While Hugo's critique of prostitution in *Les Misérables* provoked a dramatic critical backlash in France,²⁹⁸ women around the world were inspired by Hugo's scathing attack on the social ills of prostitution in their combat to end prostitution. In particular, the women of the *Ladies' National Association* in England were encouraged by Hugo's critique of prostitution in their campaign against the *Regulation Act* in England in 1869 which adopted the French system of regulation established by Napoleon III in 1804, and were deeply grateful when Hugo responded to their letter in support of their campaign.

The system of regulated prostitution which developed in France in the early nineteenth-century established a form of institutionalized prostitution which involved the setting-up of police-regulated brothels known as 'maisons de tolérance' where regulated prostitutes were subjected to regular medical check-ups from doctors and police supervisions in a bid to contain the threat of venereal disease. The aim of such a system was 'to render the prostitute invisible through the precise regulation of her availability.'²⁹⁹ Registered prostitutes were obliged to sign the register of the police, while extensive records of prostitutes were also kept by the *dispensaire de salubrité*, a 'medical arm of the police charged with the regular inspection of prostitutes' sexual organs.'³⁰⁰ One of the most influential supporters of regulation was the public hygienist Parent-Duchâtelet whose views assumed particular importance from the

²⁹⁸ In stark contrast to the overwhelming public and commercial success of *Les Misérables*, Hugo's social novel attracted considerable initial negative criticism from his contemporary writers such as Flaubert and Théophile de Gautier who espoused the theory of 'art pour l'art' and objected to the overtly moralising nature of Hugo's novel, but also received criticism from Hugo's republican allies, most notably Lamartine whose criticism particularly dismayed Hugo owing to their close friendship. Winock, Michel, *Les voix de la liberté: les écrivains engagés au XIXe siècle*, (Le Seuil: Paris, 2001), pp. 405-408

²⁹⁹ Bernheimer, Charles, *Figures of ill repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France*, (Duke University Press: Harvard, 1997), p. 17.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 16.

beginning of the July Monarchy until the system was seriously challenged during the Third Republic. His arguments dominated the stereotypical discourse of prostitution in early nineteenth-century French literature which presupposed that debauchery, immaturity, idleness, a refusal to work, inconstant temperaments, and a tendency towards excess, disorder, and improvidence explained the descent of women into prostitution and justified the arguments for their confinement and supervision.³⁰¹ While regulation was purportedly established to protect women from the threat of disease, the system was built upon a model of imprisonment and confinement which transformed prostitution into a thriving commercial market, akin to any other industry in nineteenth-century France.

Female prostitutes were not seen as victims of social and moral injustice, but rather prostitution was seen by regulators such as Duchâtelet as an inevitable evil which served the useful function of protecting the virtue of bourgeois women,³⁰² while the major threat which regulation advocates wished to contain was the threat of contagious disease,³⁰³ and not the threat to women's safety. Alain Corbin describes how the exploitative, hierarchical structure of the regulatory system, which was supported by the authorities, the police, the army, and the Church, kept prostitutes in a state of permanent submission while diminishing their chances of redemption or repentance.³⁰⁴ One of the most sinister features of regulation was the imprisonment of prostitutes in the prison-hospital Saint-Lazare where women were sent by the police prefecture and were subjected to the most barbaric forms of medical examinations. Jill Harsin comments on how the hospital at Saint-Lazare was treated as a laboratory for the study of venereal disease: 'Doctors were not well trained in the diagnosis of venereal disease, because the strict segregation of venereal patients ensured that non-specialists would seldom see a case. Medical students in general were not tested on the subject for fear of embarrassing them. The Saint-Lazare prostitute prison, clearly the most concentrated laboratory for study, was closed to all but a few doctors on the grounds of decency.'³⁰⁵ In his detailed history of Saint-Lazare, Eugène Pottet

³⁰¹ Corbin, Alain, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (Harvard University Press: Boston, 1996), pp. 6-7

³⁰² Bernheimer, p. 19.

³⁰³ *Ibid*

³⁰⁴ Corbin, pp. 10-11

³⁰⁵ Harsin, Jill, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1985), p. 257.

describes the appalling conditions and punishments to which the women detained there were subjected: ‘Les peines variant de 4 à 15 jours. [...] ‘Le quartier des filles valides comprend notamment un dortoir de quatre-vingt-dix lits...Le plafond en est bas et soutenu par des piliers et des charpentes en bois. Naturellement, on y gèle l’hiver, on y grille l’été.’³⁰⁶

While avid regulators like Duchâtelet saw prostitution as a necessary evil to purge bourgeois society of vice, and advocated prostitution for the greater good of civilisation,³⁰⁷ the French regulatory system was founded upon a network of hierarchy, hypocrisy, and sexual double standards in which all levels of society from the army, police, and government authorities, to the medical experts and the male clients who frequented the ‘maisons de tolérance’, were complicit in the enslavement and exploitation of women for sexual gratification and commercial profit. In his detailed study on the history and social organisation of prostitution in France during the 19th century, Yves Guyot, a staunch abolitionist who dedicated his book to Josephine Butler, describes how the ‘dispensaire de salubrité’ which was established in December 1802, was a corrupt, scandalous system in which medical doctors, surgeons and members of the police were complicit in profiting large sums of money from sending prostitutes to Saint-Lazare for medical treatment: ‘Quand il fut bien établi que les résultats sanitaires du dispensaire étaient “nuls” et que les chirurgiens n’étaient que des farceurs, touchant des “appointements exorbitants,” on les mit à la retraite avec 3000 francs de pension viagère, pour les récompenser, et on reconstitua le dispensaire par arrêté du 20 décembre 1810. Les filles devaient être visitées deux fois par mois: le taxe serait perçue par un employé, et les médecins recevraient un droit fixe.’³⁰⁸ He describes how this corrupt system was upheld at all levels of society: ‘Cette formule a reçu l’approbation de tous les chefs de la police et des mœurs de Paris, de tous les auteurs de projets de réglementation, policiers et médecins.’³⁰⁹

Another major problem engendered by the French regulatory system was the immense increase in clandestine prostitution towards the end of the century. While in 1820,

³⁰⁶ Pottet, Eugène, *Histoire de Sainte-Lazare (1122-1912)*, (Société française d’imprimerie et de librairie: Paris, 1912), pp. 42 & 44, <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb31140866n> [Accessed 25 January 2012]

³⁰⁷ Bernheimer, pp. 15-16

³⁰⁸ Guyot, Yves, *La prostitution*, (G. Charpentier: Paris, 1882), pp. 47-48

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 50.

there was estimated to have been as many as nine thousand clandestine prostitutes operating in Paris, by 1878, the number of clandestines was estimated somewhere between thirty thousand and forty thousand.³¹⁰ Harsin describes how the practice of clandestine prostitution, which underwent a dramatic transformation during the course of the 19th century in Paris, necessitated new policing practices to counter the threat posed by unregistered prostitutes or ‘insoumises’, who evaded police and medical surveillance and thus presented a considerable threat to the authorities: ‘Just as clandestinity itself changed from a secret to pervasive phenomenon, so the policing of clandestinity shifted from a concern with dangerous places to a concern about dangerous individuals. [...] The worries about hidden prostitution owed less to the threat of violence than to the threat of the moral and physical well-being of the individual who sought prostitutes.’³¹¹ Harsin comments on how working-class women were ‘set aside as objects of suspicion’ which had dangerous effects as ‘it provided the incentive for the police to cut even more deeply into the civil rights of these women, in the hopes of finding as many prostitutes as possible’, and led to thousands of ‘insoumises’ being ‘arrested, examined, and sometimes imprisoned without ever having a trial of any sort.’³¹² She further observes how the huge increase in clandestine prostitution in the second half of the century led to the targeting of unregistered prostitutes by medical experts, as the chief agents in the spread of venereal disease: ‘By the second half of the century clandestinity was viewed as an obstacle not only to the regulatory system but also to the health of nations.

Prostitution and syphilis had become firmly intertwined in the late nineteenth-century, both of them referred to as the “new leprosy” or the “new plague” of Europe.³¹³ The French regulatory system thus provided an ‘illusion of control over venereal disease,’³¹⁴ while at the same time subjecting women to arbitrary policing measures and the most de-humanizing, punitive medical practices. Furthermore, the system provided a framework which allowed for women to be singularized, vilified, and punished for the spread of venereal disease while men were held unaccountable and viewed as the innocent victims of immoral women; the policy of sequestration was

³¹⁰ Harsin, pp. 241-242

³¹¹ *Ibid*, pp. 242-243

³¹² *Ibid*, p. 250.

³¹³ *Ibid*, p. 251.

³¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 277.

deemed the best solution for protecting society from diseased women; with regards venereal disease ‘women were always the guilty transmitters, men (and the wives and children of these men) their hapless victims’; while ‘the close association of guilt, disease, and clandestine prostitution led to a curious paradox in which medical concern was lavished upon men while medical care was forced upon women.’³¹⁵ It is these blatant injustices, abuses, and sexual double standards inherent in the French regulatory system to which Josephine Butler, the leading abolitionist campaigner of the *Ladies’ Association*, fiercely protested in her campaign against the introduction of regulation in England.

In 1869, the British Parliament introduced the *Regulation Act* which granted permission for the arrest and medical inspection of prostitutes suspected of venereal disease. Under this law, female prostitutes found to have venereal diseases would be confined in ‘Lock Hospitals’ until they were deemed cured of their disease. The passing of the act in 1869 was the culmination of three prior *Contagious Diseases Acts* (1862, 1864, & 1866) which were introduced to combat the spread of venereal disease. The huge controversy provoked by the *Acts* in England exposed the sexual double standards which existed in Victorian Society in relation to male and female sexual relations, and became one of the first major political issues which mobilised British women to campaign for their rights to freedom and equality. At the forefront of the campaign was Butler whose vehement public struggle to repeal the *Acts* attracted international attention and correspondence with British members of Parliament such as William Gladstone, and earned the public support of such high-profile figures as Garibaldi, Joseph Mazzini, and Victor Hugo.

On 1st January 1870, the *Ladies’ Association* published an article entitled the ‘‘Women’s Protest’’ in the *Daily News* which presented a variety of arguments in opposition to the *CD Acts*, including the lack of information received by the general public, the removal of women’s personal security and civil liberty, the sexual double standards inherent in the *Acts* which punished women...while leaving unpunished ‘the sex who are the main cause’, the subjection of women to imprisonment, hard labour, and ‘punishments of the most degrading kind’, and the facilitation of the practice of

³¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 258-259

vice among the male population, thereby declaring it to be ‘necessary and venial.’³¹⁶ The article further contests the *Acts* on grounds of the lack of fundamental evidence that such punitive measures against women actually diminished the spread of venereal disease: ‘We have, on the contrary, the strongest evidence to show that in Paris and other Continental cities where women have long been outraged by this system, the public health and morals are worse than at home.’³¹⁷ Finally, the women argued that in treating the physical as opposed to the moral conditions of the disease and ‘legalising a revolting act’, the regulation laws failed to remedy the ‘causes of the evil’ at the source of the disease.³¹⁸ Butler recalls the global media attention garnered by the article: ‘This protest was published in the *Daily News*, and the fact of its appearance flashed by telegram to the remotest parts of the Kingdom. The local press largely reproduced it. Among the two thousand signatures which it obtained in a short time there were those of Florence Nightingale, Harriet Martineau, Mary Carpenter, the sisters and other relatives of the late Mr. John Bright, all the leading ladies of the Society of Friends, and many well-known in the literary and philanthropic world.’³¹⁹ Among the large array of international empathisers was Victor Hugo who wrote to Butler on 20 March 1870, pledging his fulsome support for her campaign.

In her *Reminiscences*, Butler identifies Hugo as one of the leading male empathisers for her cause owing to his pungent social critique of prostitution in *Les Misérables*: ‘For some time past have Jules Simon, in his work *L’Ouvrière*; Victor Hugo, in *Les Misérables*, John Stuart Mill, Acollas Hornung, and many other writers denounced the crime of female slavery, and declared it the duty of democracy to provide for the extinction of prostitution.’³²⁰ While French regulators were concerned with containing the social threat of prostitution, Hugo’s denunciation of prostitution in *Les Misérables* presents prostitution as the bleak outcome of social neglect, bourgeois hypocrisy, and moral decrepitude through the tragic degeneration of Fantine at the hands of society, the state, and the police. He presents Fantine as the tragic victim of social injustice rather than a threat to social and moral order. Hugo’s literary treatment of prostitution not only exposes the profound inequalities of regulation, but also differs radically from

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 17-19

³¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 19.

³¹⁸ *Ibid*

³¹⁹ *Ibid*

³²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 163.

dominant literary figurations of prostitution in French literature in the second half of the nineteenth-century which presented the prostitute in terms of animality, disease, misogynist fantasy or erotic fanaticism.³²¹

His letter of support was thus warmly received by Butler who commended Hugo as ‘a sympathetic voice...from Paris, the birthplace of the evil thing against which we were allied.’³²² However, Hugo’s letter demonstrates far more than just a ‘sympathetic voice’ to the abolitionist cause by demonstrating a distinctly feminist perspective on prostitution which is in direct alignment with Butler’s own views. Jo Doezema describes how Butler’s abolitionist campaign adopted a distinctly feminist perspective on prostitution by focusing on the victimhood and rehabilitation of prostitutes: ‘Josephine Butler famously led a feminist campaign to abolish the acts, which were repealed in 1886. Butlerite feminists opposed the then-current views of the prostitute as “fallen woman” or “sexual deviant”; placing the blame for prostitution squarely on the shoulders of unbridled male lust. Prostitutes were seen as victims who should be rescued or rehabilitated, rather than policed and punished.’³²³ It is precisely this awareness of the oppression and exploitation of prostitutes, and his support for their protection and rehabilitation in society which affirms Hugo’s feminist perspective on prostitution, and which made him a decisive voice of support for the feminist, abolitionist cause of Butler and her followers.

In his letter of response to Butler, Hugo pledges complete support to Butler and expresses his indignation at the disdainful oppression of women under regulation: ‘Je suis avec vous madame et mesdames. Je suis avec vous de toutes mes forces.’³²⁴ Whereas Hugo’s joining of forces with the women of Cuba in their fight against oppression is at times faltered by his authoritative position within their collaborative struggle, here Hugo’s support for Butler’s campaign is marked by his complete identification with the struggle of women against a tyrannical male ‘opresseur’,

³²¹ In *Figures of Ill Repute*, Charles Bernheimer examines how male fantasies surrounding women’s sexual function are crucial to understanding the ‘generative impulses behind narrative and artistic structures in this period.’ (See p. 4.)

³²² Butler, p. 20.

³²³ Doezema, Jo, ‘Loose Women or Lost Women? The Re-emergence of the Myth of White Slavery in Contemporary Discourses of Trafficking in Women’ in *International Sex Trafficking of Women & Children: Understanding the Global Epidemic*, ed. Leonard Territo & George Kirkham, (Looseleaf Law Publications: New York, 2010), p. 155.

³²⁴ Butler, p. 20.

whom he holds responsible for all forms of women's legal, moral, and civil enslavement: 'J'ai senti se soulever en moi toute mon indignation contre l'opresseur', 'la police mettent la femme hors la loi,' 'Les lois sont faites par les hommes contre les femmes.'³²⁵ Here, Hugo's critique of women's legal oppression by a male, hierarchical legal structure reveals the progressive, materialist, and forward-thinking nature of his feminism. By connecting the issue of women's prostitution to the wider legal oppression of women, Hugo is demonstrating his awareness of the larger causes of women's oppression and the need to radically overhaul a legal system which allows men to tyrannise over women, and which subjugates women to the worst forms of social, moral, and physical oppression.

The forcefulness of his language reveals the depth of his indignation at the exclusion of women within the legal systems of France and England which cast women as outlaws and where laws are made *by* men and *against* women: 'Les lois sont faites par des hommes contre les femmes. Rien de plus odieux.'³²⁶ Here Hugo's critique of regulation again corresponds with Butler and the members of her feminist repeal movement who rejected the *Acts* 'for what they saw as official state recognition of the "double standard" of sexual behaviour of men and women', and 'also objected to the way the *CD Acts* gave the state additional powers to police and control over the lives of women, especially working-class women.'³²⁷ His awareness of the appalling abuses of power committed by the police and state within the French regulatory system no doubt fuelled his argument, shared by Butler, against additional state control over women's lives, the result of which would lead inevitably to women's further exploitation and oppression at the hands of the state.

He equates the adoption of the French regulation system in England and the concurrent adoption of chamber executions in France with a politics of retrogression which constitutes an equally destructive threat to the progress of justice and humanity in both nations: 'La France est en train d'emprunter à l'Angleterre une chose mauvaise, l'exécution en chambre...et de son côté l'Angleterre emprunte à la France une chose exécrationnelle, la police mettent la femme hors la loi. [...] La France copiant la pendaison anglaise, l'Angleterre copiant le dispensaire français; émulation à réculons; triste

³²⁵ *Ibid*

³²⁶ *Ibid*

³²⁷ Doezymer, p. 155.

spectacle qui déshonore en France la justice et en Angleterre la police.’³²⁸ He further connects the issue of prostitution with the struggle against slavery in America when he describes the practice of prostitution which persists in Europe as the enslavement of white women: ‘L’esclavage des noirs est aboli en Amérique; l’esclavage des blanches continue en Europe.’³²⁹ Hugo’s description of female prostitution as ‘l’esclavage des blanches’ reflects his awareness of the use of the term in 19th century debates against prostitution and reveals how deeply connected Hugo was with public discourse on prostitution.

The use of the term ‘white slavery’ became widely used in late 19th century abolitionist discourse and reflected the diversity of views on prostitution at the time. Corbin describes the ambiguity attached to the origins of the term and the various meanings ascribed to it; ‘[...] the white slave trade was synonymous with selling women; it was to be condemned because any trading in human flesh was forbidden. It was the meaning given by the first writers to popularize the idea: Guyot in his work on prostitution and Tacussel in the first book devoted to the scourge. Similarly, the campaigns carried out by Ibels in the columns of *La lanterne* and *Le matin* against the trade in *chanteuses*...were aimed at a commerce that scarcely went beyond national frontiers.’³³⁰ However, Corbin explains that ‘what was usually meant by the white slave trade was the trading that the brothel-keepers, agents, and suppliers were obliged to carry out if they wanted to recruit and renew the staff of the officially tolerated establishments.’³³¹

In the late 19th century, ‘white slavery’ became imbued with immense rhetorical potency in the large-scale international abolitionist campaign. Frederick K. Grittner describes how social purist reformers took hold of the term in their campaign against prostitution when they discovered ‘the rhetorical power that “white slavery” had on their middle-class audience.’³³² While Butler supported some aspects of the social purist campaign against white slavery,³³³ Walkovitz describes how ‘repeal ties to the

³²⁸ *Ibid*

³²⁹ *Ibid*

³³⁰ Corbin, p. 275.

³³¹ *Ibid*

³³² Grittner, Frederick K., *White Slavery: Myth, Ideology, and American Law*, (Garland: New York, 1990), p. 41.

³³³ Doetzmer, pp. 155-156

white-slavery crusade were even stronger than to the social-purity movement as a whole'; 'In 1880 Alfred Dyer, a Quaker and prominent repealer, published a pamphlet on the entrapment and enforced detention of young British girls in the licensed brothels of Brussels. His exposé, *The European Slave Trade in English Girls*, led to the formation of the London Committee for Suppressing the Traffic in British Girls.'³³⁴ 'White slavery' thus became an 'essential aspect of the abolitionist campaign...to create public sympathy for the victims'³³⁵ of prostitution by evoking prostitutes as victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking as opposed to immoral women or agents of venereal disease.

The use of 'white slavery' became associated with the 'maiden sacrifice motif' which pitted the youth, innocence, victimhood, and whiteness of the prostitute against the villainy of the sex trader. The publication of W. T. Stead's series of articles entitled *The Maiden Tribute to Modern Babylon* in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1885 exemplifies the various tactics employed to elicit sympathy for victims of prostitution and created a huge sensation in the rising crusade against 'white slavery' in the late 19th century. In his speeches, Stead evokes the controversial issues of child prostitution and white slavery and stresses the victimhood, youth, and innocence of prostitutes; 'We took that child from a place that was steeped in vice from a mother who has admitted that she was going to a brothel as she thought, and instead of taking her to a brothel we placed her in good and Christian guardianship.'³³⁶

His public articles similarly denounced the abject measures including abduction and enslavement, employed by sex traders in the procurement of young girls and child prostitutes; 'The system of procuration...is reduced to a science [...] They go into workhouses, to see what girls are to be had. They use servant's registries. They haunt the doors of gaols when girls in for their first offence are turned adrift on the expiry of their sentences. There are no subterfuges too cunning or too daring for them to resort

³³⁴ Walkowitz, Judith R., *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, class, and the state*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1980), p. 2468.

³³⁵ Doetzmer, p. 156

³³⁶ Speech by W.T. Stead, St. James's Hall, London (August, 21, 1885). Extracted from *The Eliza Armstrong Case: Being a Verbatim Report of the Proceedings at Bow Street (Pall Mall Gazette Supplement, October 3, 1885)* W.T. Stead Resource Site <http://www.attackingthediabol.co.uk/pdfs/#sthash.xPlgaTeK.QJLJKcQs.dpbs> [Accessed 26 January 2012]

to in the pursuit of their game.’³³⁷ Stead’s scandalous exposé of child prostitution and ‘white slavery’ exposed in graphic detail the entrapment, abduction, and “sale” of young underprivileged girls to London brothels [...] threw London society into a state of moral panic, and achieved, as a consequence, the implementation of the *Criminal Law Amendment Act*, which raised the age of consent for girls from 13 to 16.’³³⁸ While, Hugo’s allusion to ‘l’esclavage des blanches’ demonstrates his awareness of public discourse and developments in the international debate on prostitution in the late 19th century, the particular rhetorical devices adopted by the ‘white slavery’ campaign, most notably the invocation of the ‘maiden sacrifice motif’ which emphasised the youth, innocence, and victimhood of the prostitute, the castigating and fiendish exposure of sexual traders, can be seen in Hugo’s tragic portrayal of prostitution in *Les Misérables* wherein Fantine’s tragic descent into the depths of social deprivation are spawned by the ills of regulation, and in the distinctly, feminist, perspective on prostitution which he adopts within his letter to Butler.

At the close of his letter, Hugo’s use of imperatives reveals the decisiveness of his support to the *Ladies’ Association*, and his awareness of the urgency of the issue: ‘Protestez, résistez, indignez-vous.’³³⁹ Hugo re-assures the women that all good and lofty spirits will support them in their struggle ‘tous les bons cœurs et tous les grands esprits seront avec vous’³⁴⁰, and closes his letter by granting the women his full permission to publish his letter, and by pledging his upmost sympathy for their cause: ‘Publiez cette lettre, si vous le jugez à propos. Agréez toutes mes sympathies et tous mes respects.’³⁴¹ Not only was Hugo’s letter published by the *Ladies’ Association*, Butler also alludes to Hugo’s support some years later in a letter to the *International Council of Women* on the fight against white slavery in March 1888.

Hugo’s letter to Butler thus provides a deeply revealing insight into his feminism during his exile; by identifying the issue of prostitution as one of the many ills engendered by women’s larger exclusion within a male-dominated, hierarchical legal structure, Hugo illustrates the far-reaching, liberating, and radical nature of his

³³⁷Extract from ‘The Violation of Virgins’ in *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon 1: the Report of our Secret Commission*, W.T. Stead (The Pall Mall Gazette, July 6 1885)

³³⁸W.T. Resource Site, (details as before)

³³⁹ Butler, p. 20.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*

³⁴¹ *Ibid*

feminism which not only sought to end female oppression, but also to integrate women within the legal system, thereby enabling them to become the agents of their own emancipation. By identifying prostitution as the outcome of social neglect and injustice, Hugo differs radically from advocates of regulation whose primary concern was containing prostitution to prevent the spread of venereal disease, and who failed miserably to recognise the oppression and suffering of the women themselves. Furthermore, by invoking the concept of 'white slavery' within his argument on prostitution, Hugo affirms his distinctly feminist stance on prostitution, shared by Butler and the women of the *Ladies' Association*, which invoked the victimhood, innocence, and exploitation of prostitutes as a justification for their need of protection and rehabilitation in society, and a definitive end to regulation.

Hugo's letter to the wives of Fenian Prisoners:

The Fenian Rebellion of March 1867 was one of several ineffectual, poorly-organised, and ill-fated Irish rebellions against British Rule in Ireland during the 19th century.³⁴² Hugo received a letter from the wives of six Fenians seeking his support in their opposition to the impending executions of their husbands, among whom were the leaders General Burke, Captain Mac Afferty, and Captain Mac Clure, and three others, Kelly, Joice, and Cullinane, who were each arrested and condemned to death by British authorities in the aftermath of the Rebellion. He responded immediately to the women by sending a letter to the British government of Queen Victoria to appeal for the clemency of the six condemned Fenians.

Although Hugo bases his argument for the clemency of the six prisoners on the renowned, global stature of England in the 19th century as a nation of progress and justice, he addresses his letter specifically to the Fenian women and makes his ultimate appeal to Queen Victoria for the clemency of the prisoners. By expressly writing to women, Hugo thus acknowledges the notably important role adopted by women following the exile of men in revolutionary struggles during the mid-nineteenth-century. The various international revolutionary struggles which unfolded during the century led to women assuming more pro-active, public roles and breaking out of the confinement of their maternal, domestic duties. During the Cuban Revolution of the 1870s, Cuban women played a vital role in procuring arms for revolutionaries, while the wives of French exiles during the Second Empire played an instrumental role in transmitting messages from exiles back to France and assisting in the publication of their literary and political works. Hugo's address to the women thus illustrates his acknowledgement and support for the cross-gendered and pro-active roles adopted by women throughout the world during the turbulent political years of the mid-nineteenth-century.

His letter is marked by a forceful rhetorical tone in which he discredits the practice of capital punishment in England as a 'contre-sens de civilisation', which contradicts England's role as a leading nation for all European nations: 'Vous êtes l'Angleterre

³⁴² While the Fenian Rebellion of March 1867 had been a military and political disaster for the IRB, the aftermath of the rebellion, which saw the wholesale arrests, imprisonment and death sentences of high-profile Fenian leaders by British authorities, provoked a wave of public sympathy both nationally and internationally for Fenian supporters.

pour montrer le spectacle de la vie et non l'exemple de la mort. L'Europe vous rappelle au devoir.'³⁴³ However, Hugo places his ultimate hope in Queen Victoria, upon whose maternal and feminine qualities he relies for the appeal of the condemned prisoners. As a woman in perpetual mourning following the death of her husband in 1842, and, as a mother, Hugo declares that Queen Victoria will not repel nature by forcing upon other women the loss she has endured: 'Épouses et filles, qui avez écrit à un proscrit, il est inutile de vous couper des robes noires. Regardez avec confiance vos enfants dormir dans leurs berceaux. C'est une femme en deuil qui gouverne l'Angleterre. Une mère ne fera pas des orphelins, une veuve ne fera pas des veuves.'³⁴⁴ Hugo's appeal to the maternal, pacifist, and feminine qualities of Queen Victoria³⁴⁵ is deeply revealing of his personal perception of women as inherently caring, loving, maternal beings. His language reveals how deeply he perceived women's maternal qualities as the inherent nature of their sex: 'Une mère ne fera pas des orphelins, une veuve ne fera pas des veuves.'³⁴⁶

In this instance Hugo is demonstrating an essentialist view of women which reduces them to their universalist and biologicistic attributes and adheres precisely to Elizabeth Grosz's definition of those terms.³⁴⁷ Grosz describes biologism as 'a particular form of essentialism in which women's essence is defined in terms of women's biological capacities...In particular, biologism usually ties women closely to the functions of reproduction and nurturance...Insofar as biology is assumed to consolidate an unalterable bedrock of identity, the attribution of biologicistic characteristics amounts to a permanent form of social containment for women.'³⁴⁸ His appeal to the common sense of suffering which unites all women: 'une veuve ne fera pas des veuves' further reflects Grosz's description of universalism as 'the attribution of invariant social

³⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 386.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 386-387

³⁴⁵ It is worth noting that Hugo's personal appeal to Queen Victoria is particularly noteworthy in light of the fact that he was expelled from England for his support of the highly satirical article on Queen Victoria's visit to Paris in 1855 sent by his fellow French exiles to a London newspaper, which led to the expulsion of three exiles from Britain, and subsequently Hugo's own expulsion from the country following his show of solidarity with the exiles. Presumably, given their history, Queen Victoria would not have readily appreciated Hugo's input in an issue of such national concern and political import.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 386.

³⁴⁷ Grosz, Elizabeth, 'Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism', in *The Essential Difference*, eds. Naomi Schor & Elizabeth Weed, (Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994)

³⁴⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 84-85

categories, functions and activities to which all women in all cultures are assigned...Universalism tends to suggest only the commonness of all women at all times and in all contexts.³⁴⁹

Hugo's essentializing language is further seen in his re-assurance that the Fenian women need not 'couper des robes noires'³⁵⁰ may also be an oblique reference to Queen Victoria who perpetually dressed in black following the death of her husband. His appeal to Queen Victoria, foremost as a mother and wife, appears to suggest quite a denigrating attitude towards the head of the British monarch and extensive British colony for the greater part of the 19th century. It seems as though Hugo is reducing women to the most essentialist and reductive terms by thus privileging and singling out their maternal, pacifying and consoling function. Indeed, it appears as though all women, regardless of their power and stature, can be reduced to their maternal, nurturing function. However, for Hugo, such a valorisation of women's maternal role is not meant as a denigration of women or their circumscription within maternal and domestic roles. Rather, Hugo sees women's maternal instincts as a source of enrichment, harmony, and conciliation for society. He appeals to Queen Victoria's maternal nature in order to secure the release of the condemned prisoners and thereby prevent their families from descending into social ruin.

His valorisation of women's maternal function thus illustrates his feminism as both essentialist and socialist – on the one hand, Hugo's appeal to women's maternal function both presupposes an innate maternal nature in women, while on the other, Hugo strategically invokes that maternal nature as the basis of his social argument for women's ability to harmonise society, to protect its most vulnerable members, and to effect social reform. Thus, it is as a mother, and not as a figurehead of the British monarch, that Hugo appeals to Queen Victoria for the release of these condemned prisoners and the protection of their vulnerable families. Furthermore, as in his letter to the women of Cuba wherein Hugo's wilful self-figuration as a victim of exile demonstrates his eagerness to form an experiential and relational connection with the women who seek his assistance 'Épouses et filles qui avez écrit à un proscrit [...]',³⁵¹ Hugo's personal appeal to Queen Victoria at the end of his letter, and his self-

³⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 85.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 387.

³⁵¹ *Ibid*, pp. 386-387

identification with the plight of the Fenian women further demonstrate Hugo's desire to harness the feelings of marginality, alienation, and oppression occasioned by his vanquished position as an exile, into an empathetic, feminist voice.

Despite his constant re-iterations of women's maternal nature, and the suffering inherent in the female condition, Hugo's ability to identify female oppression as an issue of wider social, moral, and political injustice illustrate the precise nature of his burgeoning feminist voice during his years in exile, namely a voice born out of deep sympathy and compassion for the suffering of women, and grounded in a pragmatic vision of female emancipation.

Such was the immense appeal of Hugo's empathetic feminist voice that his public discourse in support of women's rights received global coverage during his years in exile; his letter to the women of Cuba was published in *The New York Times* in 1870; his letter to the women of Guernsey was widely reproduced in English newspapers and assumed far-reaching proportions as an address to all the women of England³⁵²; his letter of support for the Fenian women succeeded in granting the reprieve of all six Fenian rebels; while Hugo's support for the abolition of prostitution still held considerable public esteem and relevance at the *International Council of Women* in 1888.

Furthermore, Hugo's invocation of women's maternal, harmonising, and consoling nature demonstrates his ability to strategically invoke an essentialist representation of women's maternal function as the basis of his argument for their participation in public life, and their capacity for social reform. Hugo's strategic appeal to women's maternal nature is strongly in tandem with feminists of his time who appealed to the specificity of women's maternal role to argue for a range of feminist issues such as the inclusion of women in public and political life, women's rights to equal citizenship, civil equality, and rights to universal suffrage. Leslie Wahl Rabine³⁵³ comments on how Saint-Simonian feminists in the 1830s were engaged in a dynamic, subversive form of essentialism which challenged the anti-essentialist, materialist criticisms of 20th

³⁵² *Ibid*, p. 535.

³⁵³Rabine, Leslie Wahl, 'Essentialism and Its Contexts: Saint-Simonian and Poststructuralist Feminists' in *The Essential Difference*, eds. Naomi Schor & Elizabeth Weed, (Indiana University Press; Bloomington; Indianapolis, 1994), p. 130.

century radical feminists like de Beauvoir and Wittig, far in advance of poststructuralist feminists.

While radical anti-essentialist feminists like de Beauvoir reject any association of women's bodies and biological function as a surrender to the system of domestic enslavement which prevailed under patriarchalism, essentialist feminists like Cixous illustrate how feminist fear and suspicion of essentialism can be radically overturned by invoking essentialist representations of femininity to articulate the plurality of female sexuality, and the fluid, multiple, and unending potentialities of women's voice and women's identities. The fact that this feminist practice of subverting essentialist representations of women to empower and liberate them, is foreshadowed in the works of Saint-Simonian feminists almost a century and a half earlier than the French poststructuralist feminists, reveals how 19th century feminism attempted to confront one of the most fundamental challenges in feminism, namely the argument between women's demands for complete equality with men on the one hand, and the valorisation of women's specificity by virtue of their maternity, on the other.

Rabine argues that the maternal, essentializing discourse employed by Saint-Simonian feminists must not be viewed 'essentially' but through an historical and structural perspective, thus enabling it to be evaluated 'as an unavoidable and unstable element of a more encompassing feminist discourse.'³⁵⁴ She argues that, in this way, essentialism and anti-essentialism could work as 'interdependent, unstable terms of one necessarily heterogeneous and oscillating feminist strategy,'³⁵⁵ and links Saint-Simonian feminists with poststructuralist feminists in terms of the 'ontheologic' which rests on a claim to the maternal as an actuality or potentiality in every woman.'³⁵⁶ Naomi Schor further argues that 'the piety that essentialism is essentially conservative, reactionary, complicit with dominant groups' and 'patriarchy's palsy' can be called into question by seeing feminist essentialism as 'a fully political "essentialist" practice.'³⁵⁷ In order to perceive essentialism from a positive feminist perspective, she argues that 'context...is everything: contemporary French feminism cannot be understood without some knowledge of the history of French feminism,'³⁵⁸ and this is

³⁵⁴ *Ibid*

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 132.

³⁵⁷ Schor, Naomi, *The Essential Difference*, p. xiv.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*

true of the specific way in which Saint-Simonian feminism equated femininity and maternity, 'to press for their own claims to equality.'³⁵⁹

The multiplicity of pleasure and bodily drives inscribed within H el ene Cixous's ' criture f eminine' is foreshadowed in the Saint-Simonian feminist Claire D emar's essay 'Ma Loi d'Avenir' in which she designates her own writing as a 'parole de femme.'³⁶⁰ In her essay, D emar articulates her conception of a unique woman's voice as a voice for every woman; 'toute parole de femme doit  tre dite et sera dite pour l'affranchissement de la femme', a voice which is energetic, powerful, and resonant; 'une voix de femme  nergique, puissante du long retentissement.'³⁶¹ In the same way that Cixous envisaged 'l' criture f eminine' as an open-ended, fluid, undefinable, and unrestrained language with infinite possibilities for women to express and speak of themselves and their bodies,³⁶² D emar's 'parole de femme' is 'ind cise...inarticul e amie ou ennemie discordante et heurt e comme les mille bruits confus, les cliquetis fun bres qui jaillissent du choc des soci t es qui croulent en ruine...ou suave et harmonieuse comme l'hymne des f tes de l'avenir.'³⁶³ D emar's 'parole de femme' is true, free, liberating, audacious, again foreshadowing Cixous's proposal of ' criture f eminine' as an alternative voice for women which allows them to express their subjecthood outside of phallogentric, patriarchal discourse: 'Et moi, femme, je parlerai, je ne sais pas tenir ma pens e captive et silencieuse au fond de mon c eur, qui ne sais pas voiler ses formes m les, rudes et hardies, mettre   la V RIT  une robe de gaze, arr ter au bord des l vres une parole franche, libre, audacieuse, une parole nue, vraie, acerbe poignante [...]'³⁶⁴

Rabine argues that the essentialist vocabulary employed by Saint-Simoniennes and post-structuralist feminists serves a double function in which seemingly essentialist meanings have a '*function* of transformation in a social debate', and have their own

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*

³⁶⁰ Rabine, p.132.

³⁶¹ D emar, Claire, *Ma Loi d'Avenir*, (Bureau de la *Tribune des femmes*: Paris, 1834), p. 23.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark://12148/cb30321255c> [Accessed 23 January 2012]

³⁶² In 'Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays.' Cixous writes: 'Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling-place of the other in me – the other that I am and am not [...] that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me, who? – a feminine one, a masculine one, some ? Several, some unknown, which is indeed what gives me the desire to know and from which all life soars.' in *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. Alan D. Schrift, (Routledge; New York; Oxon, 1997), p. 157.

³⁶³ *Ibid*

³⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 24.

“‘différance’” as differential signs in a combination with other signs both textual and social.’³⁶⁵By foregrounding the female body to assert women’s subjectivity through writing, ‘Cixous is not, as is often suggested adopting the discourse of idealism, but is rather mobilizing a materialist account of social relations which constitutes a critique of ‘mass society.’³⁶⁶ In her seminal essay *Sorties*, Cixous argues that ‘the...violence of masculine economy consists in making sexual difference hierarchical by valorizing one of the terms of the relationship, by reaffirming what Freud calls *phallic primacy*.³⁶⁷She argues that the ‘difference’ is always perceived and carried out as an opposition. Masculinity/Femininity are opposed in such a way that it is male privilege that is affirmed in a movement of conflict played out in advance.’³⁶⁸However, she argues that ‘if we were to imagine a transformation of each one’s relationship to his or her body (and to the other body)’, then ‘what today appears to be ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ would no longer amount to the same thing as ‘no longer would the common logic of difference be organized with the opposite that remains dominant’, and ‘difference would be a bunch of new differences.’³⁶⁹

While Infantarian and Saint-Simonian doctrine treated women as objects within a hierarchical, phallogocentric symbolic system, Saint-Simoniennes were able to ‘disrupt’ this practice by ‘making visible the gaps and conflicts between the signs of gender and the social referent they supposedly signify’, ‘by bringing the differences of sexual and class struggle into the workings of the sign’, and ‘by recombining the gender positions of the dominant symbolic system into new patterns.’³⁷⁰ In this way, the Saint-Simoniennes were able to ‘appropriate as subjects the discourse which men have used to turn them into objects.’³⁷¹ By subverting the subjectivity conferred on women by phallogocentric ideology, Cixous argues that ‘écriture féminine’ always ‘disturbs the relationship to reality: produces an uncertainty that gets in the way of the subject’s

³⁶⁵ Rabine, p. 137.

³⁶⁶ Shiach, Morag, *Hélène Cixous: a politics of writing*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1991), p. 21.

³⁶⁷ Cixous, *Ibid*, p. 151.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid*

³⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 208.

³⁷⁰ Rabine, p. 137.

³⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 137.

socialization.³⁷² In this way, she argues that ‘l’écriture féminine’ is distressing...for men as its permeability and nonexclusion ‘is a threat, something intolerable.’³⁷³

Rabine argues that Claire Démar’s self-appointment as the *Femme Messie* of the Saint-Simonian family operates an ‘almost imperceptible shift’ which ‘drastically transforms the “call of the woman” from object of the men’s call’ to ‘subject of a call to the women, and as such the model for the woman as subjects.’³⁷⁴ In *Ma Loi d’Avenir*, Démar’s self-proposal as female-redemptress illustrates how she draws attention to the limitations of Enfantin’s doctrine and argues that Saint-Simonian ideals of workers’ emancipation and social rehabilitation can only be achieved through the emancipation and rehabilitation of women. In so doing, she is assigning a positive, material, and emancipatory meaning to the feminine qualities attributed to women within Saint-Simonian doctrine: ‘Oui, l’affranchissement du prolétaire, de la classe la plus pauvre...n’est possible...que par l’affranchissement de notre sexe par l’association de la force et de la beauté, de la rudesse et de la douceur de l’homme et de la femme. Aux femmes donc à faire retentir ce cri d’affranchissement; à répudier la protection injurieuse de celui qui se disait son maître, et n’était que son égal! Qu’elle se lève donc d’entre les femmes...le traité de réhabilitation, d’alliance et d’égalité.’³⁷⁵

Démar describes the voice of the female-redemptress as an instrument of revolt ‘je soutiens que la parole de la femme rédempteur sera une parole souverainement révoltante, car elle sera la plus large, et conséquemment la plus satisfaisante à toute nature, à toute volonté.’³⁷⁶ She proclaims that this ‘parole souverainement révoltante’ will replace the revered but silent voice of Enfantin’s idealised ‘femme-rédemptresse’: ‘[...] le père Enfantin, qui faisait appel à la femme, n’a pas cru lui déterminer des limites, au-delà desquelles sa voix ne devait pas être entendue, son langage deviendrait mauvais et immoral. – Si donc il en est ainsi que je viens de le dire, n’avais-je pas raison d’avancer en commençant, que les femmes même de la Tribune ne pourraient pas porter la parole de la femme messie.’³⁷⁷ As well as subverting the essentialist language of Saint-Simonian doctrine by inserting themselves as the subjects rather

³⁷² Cixous, p. 210.

³⁷³ *Ibid*

³⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 138.

³⁷⁵ Démar, p. 25. (emphasis in original)

³⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 28.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid*

than objects of its discourse, and by proposing an alternative ‘parole de femme’ as a means of expressing their subjectivity outside the phallogocentric, hierarchical confines of Saint-Simonian thought, *Saint-Simoniennes* also radically subverted the representations of motherhood within the doctrine.

Feminists like Voilquin, Roland, and Démar radically subverted essentialist representations of women’s maternal role by extending and broadening the idealised and confining mythical notions of motherhood within Saint-Simonian theory, and by articulating the true, material role of ‘la mère sociale.’ In her writings, Voilquin appeals to the material reality of motherhood in order to demystify *Enfantin*’s maternal idealisms and argue for the need for fundamental legal reforms on maternity: ‘Selon lui, ‘la famille doit reposer sur la maternité; il dit, pour justifier son système, que la paternité est une croyance, que la maternité seule est une certitude. [...] La société de l’avenir reposera, non pas sur le mystère, mais sur la confiance; car le mystère prolongerait encore l’exploitation de notre sexe; la publicité, la confiance devront former les bases de la nouvelle morale.’³⁷⁸ Her conception of the regenerative role of ‘la mère sociale’ attributes women with a fundamental educative role in the formation of men and the moral education of the world and stresses the multiplicity of women’s social role: ‘À nous la *population*, à nous de renouveler l’humanité, à nous appartient de former le cœur, les sentiments de l’homme, à nous enfin, l’éducation morale du monde...Enfin, à la femme sous son aspect *multiple* d’apporter à l’humanité *amour* et *bonheur*.’³⁷⁹

It is this social meaning of motherhood that Voilquin strategically invokes in her argument for women’s equality: ‘[...] appuies-toi sur ton titre de mère, pour réclamer de l’homme ton égalité et le droit de libre passage sur cette terre.’³⁸⁰ She further demystifies the essentialist representations of maternity within Saint-Simonism by reconfiguring motherhood as the social and material function of women: ‘Mais la maternité ! c’est notre plus beau caractère...c’est la femme dans son épanouissement; dans la religion de l’avenir ce ne sera plus, comme type féminin, une madone virginale que nous présenterons à l’adoration des Croyons: ce sera la mère! Qui ne laissera pas

³⁷⁸ Voilquin, Suzanne, *Ma Loi d’Avenir*, (préface), p. 16.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 20. (emphasis in original)

³⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 19.

grandir isolé un seul orphelin sur la terre [...]’³⁸¹ Rabine argues that the strategy adopted by the Saint-Simoniennes of ‘positing an unchangeable feminine essence’ enabled them ‘to argue that the socio-symbolic structures which repress and distort it must change,’³⁸² while their play with gender roles foreshadows poststructuralist perspectives on *écriture féminine* ‘not only in terms of phallogentric meaning...but its inscription of a feminine subjective.’³⁸³ As H  l  ne Cixous observes in *Le Rire de la M  duse*: ‘[...]   crire c’est justement travailler dans l’entre, interroger le proc  s du m  me et de l’autre sans lequel rien ne vit...c’est d’abord vouloir le deux, et les deux, l’ensemble de l’un et de l’autre [...] dynamis  s    l’infini par un incessant   changeant de l’un et de l’autre sujet diff  rent, ne se connaissant et se recommen  ant qu’   partir du bord vivant de l’autre: parcours multiple et in  puisable    milliers de rencontres et transformations du m  me dans l’autre et dans l’entre [...]’³⁸⁴ Thus, far from ‘perpetuating conservative essentialist ideas of womanhood, the discourse employed by the Saint-Simoniennes opens the jarring of contradiction between the meanings of its vocabulary and the social meanings attached to its speakers, while calling attention to the yawning gap between the social world and its ideal representation.’³⁸⁵

This subversive use of essentialist discourse by Saint-Simonian feminists provides an opportunity to interpret Hugo’s essentialist representations of women’s maternal role from a far more enlightened, feminist perspective. In a letter to Hugo, inspired by his reading of *Les Contemplations*, Prosper Enfantin, the spiritual leader of the Saint-Simonian community, praises Hugo for defending the cause of female emancipation. Enfantin praises Hugo for the paternal love he shows in *Les Contemplations* which he describes as a ‘puissant et religieux amour de la femme.’³⁸⁶ Enfantin was writing to Hugo ahead of the publication of *Dieu* and especially *La Fin de Satan*, anticipating the portrayal of a triple deity he expects to find in these works: ‘J’attends avec impatience ce que vous nous annoncez: *Dieu* et surtout *La Fin de Satan*, bien s  r que vous ferez   craser la t  te de celui-ci par la femme et que votre Dieu ne sera pas seulement un p  re. Vous le manifesterez    nous, d  livr   de Satan et de son enfer, se

³⁸¹ *Ibid*

³⁸² Rabine, p. 139.

³⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 144.

³⁸⁴ Cixous, H  l  ne, *Le Rire de la M  duse*, (Gallil  e: Paris, 2010), pp. 51-52

³⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 145.

³⁸⁶ Enfantin, Barth  l  my-Prosper, *  uvres de Saint-Simon & d’Enfantin, Volume XIII*, (E. Dentu: Paris, 1867), p. 2.

montrant sous sa triple forme de mère, d'épouse et de fille, et non pas seulement sous la forme mâle de *Père, Fils et Saint-Esprit*. Car c'est là le véritable sens de ce qu'ils ont cherché et trouvé, sans le savoir, dans l'*immaculé conception de la mère de Dieu*.³⁸⁷ In his reply, Hugo affirms his steadfast devotion to the cause of female emancipation: 'Dans ces deux livres...je n'oublierai pas la femme; j'irai même au-delà, de même que j'irai au-delà de la terre.'³⁸⁸ However, Hugo makes clear that he does not share *Enfantin*'s views in relation to the female messiah: 'Je vois votre horizon, et je l'accepte; et je pense que vous accepterez aussi le mien. Travaillons à la lumière, créons l'immense amour.'³⁸⁹

Hugo's essentialist descriptions of femininity and women's maternal role are in fact much closer to those of the Saint-Simonian feminists like Démar and Voilquin in the way in which he invokes an essentialist discourse on women as a means of reconfiguring women's maternal roles, making claims to women's right to social and legal reforms, and illustrating the real, material benefits of women's participation in society. While it is true that Hugo does assume that women possess an innate essence which is nurturing, maternal, loving, and consoling, his invocations of women's maternal essence are accompanied by a real and materialist vision of their social utility and ability to effect social reform. Hugo appeals to Queen Victoria's maternal nature because she can spare six families from social ruin. He depicts prostitutes as innocent, helpless victims in order to argue for their social restoration and he refutes the prevailing perceptions of prostitutes as 'fallen' women which have justified their enslavement and exploitation by the state, police, and society at large.

Furthermore, Hugo's specific addresses to the women of Cuba, Guernsey, and the Fenian women illustrate his willingness to be part of and assist in the radical transformation of women's social roles and their entry into political life occasioned by the revolutions of the mid-nineteenth-century, as had occurred during the American Revolution a century before. Thus, while Hugo does undeniably display a perception of women which is unrefutedly essentialist, he cannot be seen to espouse an essentialism which is reductive, or antithetical to his feminism. Rather, by employing a strategic, subversive form of essentialism, Hugo can be seen to be partaking in the

³⁸⁷ *Ibid*

³⁸⁸ Hugo cited in *Œuvres de Saint-Simon & d'Enfantin*, p. 4.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid*

subversive essentialism practiced by Saint-Simonian feminists of his time, and to a lesser extent, the strategic essentialism espoused by Cixous a century later.

Hugo's Letter in Support of Women's Education.

Women's exclusion from the republic.

While Hugo's strategic use of essentialism in his letters to afflicted women who sought his assistance illustrate his ability to combine a maternal, essentially feminine vision of women with a vision of women's potential for social reform, the newly-established conservative and paternalistic republic to which he returned following his exile in September 1870, presented a further challenging environment for Hugo to militate for feminist issues and to support the liberation, emancipation, and changing perceptions of women in the final decades of the 19th century.

The exclusion of women from the first French Republic constituted a devastating blow to rising feminist activity during the French Revolution. In *Déclaration des Droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*, Olympe de Gouges had proclaimed that the attainment of women's equal citizenship would be instrumental in the regeneration of society following the revolution: 'La garantie des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne nécessite une utilité majeure; cette garantie doit être instituée pour l'avantage de tous, et non pour l'utilité particulière de celles à qui elle est confiée.'³⁹⁰ However, despite the audacious demands for women's rights during the revolutionary period and the considerable contribution made by women to the establishment of the first French Republic, the introduction of Napoléon's *Code civil* in 1804 firmly relegated women to the domestic and private sphere and fixed the exclusionary and secondary citizenship which determined women's social identity within republicanism throughout the 19th century and beyond.

The Napoleonic Code effectively enshrined women's confinement and enslavement within the domestic sphere by granting husbands ultimate power over their wives in terms of property rights, marital status, employment, and rights to children. Under the terms of the *Code*, wives were required to submit completely to the authority of their husbands: 'Le mari doit protection à sa femme, la femme obéissance à son mari.'³⁹¹ The *Code* made women's right to divorce considerably more difficult to obtain than

³⁹⁰ Gouges, Olympe de, *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*, (Éditions Mille et Une Nuits: Paris, 1791; 2003), p. 18.

³⁹¹ *Code Civil des français*, Chapitre VI *Des Droits et des Devoirs respectifs des Époux*, Art. 213, p. 15. (Imprimerie de la République: Paris, 1804), <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:12148/cb339642859> [Accessed 10 January 2013]

that of men: ‘Le mari pourra demander le divorce pour cause d’adultère de sa femme.’ ‘La femme pourra demander le divorce pour cause d’adultère de son mari, lorsqu’il aura tenu sa concubine dans la maison commune.’³⁹² It also granted paternal rights to men over children in divorce cases: ‘L’administration provisoire des enfans restera au mari demandeur ou défendeur en divorce [...]’³⁹³ Thus, while Napoléon declared that ‘L’exercice des droits civils est indépendant de la qualité de *Citoyen*’,³⁹⁴ and that ‘Tout Français jouira des droits civils’,³⁹⁵ the first French Republic set the tone for women’s marginal status as secondary citizens and enacted the strict division of public and private spheres which determined women’s relations with republicanism for the entire 19th century and beyond.

The fraternalist discourse engendered by the French Revolution provided a robust ideological and political framework for women’s exclusion from republican politics, the denial of women’s rights to full citizenship and the right to vote, and the confinement of women to domestic life. While the *Code* marked the urgent attempts of the First French Republic to definitively quell the fervour of rising feminist activity during the Revolutionary period, the fraternal discourse inherited by subsequent republican regimes in France during the 19th century, continued to employ this discourse to bolster their masculinist notions of republicanism and disguise their denial of women’s basic rights and freedoms. However, the male exclusiveness encoded within the fraternal rhetoric of republican discourse was acknowledged by several leading French feminists throughout the 19th century who each sought to challenge women’s marginal, exclusionary status within republicanism, and the idealised role of women within republican ideology which defined their role solely in relation to their husbands, children, and domestic responsibilities.

One such feminist who contested the gender exclusiveness of republican discourse was Claire Démar, who declared that the Republic of 1832 was in fact constructed upon a paradox: ‘Oui, jamais autre qu’un homme stupide et inepte a pu faire hurler ensemble les mots de monarchie et de république...qui n’est lui-même en définitive

³⁹² *Ibid*, Titre VI Du Divorce. Chapitre Premier. Des Causes du Divorce, Art. 229 & 230, p. 56.

³⁹³ *Ibid*, Section II: Des Mesures provisoires auxquelles peut donner lieu la Demande en divorce pour cause déterminée. Art. 267, p. 66. (spelling as in original)

³⁹⁴ *Ibid*, Livre Premier Des Personnes, Titre 1^{er}, De la Jouissance et de la Privation des Droits Civils, Chapitre Premier, De la Jouissance des Droits civils, Art. 7. p. 3.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid*, Art. 8. p. 3.

qu'un long paradoxe, il devait être réservé d'entendre, d'écouter, d'applaudir ce paradoxe étrange: la meilleure des républiques, c'est un roi.'³⁹⁶ Refuting the egalitarian, universalist claims of republican discourse, Démar declared that a true republican state would not desire the oppression of any member of society and warned that the security of the republic depended upon the extension of political and legal equality to women: 'Les vrais républicains sont ceux qui ne veulent l'oppression d'aucun membre de la Société; il est nécessaire, indispensable, sacré, de faire assister les femmes à la rédaction de toute loi [...]'³⁹⁷ Another Saint-Simonian feminist who exposed the exclusion of women encoded within republican discourse was Jeanne Deroin who argued for women's inclusion within the republican principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity in order to ensure the protection and harmony of the larger social family: 'Au nom de Dieu et de la solidarité qui relie tous les membres de la grande famille humaine; Nous affirmons que les femmes ont le même droit que les hommes à la liberté, à l'égalité et à la fraternité.'³⁹⁸

Joan Wallach Scott describes how Deroin exposed the male exclusiveness of the republican proposal for universal suffrage which became inextricably linked with the right to work during the revolution of 1848, and marked a considerable difference from the previous revolutions of 1792 and 1832.³⁹⁹ While republicans based their arguments for women's exclusion from politics on sex differences, Scott argues that Deroin's insistence on individualism 'must be read as a feminist articulation of the utopian socialist critique of individualism', and that 'Deroin's feminism offered an alternative to individualism by insisting on "'sexual difference"' as the basic unit of humanity' and 'turned sexual difference into an argument for equality' which 'both exposed the contradictions of the Second Republic's definition of citizenship and revealed how difficult it was to depict the difference between the sexes as a symmetrical (rather than hierarchical) relationship.'⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁶ Démar, *Ma Loi d'Avenir*, p. 41.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 69.

³⁹⁸ Deroin, Jeanne, *Association fraternelle des démocrates socialistes des deux sexes pour l'affranchissement politique et social des femmes*, (A. Lacour: Paris, 1849), p. 3.
<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb30326925k> [Accessed 9 January 2013]

³⁹⁹ Scott, Joan Wallach, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*, (Harvard University Press: Boston, 1996), p. 57.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 58.

Deroin's distinctly feminist strategy of 'turning sexual difference into an argument for equality' can be seen throughout her writings wherein she employs a maternal essentialism to argue for women's inclusion within republican politics in order to ensure their contribution to the social unity and harmony of the republic. In particular she aligns women's maternity with the oppressed working class: 'O femme ! mère du genre humain, toi qui résumes en ton sein toutes ses douleurs, toi qui a subi tous les martyres, toi le type sacré du travailleur toujours souffrant, toujours opprimé, toujours subalternisé, lève-toi et parle au nom de l'humanité !'⁴⁰¹ She further challenges the exclusion of women within republican ideology by exposing the gender bias encoded within republican concepts of fraternity, harmony, and solidarity and exposes the ineffectualness of such principles so long as women are excluded from the republic: 'Refuser à la femme ses droits à la liberté et à l'égalité, c'est perpétuer l'antagonisme, c'est méconnaître le respect de la dignité humaine et les principes de fraternité et de solidarité qui sont la base de l'harmonie universelle.'⁴⁰²

Deroin's use of sexual differences to overturn the gendered terms of republican discourse and argue that the basis for true harmony, solidarity, and social unity is contingent upon the enfranchisement of women foreshadows Hugo's arguments within his public letters during the Third Republic wherein he argues that social emancipation and an end to oppression can only be achieved through the attainment of female emancipation: 'L'humanité est homme et femme; la loi formulée par l'homme seul ne peut satisfaire aux besoins de l'humanité. [...] Nous affirmons que la réforme sociale ne peut s'accomplir sans le concours de la femme, de la moitié de l'humanité...l'affranchissement politique de la femme est le premier pas vers l'affranchissement complet de tous les opprimés.'⁴⁰³

The fraternal discourse which framed Republican ideology set in place an explicitly male gendered citizenship which enabled republican leaders to legitimate and naturalize the denial of equal citizenship and voting rights to women. However, while women were denied the right to full citizenship, they nevertheless played a

⁴⁰¹ Deroin, Jeanne, *Cours de Droit Social pour les Femmes*, (Imprimerie de Plon: Paris, 1848), p. 8. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb30326928m> [Accessed 9 January 2013]

⁴⁰² Deroin, Jeanne, *Association fraternelle des femmes*, p. 4.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 4.

fundamental role ‘in raising future citizens and mothers of citizens.’⁴⁰⁴ The republican concept of citizenship which emerged in the late 18th and 19th centuries was profoundly shaped by Rousseau’s model of ideal citizenship and women’s role therein. For Rousseau, citizenship and the formation of future citizens was considered the patriotic duty of each man: ‘Un père, quand il engendre et nourrit des enfants, ne font en cela que le tiers de sa tâche. Il doit des hommes à son espèce: il doit à la société des hommes socialistes...il doit des citoyens à l’état.’⁴⁰⁵ Rousseau’s model of the republican mother as creator and shaper of future republican citizens invoked images of the ruthless Spartan mother who operated her home as a training camp for future republican citizens.⁴⁰⁶ For Rousseau, women’s citizenship was thus not seen in terms of their individual rights to citizenship as independent, social beings, but in terms of their vital role in the formation, education, and cultivation of future citizens. As Maurice Agulhon observes, when Rousseau proclaims women as ‘the precious half of the Republic, he means the half without citizenship.’⁴⁰⁷

In Rousseau’s mind, however, such a conception of ‘la citoyenne’ was not discriminatory as it allocated women an instrumental role within the formation of the republic – Rousseau’s model of republican mother ‘was not a citizen, but was the chief source of citizenship.’⁴⁰⁸ His proposed model of republican citizenship was thus profoundly anchored by the family wherein men and women assumed distinct yet vital roles in the cultivation of future citizens and the solid formation of the Republic. Such was the popularity of his ideas on the place of men and women within the Republic that the incorporation of his ideas formed the basis of republican ideological and legislative framework in the First French Republic. Reynolds comments on how ‘effectively, the Republic was built on a set of principles which wrote women out of the small share of public life which they had previously been allotted and firmly back

⁴⁰⁴ Nord, Philip, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France*, (Harvard University Press; Cambridge; London, 1995), p. 232.

⁴⁰⁵ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Emile ou, De l’éducation*, (Garnier-Flammarion: Paris, 1996), pp. 19-20

⁴⁰⁶ ‘Une femme de Sparte avait cinq fils à l’armée, et attendait des nouvelles de la bataille. Un ilote arrive; elle arrive; elle lui en demande en tremblant: “Vos cinq fils ont été tué. – Vil esclave, t’ai-je demandé cela ? – Nous avons gagné la victoire !” La mère court au temple, et rend grâces aux dieux. Voilà la citoyenne.’ (*Emile*, p. 39.)

⁴⁰⁷ Reynolds, Siân, ‘Marianne’s Citizens? Women, the Republic and Universal Suffrage in France’ in *Women, State, and Revolution: Essays on Power and Gender in Europe since 1789*, ed. Siân Reynolds. (Wheatsheaf: Brighton, 1986), p. 111.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid*

into private life.⁴⁰⁹ The ‘sinful female body was to become a virtuous republican body, bearing sons who would be soldier-citizens.’⁴¹⁰

The centrality of women’s role within the republican family thus defined their contribution to the republic firmly in terms of their domestic, familial, and maternal duties. On a deeper level, this idealisation of republican mothers as creators of nationalistic, patriotic citizens became a way for republicans to legitimate their denial of women’s inclusion within the public and political life of the republic. While the logical realisation of the principle of fraternity enunciated during the French Revolution would have been to grant women equal rights as fraternal sisters of the new Republic, the role of ‘republican motherhood’ assigned to women following the Revolution enshrined their relegation to the private sphere and shaped issues of women’s citizenship and political status in French public life for almost a century and a half. Marie-Blanche Tahon describes how an understanding of ‘republican motherhood’ enables us to understand the origins of the distinction between the sexes within French sociological relations, women’s political status within the republic, the history of women’s ‘exclusion’ from citizenship, and the denial of women’s basic human rights: ‘Le discours qui affirme que dans l’établissement de la citoyenneté, la détermination de sexe n’entre pas en ligne de compte est la pratique qui la fait intervenir pour un seul sexe. Dans cet écart, c’est à la figure de mère qu’il fait appel. Cette figure, dans sa concrétisation, rend possible la représentation de l’abstraction de l’individu. Avec la déclaration: “Tous les hommes naissent égaux en droits”, la filiation n’intervient pas dans la transmission de la citoyenneté, les hommes sont frères dans la cité. Cette révolution passe par la construction de la mère républicaine, alors qu’on se serait plutôt attendu à ce qu’apparaisse la sœur égale au frère.’⁴¹¹

The promotion of ‘la mère républicaine’ as the model for women’s idealised role within the republic thus set in place a solid framework for the exclusion of women from citizenship and voting rights throughout the 19th century and beyond, while also legitimating and naturalising women’s confinement to domestic and maternal roles by defining such roles in terms of national duty and civic responsibility. However, this

⁴⁰⁹ Reynolds, p. 113.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid*

⁴¹¹ Tahon, Marie-Blanche, *Sociologie Des Rapports de Sexes*, (University of Ottawa Press: Ottawa, 2003), p. 125.

ideology of ‘republican motherhood’ not only excluded women from the attainment of basic rights and freedoms but also shaped the legislative framework of successive republican regimes during the 19th century on all issues pertaining to women’s rights. This is particularly evident in relation to reforms in women’s education which were deeply moulded around the concept of ‘republican motherhood’ and the educative responsibilities required of women within that role.

Republicanism and education:

One particular feminist issue in which Hugo became actively engaged during the early years of the Third Republic was the issue of women’s right to equal education. Already, Hugo had virulently argued in favour of a public, secular, and universal education during the debates on the secularisation of primary education in the *Assemblée Législative* in 1850. In his speech to the assembly on 15 January 1870, Hugo caused a sensation when he declared that it was the right of each child to have access to compulsory primary education and that education should be made a free entity for all children, irrespective of class differences: ‘L’instruction primaire obligatoire, c’est le droit de l’enfant, qui, ne vous y trompez pas, est plus sacré encore que le droit du père et qui se confond avec le droit de l’état.’⁴¹² This desire for the secularisation of education corresponded with Hugo’s life-long commitment to alleviating the social misery of the most afflicted classes in society: ‘Certes, je suis de ceux qui veulent...avec une inexprimable ardeur...améliorer dans cette vie le sort matériel de ceux qui souffrent; mais la première des améliorations, c’est de leur donner l’espérance.’⁴¹³

In his speech, Hugo condemns the culture of ignorance and error inherent in clerical education which constrains the cultivation of national genius: ‘Ah!...nous connaissons le parti clérical...C’est lui qui a trouvé...l’ignorance et l’erreur. C’est lui qui fait défense à la science et au génie d’aller au-delà du missel et qui veut cloîtrer la pensée dans le dogme.’⁴¹⁴ Hugo’s argument in favour of a public, free, universal state-supervised education system was deeply informed by his socialist and political convictions – by making education free for all citizens, Hugo believed that all children

⁴¹² *Actes et Paroles I*, (Albin Michel: Paris, 1880-1926), p. 312.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb373094302> [Accessed 4 February 2015]

⁴¹³ *Ibid*, p. 316.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 321.

would in turn become free citizens. Although the passing of the *Loi Falloux*⁴¹⁵ in March 1850 constituted a defeat for Hugo, he continued his campaign for universal, secular education, an issue which assumed particular importance following the accession of Republicans to power in 1870.

Republicanism and women's education:

The issue of education became inextricably linked with the evolution of republicanism during the reign of Napoléon III when utopians and Masons united in their efforts for universal and secular primary education and took several important measures to achieve their mission such as the foundation of the *Ligue de l'Enseignement* founded by Jean Macé in 1866, the opening of a night school by *L'École Mutuelle* in 1869, while Masons also took the pledge of universal education.⁴¹⁶ Masons espoused a 'practical, moral, and regenerative' educational ideology based on the brotherhood of nations, an opposition to war, and the emergence of a United States of Europe.⁴¹⁷ Such an educative model reworked several utopian beliefs in relation to the role of women and the complementarity of the sexes which abandoned the Saint-Simonian quest for a female-messiah while retaining the ideal of harmony between the sexes which would 'not be worked out in cosmic union but in the quotidian arrangements of married life.'⁴¹⁸

The perception of female education among masonic republicans in the 1860s and 1870s was deeply informed by republican ideas concerning the sexual division of labour and 'republican motherhood' – republicans endorsed female education as a preparation for women's domestic role as a wife and a mother within the ideal republican family. By granting women a practical education, they believed that women would assist in strengthening the fraternity of the nation by rearing their sons

⁴¹⁵ The *Loi Falloux* was a law which was initiated by Alfred de Falloux, Minister for Instruction in the National Assembly until September 1849, which was passed on 15 March 1850. The law proposed a system of 'liberté d'enseignement' which authorised the free establishment of schools by members of the public provided they facilitated for state examinations. While proposing a concept of free education, in reality, the new law greatly facilitated the clerical domination of education as the clergy were able to set up private schools throughout the country. While Hugo was not hostile towards this measure, he argued that public, state-supervised schools should be set up throughout France to rival these schools and to offer an equal, non-denominational and free education to children of all social classes.

⁴¹⁶ *Actes et Paroles I*, pp. 25-26

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 27.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid*

according to the ideals of brotherhood. Philip Nord describes how masonic feminists, who were partisans of women's access to education 'were inclined to conceive of school more as a training ground for happy and virtuous domesticity than as a preparation for working-life.'⁴¹⁹

While masonic republicans endorsed female education as part of their wider reconfiguration of the family unit, the considerable advances in female education during the 1850s and 1860s also gave rise to a new form of feminist activity during the late 1860s and 1870s which was deeply orientated towards women's demands for equal education as a means of effecting their wider social, civil, and legal emancipation. This resurgence in feminist activity in the early Third Republic abandoned the revolutionary feminism of the Paris Commune and the Utopian feminism of the 1830s and 1840s in favour of a republican, liberal, and intellectual feminism characterised by the spread of public lectures and conferences, and the distribution of feminist publications and newspapers which attracted a wide-ranging audience from middle-class intelligencia to members of the working class.⁴²⁰ The leading feminists involved in the renewed feminist activity of the late 1860s and 1870s include Léon Richer and Maria Deraismes who raised public awareness on a broad range of feminist issues such as sexual segregation in the workplace, legal reform, equal pay for women, the right to divorce, and women's civil liberty and equal citizenship. Richer and Deraismes placed particular importance upon women's right to education and intellectual improvement as a means of escaping their domestic confinement and becoming the agents of their own emancipation. They also placed central importance upon women's education in her struggle to end the scourge of

⁴¹⁹ Nord, p. 28.

⁴²⁰ Several influential advances were made in regards to female education during the 1850s and 1860s which deeply informed the resurgent feminist activity of the 1860s and 1870s: The *Loi Falloux* of 1850 required that communes of more than 800 persons establish girls' primary schools while in 1867, the freethinker Victor Duruy required girls' primary schools in communes of more than 500 persons; during the 1850s the number of girls who achieved the *Brevet Supérieur* rose from 356 in 1855 to 1,356 in 1875; in the 1860s, the first women, all privately educated, entered university; these women, including Julie Daubié and the Empress Eugénie wrote on issues such as sex segregation in the workplace, low wages of women, the links between women's inadequate education and economic exploitation; in the mid-60s, Daubié led the first campaign against the regulation of prostitution and organised a women's suffrage campaign in the early 1870s while also advocating legal reform in relation to women's rights in paternity suits and equal rights regarding illegitimate children. (Moses, pp. 174-176)

prostitution and to promote egalitarian and mutually respectful marital relations between men and women.

However, for the majority of leaders during the Third Republic, support for female access to education was not motivated by feminist convictions but by political and republican principles. In their effort to consolidate the new republic, several significant measures were introduced to advance women's entry into education. James F. Mc Millan comments on how the emphasis placed upon female education in the early Third Republic reflected the need for the new republic to establish itself as a secular nationalist state via its educative system: 'Whatever else she was, the "new woman" was an educated woman, and female education was a field in which women undoubtedly secured a genuine new deal in the 1880s. After the disaster of the Franco-Prussian war, the outcome of which was widely attributed to the 'Moral Order' and the monarchist threats to the security of the regime in the 1870s, Republican leaders became more convinced than ever of the need to establish a secular and national educational system.'⁴²¹

One of the most notable advances in women's education in the early Third Republic was the reform in girls' primary education undertaken by the minister of education, Jules Ferry. Mc Millan describes the legislative conditions surrounding the Ferry laws for female education introduced during the 1880s: 'Jules Ferry, the principal architect of the law of 9 August 1879, was concerned to ensure that teaching in girls' primary schools was carried on only by trained, qualified teachers, and his legislation stipulated that every department now had to have at least one training school (*école maternelle*) for women primary teachers. [...] Another law, of 16 June 1881, provided for free secular education for all children, girls, as well as boys. Compulsory attendance between the ages of six and thirteen was required by the law of 26 March 1882.'⁴²²

However, while such laws did greatly improve educational opportunities for girls, the laws on female education introduced by the Third Republic also had considerable limitations. One such limitation was the difficulty of enforcing attendance in girls' primary schools, particularly among poorer families, while the early departure of girls

⁴²¹ McMillan, James F., *France and Women 1789-1914: gender, society and politics*, (Routledge: London, 2000) p. 144.

⁴²² *Ibid*, p. 145.

from primary school also illustrated the difficulty of enacting these laws.⁴²³ Regarding the secondary education of girls, Nord further comments on how the Sée Law of 21 December 1880, introduced by Camille Sée, which created lycées and collèges for girls, was ‘inspired not by feminism but rather by the anticlerical project of secularising the state and consolidating the republican regime.’⁴²⁴ He describes how the Sée Law did not intend ‘to put girls on an equal educational footing with boys’ but to ‘reinforce the ideal of domesticity, not to destroy it.’⁴²⁵ As with the Ferry laws, the implementation of the Sée Law also encountered numerous difficulties in the form of hostility towards female education in the provinces and clerical opposition, while the excessive tightness with expenditure on the part of the Ministry of Education constituted one of the main issues impairing the early enactment of the law.⁴²⁶

The particular education proposed for women within educational tracts during the Third Republic illustrate how the republican concept of education as a preparation for life firmly placed women within the role of ‘republican mother’, and proposed an educational curriculum according to this role which included extensive training in sexing, household economy, ironing and the like: ‘De plus en plus on tâche de justifier la vieille définition: “L’école est la préparation à la vie.” Voilà pourquoi les travaux manuels des écoles de filles consistent en travaux de couture, en exercices de coupe et d’assemblage.’⁴²⁷ This explicitly feminine training could only be provided by female teachers: ‘De même que la direction des travaux manuels de garçons est confiée à l’instituteur...l’enseignement des travaux manuels de filles est en principe à la charge de l’institutrice et c’est le cas le plus fréquent [...]’⁴²⁸

These improvements in female education during the 1880s led to the vast increase in female teachers during the early decades of the Third Republic as teaching rose to prominence as one of the most acceptable professions for educated women. Such was the proliferation of female teachers between the years 1876-1906, that numbers of

⁴²³ *Ibid*

⁴²⁴ *Ibid*

⁴²⁵ *Ibid*

⁴²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 146.

⁴²⁷ Compayré, Gabriel, *Organisation pédagogique et législation des écoles primaires (pédagogie pratique et administration scolaire)*, (P. Delaplane: Paris, 1890), p. 42.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb30262605t> [Accessed 23 January 2013]

⁴²⁸ *Ibid*

female primary teachers quadrupled,⁴²⁹ while, in 1906, there were some 57,000 female teachers, constituting almost 50% of the population.⁴³⁰ Teaching was an acceptable profession for women as it placed them within an educative, moralizing role in the vital formation of future republican citizens. Stone describes how despite the fact that ‘among republican schoolteachers were to be found advocates for the further extension of women’s civil and political rights, especially the vote...republican and Radical politicians continued to view them as civic versions of “republican mothers” who offered a distinct, female instruction for their pupils.’⁴³¹ This view of female teachers is reminiscent of Enlightenment Britain where the Georgian woman schoolteacher was seen as a ‘strong, rational mother-pedagogue.’⁴³²

Such a conception of female teachers as ‘mother-pedagogues’ is very much in evidence within the political and legislative discourse of the French laws on female education in the 1880s. In the report submitted by Camille Sée to the commission charged with examining his proposal for the establishment of an *École Normale* to train female teachers for girls’ secondary schools, Sée advocates the practical, domestic-orientated education which can only be provided by female teachers: ‘Elles enseigneront à leurs élèves, outre les sciences écrites sur le programme, la science de la vie, qui est la plus difficile et la plus nécessaire de toutes.’⁴³³ Mona Ozouf comments on how the failure of the Sée law to include girls’ preparation for the Baccalauréat diploma fuelled Hubertine Auclert’s disillusionment with republican legislators: ‘La loi Camille Sée...n’a contre elle que son inachèvement, puisqu’elle couronne les études féminines non d’un baccalauréat, mais d’un diplôme stérile et décoratif. C’est sur cette incomplétude que prospèrent toutes ses controverses avec les

⁴²⁹ Stone, Judith F., ‘Republican Brotherhood’ in *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870-1914*, eds. Elinor Ann Accampo, Rachel Ginnis Fuchs and Mary Lynn Stewart, (John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore;London, 1995), p. 52.

⁴³⁰ Hause, Stephen, & Kenney, A.R., *Women’s suffrage and social politics in the French Third Republic*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1984), p. 125.

⁴³¹ Stone, p. 52.

⁴³² Hilton, Mary & Shefrin, Jill, *Educating the child in Enlightenment Britain: beliefs, cultures, practices*, (Ashgate: Burlington, 2009), p. 78.

⁴³³ *Lycées et collèges de jeunes filles: documents, rapports, et discours à la Chambre des députés et au Sénat, décrets, arrêtés, circulaires etc. relatifs à la loi sur l’enseignement secondaire des jeunes filles*, (3^e édition), préface par M. Camille Sée, (L. Cerf : Paris, 1888), p. 443.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb334657496> [Accessed 21 January 2011]

républicains.⁴³⁴ Furthermore, considerable differences existed in the treatment of female and male teachers regarding issues such as pay, dress, and marital rights.⁴³⁵

Hugo's letter to A.M. Trébois, president of *La Société des écoles*, in support of female education: Education and Instruction.

On 2 June 1872, Hugo sent a letter to A.M. Trébois to profess his support for women's access to equal education. In his letter, he pledges his full support for the inclusion of women within the secularized education proposed by Louis Blanc: 'Monsieur, Vous avez raison de le penser, j'adhère complètement à l'éloquente et irréfutable lettre que vous a adressée Louis Blanc. Je n'ai rien à y ajouter que ma signature. Louis Blanc est dans le vrai absolu et pose les réels principes de l'instruction laïque, aussi bien pour les femmes que pour les hommes.'⁴³⁶

In his letter, Hugo makes a clear distinction between education and instruction: 'Quant à moi, je vois clairement deux faits distincts, l'éducation et l'instruction.'⁴³⁷ He attributes the role of education to the family, while he confers the role of instruction to the state: 'L'éducation, c'est la famille qui la donne; l'instruction, c'est l'état qui la doit. L'enfant veut être élevé par la famille et instruit par la patrie.'⁴³⁸ Such a distinction between education and instruction pervades republican pedagogical discourse during the Enlightenment and throughout the 19th century. In *Cinq mémoires sur l'instruction publique*, Condorcet identifies education as the responsibility of parents, and instruction as the duty of the state in the formation of future citizens. Like Hugo, he identified national instruction as the duty of the Republic: 'L'instruction publique est un devoir de la société à l'égard des citoyens.'⁴³⁹ He argues that national education should be limited to instruction and that parents were responsible for the religious instruction of their children, and the cultivation of conscience in their children: 'Il faut...que la puissance publique se borne à l'instruction, en abandonnant

⁴³⁴ Ozouf, Mona, *Les mots des femmes: essai sur la singularité française*, (Fayard: Paris, 1995), p. 221.

⁴³⁵ McMillan, p. 151.

⁴³⁶ *Actes et Paroles III*, (J. Hetzel: Paris, 1880-1926), p. 271.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb373094302> [Accessed 12 February 2013]

⁴³⁷ *Ibid*

⁴³⁸ *Ibid*

⁴³⁹ Condorcet, Marquis de, *Cinq Mémoires sur l'Instruction Publique*, (Flammarion: Paris, 1994), p. 68.

aux familles le reste de l'éducation.'⁴⁴⁰ He proposes a non-elitist common system of public instruction which would not discriminate between social classes and which allowed for the cultivation of genius in children of all classes: 'Il serait donc important d'avoir une forme d'instruction publique qui ne laissât échapper aucun talent sans être aperçu, et qui lui offrit alors tous les secours réservés jusqu'ici aux enfants des riches.'⁴⁴¹ Protesting against the prejudices engendered by clerical state-controlled education, Condorcet argues that parents alone are responsible for instilling opinions in their children: 'Les parents seuls peuvent avoir le droit de faire enseigner ces opinions, ou plutôt la société n'a pas le droit de les en empêcher.'⁴⁴² The universality and strict separation of church and state entailed within Condorcet's vision of public instruction correspond exactly to the fundamental tenets of Hugo's vision for the reform of national education, namely 'la laïcité, 'l'obligation', and 'la gratuité.'⁴⁴³

In his speech on 'La liberté de l'enseignement' in 1850, Hugo echoes Condorcet's vision of a secular, universal, and free educative system when he calls for a secular but state-supervised national education: '[...] je veux...la liberté de l'enseignement; mais je veux la surveillance de l'Etat; et comme je veux cette surveillance effective, je veux l'Etat laïque, purement laïque, exclusivement laïque. [...] Je veux donc la liberté d'enseignement sous la surveillance de l'Etat [...]'⁴⁴⁴ Like Condorcet, Hugo argues that such an educative system would result in progress, scientific advances, and the cultivation of national genius. However, the most significant similarity between the educative model envisioned by Condorcet and Hugo is that both advocated the equal instruction of women within their vision of universal national education.

Unlike Rousseau who advocated an equivalent yet grossly unequal education for the sexes, Condorcet called for the equal instruction of men and women. While he acknowledged that women did not exert the same public functions as men, he argued that all women should nonetheless receive a common elementary instruction to that of men, and thereafter that women who wished to compete with men in various public

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 81.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 87.

⁴⁴² *Ibid*, p. 126.

⁴⁴³ 'Pour moi l'idéal de cette question de l'enseignement, le voici: L'instruction gratuite et obligatoire. Obligatoire au premier degré seulement, gratuite à tous les degrés.' *Actes et Paroles I*, (A. Michel: Paris, 1937-1940) p. 177. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb322627986> [Accessed 23 February 2013]

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid*, pp 178-179

professions should receive the same specialised instruction as men: ‘S’il est quelque profession qui soit exclusivement réservée aux hommes, les femmes ne seraient point admises à l’instruction particulière qu’elle peut exiger; mais il serait absurde de les exclure de celle qui a pour objet les professions qu’elles doivent exercer en concurrence.’⁴⁴⁵ Hugo similarly includes women within his vision for educative reform when he declares that a secular and universal education should be extended to women as well as men: ‘[...] l’instruction laïque aussi bien pour les femmes que pour les hommes [...]’⁴⁴⁶

Further, Hugo’s personal conception of education as the responsibility of parents not only reflects that of Condorcet but is also deeply reminiscent of the views espoused by other leading Enlightenment thinkers on education such as William Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft who propounded the central role of the family, and particularly the mother, in the early education of children and the formation of future citizens. Within Rousseau’s ideal model of education, women assumed a vital role in cultivating the principles of virtue, morality, and modesty in their children. The prescriptive education set out in his novels *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and *Emile* had a profound impact on educational reforms not only in France and Britain, but also throughout Europe in the late 18th and 19th centuries. However, his proposed model for female education also came under intense fire from feminists of his time such as Wollstonecraft, and feminists advocating women’s access to education a century later such as Richer and Deraismes.

The aspects of Rousseau’s female educative model which elicited most criticism were his views concerning the limited intellect and distinct lack of genius in women, the idea that women’s education should be orientated towards the pleasure of men, and that it should be conditioned by the tastes and desires of men. Rousseau describes his ideal female student, Sophie, as the exact replica of his ideal male student Emile who submits unreservedly to his interests and desires. Such a formulation of women’s education did not allow any scope for the elevation of female genius, which Rousseau saw as a transgression of women’s duties: ‘De la sublime élévation de son beau génie, elle dédaigne tous ses devoirs de femme [...] Sa dignité est d’être ignorée; sa gloire est

⁴⁴⁵ Condorcet, *Cinq Mémoires*, pp. 96-97

⁴⁴⁶ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 271.

dans l'estime de son mari. Ses plaisirs sont le bonheur de sa famille [...]'⁴⁴⁷ Within Rousseau's educative formula, women are defined uniquely in terms of their function to men: '[...] elle sera la femme de l'homme [...] Elle ne sera point le professeur de son mari, mais son disciple; loin de vouloir l'assujettir à ses goûts, elle prendra les siens. Elle vaudra mieux pour lui que si elle était savante; il aura le plaisir de lui tout enseigner.'⁴⁴⁸

For Rousseau, the desired result of such an education was to cultivate women's moral qualities and affective tastes and interests as distinct from the cultivation of their intellect, scientific thinking, logical reasoning, or genius: 'L'art de penser n'est pas étranger aux femmes, mais elles ne doivent faire qu'effleurer les sciences de raisonnement. Sophie conçoit tout et ne retient pas grand-chose. Ses plus grands progrès sont dans la morale et les choses du goût [...]'⁴⁴⁹

These are the qualities which Rousseau attributes to the Spartan and Roman mother, whose chastity, virtue, and modesty provided a model for his vision of 'republican motherhood': 'Tous les peuples qui ont eu des mœurs ont respecté les femmes. Voyez Sparte, voyez les Germains, voyez Rome, Rome le siège de la gloire et de la vertu [...]'⁴⁵⁰ He believes that all of women's glory and power reside in their virtue: 'Son empire commence avec ses vertus; à peine ses attraits se développent, qu'elle règne déjà par la douceur de son caractère et rend sa modestie imposante.'⁴⁵¹

In *A Vindications of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft condemned this prescriptive model of female education set out by Rousseau as 'captivating but grossly unnatural.'⁴⁵² One of the primary aspects of Rousseau's educative proposals to which Wollstonecraft most vehemently protested was the fact that 'the foundation of her (woman's) character' and 'the principles on which her education was built' required that women submit completely to the obedience of their husbands and masters: 'He carries the arguments, which he pretends to draw from the indication of nature...and insinuates that truth and fortitude, the corner stone of all human virtue, should be

⁴⁴⁷ *Emile*, p. 536.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 537-538

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 558-559

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 512.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid*, pp. 511-512

⁴⁵² Wollstonecraft, Mary, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1994), p. 90.

cultivated with certain restrictions, because, with respect to the female character, obedience is the grand lesson which ought to be impressed with unrelenting rigour.⁴⁵³ Wollstonecraft refutes the way in which Rousseau invokes the presumed natural qualities of the female sex such as their cunning and dependence on others to bolster his arguments for their submissive education: ‘Rousseau declares that a woman should never...feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her *natural* cunning, and made a coquettish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a *sweeter* companion to man, whenever he chooses to relax himself.’⁴⁵⁴

She further condemns the ‘whole tendency’ of Rousseau’s female educative system to render women pleasing to men, arguing that when women are taught to define themselves solely in terms of their ability to please others, it leads to disaster within their marital and familial lives as they grow languid and despondent when the initial passion of their marriage wanes, and indulge in reveries and fantasy or succumb to jealousy and vanity, to the neglect of their parental and wifely duties.⁴⁵⁵ Wollstonecraft proposed an alternative educative model to that of Rousseau which promoted the cultivation of women’s strength of mind and body, their sense of personal independence and self-respect, their intellect, logic, and judgement.

The Enlightened alternative to Rousseau’s female educative model proposed by Enlightenment feminist thinkers and by feminists in the Third Republic.

Although Wollstonecraft’s educative model is based on far more emancipatory principles than that of Rousseau, her proposed reforms for female education are underpinned by the same fundamental motive as that of Rousseau’s – namely to prepare women for their maternal roles and their parental and wifely duties within the family. She argues that ‘[...] the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend...of her husband’⁴⁵⁶ By cultivating their bodies and minds, Wollstonecraft argues that women would not only be emancipated from their subordinate dependence on men, but would also possess the independence of mind to carry on the functioning

⁴⁵³ *Ibid*

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 91.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 93-94

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 95.

of the family home should the husband die or abandon them, enabling them to perform the ‘double duty of being the father as well as the mother to her children.’⁴⁵⁷

These views concerning the cultivation of female reason and independence of mind are also strongly shared by Condorcet who endorses the fundamental premise of Wollstonecraft’s *Vindications* that it is women’s defective education as distinct from any natural inferiority that is to blame for their inferior social existence: ‘On a dit que les femmes...n’avaient pas proprement le sentiment de la justice; qu’elles obéissaient plutôt à leur sentiment qu’à leur conscience. Cette observation est...vraie mais elle ne prouve rien: ce n’est pas la nature, c’est l’éducation, c’est l’existence sociale qui cause cette différence.’⁴⁵⁸ Like Wollstonecraft, Condorcet rejects Rousseau’s model of dependent, submissive female education by arguing that women should acquire independence of mind and reason. In *Conseils à sa fille* (1794), Condorcet echoes Wollstonecraft by promoting the fundamental importance of work for women so as to escape a life of dependence: ‘Prends l’habitude du travail non seulement pour te suffire à toi-même...mais pour que ce travail puisse pourvoir à tes besoins, et que tu puisses être réduite à la pauvreté, sans l’être à la dépendance.’⁴⁵⁹

The views on female education articulated by Condorcet in *Cinq mémoires sur l’instruction publique* reveal precisely the same fundamental motive as Wollstonecraft’s *Vindications* – namely to extend education to women in order to improve their ability to fulfil their parental and wifely duties. Condorcet argues that by improving the instruction received by women, they, in turn, will be better equipped to provide better instruction to their children: ‘Il est nécessaire que les femmes partagent l’instruction donnée aux hommes...pour qu’elles puissent surveiller celle de leurs enfants.’⁴⁶⁰ He argues that it is incumbent upon mothers to undertake the instruction of their children in the home to prepare them for their role as future citizens of the nation as this role cannot be filled by public instruction alone or by any domestic servant.⁴⁶¹ However, while Condorcet assigns women with the primal role of

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 118.

⁴⁵⁸ Condorcet, *Sur l’admission des femmes au droit de cité*, (Firmin Didot frères, imprimerie De l’Institut: Paris, 1847), p. 125. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb372370480> [Accessed 14 June 2013]

⁴⁵⁹ Condorcet, *Œuvres de Condorcet, Tome I*, (Firmin Didot frères : Paris, 1847-1849), pp. 611-613 <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb30263648b> [Accessed 17 June 2013]

⁴⁶⁰ Condorcet, *Cinq Mémoires*, p. 98.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid*

instructing children, he does not limit women's role solely to the instruction of children like Rousseau and his republican contemporaries, but rather he argues from the practical standpoint that it is women who are predominantly in the home with children and thus assume the principal responsibility of their education.⁴⁶² Thus whereas Rousseau's educative model promoted the cultivation of women's virtue, modesty, their bodily and mental dependence on men, their propensity towards pleasure, and their 'blind obedience' to the authority of their husbands, both Wollstonecraft and Condorcet proposed an alternative model for female education which promoted the logic of cultivating women's intellect, power of reasoning, independence, self-respect, judgement and independence of spirit as a means of preparing women for their roles as wife and as mother.

In the following century, female writers on education continued to take issue with Rousseau's proposed model of female education for maintaining women in a state of dependence, ignorance, and submission to male authority by cultivating their affective, moral, and virtuous qualities while denying their intellectual and mental capacities. Almost a full century after Wollstonecraft's *Vindications*, Maria Deraismes echoes her argument that female virtue should be based on the enlightened cultivation of reason, intellect, and knowledge as opposed to the overwrought cultivation of sentiment, charm, and ignorance extolled by Rousseau's female educative model. She shares Wollstonecraft's views that female virtue is the product of reason and knowledge, while also condemning the cultivation of ignorance in women as the source of their inferior social and intellectual status, and the consequent degeneration of the family home: 'Par l'absence d'instruction rationnelle, on a crée une infériorité féminine qui annule la puissance de la vertu et lui enlève même son action et son charme. [...] Cette situation et cette éducation subalternes de la femme diminuent les chances du bonheur du ménage.'⁴⁶³ Further echoing Wollstonecraft and Condorcet, Deraismes attributes the breakdown of spousal relations to the profound disparities between male and female instruction: 'La différence d'apport intellectuel et scientifique chez les époux rompt l'équilibre: un malaise s'empare de l'un et de l'autre

⁴⁶² *Ibid*

⁴⁶³ Deraismes, Maria, *Œuvres complètes de Maria Deraismes. Nos principes et nos mœurs. L'ancien devant le nouveau*, (Ancienne Librairie Germer Baillièere et Cie: Paris, 1896), pp. 52-53
<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb320177621> [Accessed 20 January 2013]

et notamment du mari [...] il y a communion d'intérêt, il n'y a point communion d'idées...il manque quelque chose à la vie du foyer.'⁴⁶⁴

Deeply reminiscent of Wollstonecraft's conception of marital relations as a companionate bond of mutual respect and friendship, she argues that a 'mariage de raison' is contingent upon the equal instruction of men and women: 'Pour faire ce qui s'appelle un mariage de raison, il faut qu'il y ait sympathie physique et morale. La jeune fille instruite au même degré que l'homme qu'elle a choisi, a le sentiment de dignité.'⁴⁶⁵ Like Wollstonecraft, Deraismes argues that such an egalitarian relationship in turn secures the harmony, morality, and virtue of the larger family unit: 'L'égalité des deux époux est une garantie pour la sécurité de la maison [...] on ne verra plus l'homme compromettre sa santé, sa fortune, son avenir...dans des alliances honteuses, la postérité n'en sera que plus saine de corps et d'esprit; lui-même...saura mettre le bonheur à sa vraie place.'⁴⁶⁶

However, while Wollstonecraft, Condorcet, and Deraismes present a far more enlightened view of female education than that of Rousseau by proposing an egalitarian instruction for men and women, and by arguing that female virtue is the product of knowledge and reason as distinct from feminine charm and sensibility, significantly, for each of these thinkers, the primary goal of female instruction is directed toward the successful fulfilment of women's domestic roles while the marital and familial relations envisaged by Wollstonecraft, Condorcet, and again by Deraismes, almost a century later, closely reflect the harmonious relations proposed by Rousseau's social novels. In *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, spousal relations are characterised by mutual bonds of friendship, respect, sympathy, and understanding and the renouncement of amorous passion, to which Rousseau attributes the domestic harmony of the family and the wider community of Clarens.

Despite the well-worn assaults on the sexism inherent within Rousseau's model of female education, his views on the central role of education in the formation of citizens, and the particular importance attached to the role of parents in the instruction of children reveal far more inclusive and utilitarian principles on women's education

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 53.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 60-61

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 62.

than the majority of his Republican contemporaries and successors.⁴⁶⁷ As we have seen, the major reason underlying Wollstonecraft and Condorcet's demands for reforms in female education was the improvement of women's parental duties and responsibilities. Wollstonecraft argues that women need to be able to exercise reason and judgement in order to make sound parental decisions, but observes that the present system of female education only cultivated their vanity, coquetry, inconstancy, insolence, and propensity towards pleasure. Deraismes similarly argues that women need to possess both reason and knowledge in order to equip them for their maternal and educative role within the family: 'Il est presque unanime de reconnaître que la femme représente la famille, le foyer, la maison. [...] Si la femme est ignorante, le souffle intellectuel ne traversera jamais la maison; si, au contraire, elle est instruite, le foyer rayonnera et donnera une large hospitalité à toutes les choses de l'esprit.'⁴⁶⁸

However, Rousseau also recognised that women would never be able to raise children without possessing the powers of reflection and that in order for women to acquire the esteem of her husband, they should possess both spirit and reason: 'Elle devient le juge de ses juges... Rien de tout cela ne peut bien se faire sans cultiver son esprit et sa raison.'⁴⁶⁹ Wollstonecraft's steadfast desire to refashion the marital relationship from a union of love and passion into one built upon the solid and enduring ties of esteem, friendship, and mutual respect as a means of unifying spouses in their parental obligations, a view shared by Deraismes and Richer, is also deeply evident within Rousseau's writings.

In *Emile*, Rousseau proposes a female education which cultivates women's feminine charm, sensibility, and virtue but he nonetheless argues that honesty is the quality which most endears a husband to his wife and which endures long after the fleeting charms of beauty: '[...] les grâces ne s'usent pas comme la beauté; elles ont de la vie, elles se renouvellent sans cesse, et au bout de trente ans de mariage, une honnête

⁴⁶⁷ Rousseau's views on female education were far more advanced than those shared by a great many of his contemporary Republicans but also his republican successors in 19th century France such as Proudhon and Michelet whose vision of women in the home was far less dynamic than the diverse roles which Rousseau envisioned for women within the home. See Proudhon, *La pornocratie, ou Les femmes dans les temps modernes*, see Rousseau, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, see Michelet, *La Femme*.

⁴⁶⁸ Deraismes, *Ève dans l'humanité*, p. 63.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 502.

femme avec des grâces plaît à son mari comme le premier jour.⁴⁷⁰ Rousseau also believes that a marriage based on friendship and mutual affection is far more enduring than a union based on passion as it allows for the fulfilment of parental duties – this is precisely the marital relationship which he prescribes for both Saint-Preux and Julie and Emile and Sophie: ‘Les enfants forment...une liaison non moins douce et souvent plus forte que l’amour même quand vous cesserez d’être la maîtresse d’Emile, vous serez la femme et son amie; vous serez la mère de ses enfants.’⁴⁷¹

For Wollstonecraft, Condorcet, and Rousseau, and later for Deraismes, the promotion of a marital union based on friendship, mutual respect, and shared parental responsibility reflect their conception of the family as the fundamental social unit of society which performed the instrumental task of forming future citizens and future generations. It is only upon women’s acquisition of sense and independence of mind that parental responsibility can be equally distributed between both parents, and that parental affection produces sentiments of mutual respect, sympathy and natural affection between parents and children, which, in turn, produces filial duty: ‘In the exercise of their maternal feelings providence has furnished women with a natural substitute for love, when the lover becomes only a friend, and mutual confidence takes place of overstrained admiration...and a mutual care produces a new mutual sympathy.’⁴⁷²

The Role of Women’s Education in the attainment of Women’s Rights.

Like Wollstonecraft, Condorcet argues that the preservation of the rights of man is contingent upon the extension of equal instruction to women: ‘Il serait donc impossible d’établir dans l’instruction cette égalité nécessaire du maintien des droits des hommes...si, en faisant parcourir aux femmes au moins les premiers degrés de l’instruction commune, on ne les mettait en état de surveiller celle de leurs enfants.’⁴⁷³ Unlike Rousseau however, Condorcet does not see the maternal duties of women as the basis for their confinement to the domestic sphere, but rather sees no reason why

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 537.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid*

⁴⁷² *Ibid*, p. 234.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 98.

women's wifely and maternal responsibilities should exclude them from admission to the judicial, legal, and political life of the public sphere.

The extent to which Condorcet surpassed the gendered perceptions of his time, and those which pervaded 19th century pedagogical discourse by invoking women's maternal responsibilities as the basis for their inclusion within the public sphere, as opposed to a justification for their exclusion from it, is strikingly evident in his essay *Sur l'admission des femmes au droit de la cité*. Condorcet vehemently rejects as a form of legal tyranny, the denial of women's natural rights upon which rests their legal exclusion from the public life of the nation: 'Il serait difficile de prouver que les femmes sont incapables d'exercer les droits de cité. Pourquoi des êtres exposés à des grossesses...ne pourraient-ils exercer des droits dont on n'a jamais imaginé de priver les gens qui ont la goutte tous les hivers, et qui s'enrhument aisément ?'⁴⁷⁴ Indeed, Condorcet argues that it is women's superior feminine virtues which enable them to understand the concept of liberty and sacrifice and which thus validate their claim to equal citizenship in the republic: 'Les femmes sont supérieures aux hommes dans les vertus douces et domestiques; elles savent, comme les hommes, aimer la liberté...et dans les républiques, on les a vus souvent sacrifier pour elle: elles ont montré les vertus de citoyen toutes les fois...où les troubles civils les ont amenées sur une scène dont l'orgueil et la tyrannie des hommes les ont écartées chez tous les peuples.'⁴⁷⁵

He argues that the participation of women in public life will in no way detract from their maternal and domestic duties, but rather will enrich their ability to create domestic harmony and to form the future men of the Republic: 'Ainsi il ne faut pas croire que les femmes pourraient être membres des assemblées nationales, elles abandonneraient sur-le-champ leurs enfants, leur ménage, leur aiguille. Elles n'en seraient que plus propres à élever leurs enfants, à former les hommes.'⁴⁷⁶ While Condorcet identifies a natural inclination for women's maternal and domestic role, he stresses that this does not provide a natural basis for their legal exclusion from the public life. Contrary to Rousseau, and the majority of republicans involved in the legislation on women's rights in the 19th century such as Gambetta, Ferry, and Pelletan, who drew upon women's natural maternal tendencies as the basis of their exclusion from the

⁴⁷⁴ Condorcet, *Sur l'admission des femmes au droit de cité*, p. 122.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 124.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 128.

public life of the republic, Condorcet argues that no natural difference exists between men and women to legitimate the denial of their natural rights, but rather argues that it is women's natural qualities which enrich their contribution to public life, to the lives of men, and indeed, to society at large.

The feminist thrust of Condorcet's argument for the extension of equal instruction and natural rights to women is reflective of the arguments presented by Olympe de Gouges, who similarly invoked the superiority of women's maternal function as the basis for their equal citizenship. De Gouges deeply echoes Condorcet's argument when she declares that inequality between the sexes introduces larger social inequality and corruption into the nation. While Condorcet argues that: 'Jusqu'ici, chez les peuples, l'inégalité légale a existé entre les hommes et les femmes...l'inégalité introduit nécessairement la corruption, et en est la source la plus commune, si même elle n'est pas la seule,'⁴⁷⁷ de Gouges declares that 'l'ignorance, l'oubli ou le mépris des droits de la femme, sont les seules causes des malheurs publics et de la corruption des gouvernements [...]'⁴⁷⁸ Like Condorcet, de Gouges bases her argument for the extension of equal rights to women on its larger social utility: 'La garantie des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne nécessite une utilité majeure; cette garantie doit être instituée pour l'avantage de tous et non pour l'utilité particulière de celles à qui elle est confiée.'⁴⁷⁹ Further echoing Condorcet, de Gouges argues that the enriching contribution which women can make to public life resides in their natural, maternal supremacy as 'le sexe supérieur en beauté comme en courage dans les souffrances maternelles.'⁴⁸⁰ Like Condorcet and Wollstonecraft, de Gouges argues that the extension of equal citizenship to women is dependent on the extension of an egalitarian national instruction to women: '[...] on peut la préparer par l'éducation nationale, par la restauration des mœurs et par les conventions conjugales.'⁴⁸¹

Female education and its wider social utility.

Such ideas reflecting the importance of women's education in the formation of male citizens, and the creation of domestic and wider social harmony are however also

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 129.

⁴⁷⁸ De Gouges, p. 13.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 18.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 14.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 24.

strikingly evident within the educative roles assigned to parents in Rousseau's social novels, such as that undertaken by Wolmar and Julie in the education of their children and their larger family of domestics and workers in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Like Wollstonecraft, Rousseau argued that the education of children should commence from the earliest stage of their existence.⁴⁸² He similarly sees the education of children as the fundamental function of marriage: '[...] la plus importante éducation...est de rendre un enfant propre à être élevé.'⁴⁸³ Like Wollstonecraft, Rousseau argues that women must exert reason in their parental duties in order to encourage the child's natural stages of mental development, but for Rousseau, the cultivation of reason is an intellectual capacity which is most important in the formation of men: '[...] de toutes les instructions propres à l'homme, celle qu'il acquiert le plus tard et le plus difficilement est la raison même.'⁴⁸⁴ Every aspect of Julie's educative practices is directed towards the successful socialisation of her children. By putting her children to work, Julie's educative method dispels any propensities towards idleness and encourages a 'goût du travail, de l'ordre, de la modération.'⁴⁸⁵ Although the education which Julie bestows on her children and the wider family of Clarens is based upon a strict division of domestic tasks and the separation of men and women, the multiple roles exerted by Julie at Clarens from the administrative and financial functioning of the state, to the care of orphans and elderly neighbours, and the selection and training of domestics, reveal the indispensable importance which Rousseau nonetheless attached to women's educative abilities in the cultivation of modesty, harmony, sympathy, and respect, within the family and larger community: '[...] que c'est un spectacle agréable et touchant que celui d'une maison simple et bien réglée où règnent l'ordre, la paix, l'innocence; où l'on voit réunie sans appareil, sans éclat, tout ce qui répond à la véritable destination de l'homme !'⁴⁸⁶

Significantly the views on female education espoused by Deraismes reflect the same fundamental objectives of her Enlightenment predecessors most notably, the complementarity of parental educative duties, the need for women to exert reason and sentiment in the education of children, and the wider social utility of the family in the

⁴⁸² Rousseau, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, (Éditions Gallimard: Paris, 2002), p. 632.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 625.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 626.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 620.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 503.

formation of future citizens. The fact that feminists in the Third Republic were still advocating the fundamental principles of Enlightenment arguments on female education reveals how little progress was made by successive post-revolutionary administrations to extend an equal, non-discriminatory, and national education to women. In particular, the fact that feminists in the Third Republic were still invoking women's maternal nature as a justification for the extension of an equal, national instruction to women, rather than the basis of their exclusion from it, reveals how the male-defined educative system, like the legal and judicial system, provided an enabling structure for the construction of gender ideology through its explicit gendering of logical, scientific male knowledge, and feminine, aesthetic knowledge, its implementation of strictly polarised education and training orientated towards the sexual division of labour, and a strict division of public and private spheres.

Léon Richer's views on female education further echo those of Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, Condorcet, and Deraismes, by propounding a harmonious marital relationship between spouses, and emphasising the shared responsibility of parents and the special educative role of mothers in the early education of children. He similarly proposes a marital relationship based on mutual sympathy, understanding, and harmony: 'Je ne demande pas à déplacer la servitude, à substituer l'autorité de l'autre [...] Dans la plupart des cas, je compte sur ce qui, fort heureusement, se rencontre le plus souvent dans le mariage: l'entente, la bonne harmonie, l'affection mutuelle.'⁴⁸⁷ Richer shares the views of Condorcet, Wollstonecraft, and Deraismes, that it is education, and not any presumed natural inferiority, which is to blame for the inequality of the sexes: 'Condorcet dit formellement que la différence que nous constatons entre la valeur morale de l'homme et la valeur morale de la femme, n'est pas un fait de nature, une question de sexe, mais bien une question d'éducation et de milieu.'⁴⁸⁸

Like Condorcet, Richer makes a clear distinction between education and instruction and calls for the extension of equal education for women on the basis of their unique role in the formation and instruction of men. One of the reasons proposed by Condorcet for the extension of equal instruction to women is the improvement of their

⁴⁸⁷ Richer, *Le code des femmes*, (E. Dentu: Paris, 1883), p. 171.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb312133478>, [Accessed 13 June 2013]

⁴⁸⁸ Richer, *La femme libre*, pp. 175-176

ability to instruct men: ‘J’ajouterai encore que les hommes qui auront profité de l’instruction publique en conserveront bien aisément les avantages, s’ils trouvent dans leurs femmes une instruction à peu près égale [...]’⁴⁸⁹ Richer similarly argues that ‘C’est la femme qui fait l’homme...Elle le fait comme mère, elle le fait comme épouse, elle le fait comme sœur, elle le fait comme amie. [...] Et c’est là un grand enseignement pour nous; il nous montre que les mères doivent être formées de telles sortes qu’elles ne puissent exercer qu’une influence féconde et salutaire.’⁴⁹⁰

He further echoes the progressive views of his Enlightenment predecessors by situating his argument for the equal instruction of women in terms of its wider social utility: ‘Mais la femme ne fait pas seulement l’homme, elle fait aussi la société, et en même temps qu’elle fait la société, elle fait les mœurs.’⁴⁹¹ Like Condorcet and Wollstonecraft, Richer argues that the extension of equal instruction to women will in no way detract from their maternal qualities, but will in fact improve them: ‘Nous craignons, – si les femmes ne restent pas tout à fait *aveugles*, – qu’elles perdent leur qualités de bonnes ménagères ou leurs grâces physiques. Mais l’instruction n’ôte rien des dons de la nature...elle les accroît, loin de les diminuer.’⁴⁹² Further echoing Wollstonecraft and Condorcet, Richer argues that it is only when women receive an equal instruction, and not the religious, superstitious instruction to which they are accustomed, that they can truly fulfil their maternal role as educators, mothers of future citizens, and creators of familial and social harmony.⁴⁹³

The views on female education expressed by Richer and Deraismes are also foreshadowed by Flora Tristan who also attributed women with the creation of familial and wider social harmony: ‘Car c’est la mère qui unit la famille si c’est le père qui la nourrit. La femme est la reine de l’harmonie et c’est pourquoi elle doit être à la tête du mouvement régénérateur de l’avenir. Car, pour que vous viviez en frères, il faut que la mère vous apprenne à vous entr’aimer !’⁴⁹⁴ Foreshadowing the intellectually-orientated feminism of Richer and Deraismes, Tristan declares that female instruction

⁴⁸⁹ Condorcet, *Cinq Mémoires*, p. 99.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 179.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 181.

⁴⁹² *Ibid*, p. 188.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid*, pp. 166-167

⁴⁹⁴ Tristan, Flora, *L’émancipation de la femme, ou Le testament de la paria*, (La Vérité: Paris, 1846), pp. 81-82 <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb31497154z> [Accessed 19 June 2013]

is fundamental to their emancipation: ‘Pour émanciper ces serfs il faut les instruire [...]’⁴⁹⁵ Like Deraismes and Richer, Tristan endows women with ‘le génie maternel’, and invokes the unique educative role of mothers as the basis of her argument for the extension of equal education to women: ‘Leurs droits sont les mêmes que ceux des hommes ! elles ont de plus la divine prérogative de la maternité ! [...] je veux vous sauver, mais il faut vous instruire, il faut vous dégager des scrupules d’une fausse religion [...]’⁴⁹⁶ Like Deraismes and Richer, Tristan also reflects the views of her Enlightenment predecessors by envisaging the advantages of female education in terms of its influence on the lives of men and its wider social utility: ‘Quand vous saurez vouloir, tout sera fait, car les hommes ont besoin de vous, comme l’enfant a besoin de sa mère !’

Hugo and Women’s Education.

In his letter to A.M. Trébois, Hugo, like his contemporary feminists proposes an educative model which bears considerable resemblance to that extolled by his Enlightenment predecessors but which comes closer in certain aspects to that proposed by Rousseau. Like his contemporaneous feminist thinkers and his Enlightenment predecessors, Hugo stresses that it is ‘la famille’ which is responsible for a child’s education, suggesting that both parents assume equal importance within the education of children; ‘L’éducation, c’est la famille qui la donne; l’instruction, c’est l’état qui la doit. L’enfant veut être élevé par la famille et instruit par la patrie [...]’⁴⁹⁷ While Hugo shares both Wollstonecraft and Rousseau’s views by attributing parents with equal parental responsibility, in the next lines, his language appears to exclude women from the intellectual development of children when he makes the precision that it is the father who bestows the values of faith and conscience upon the child, and thus comes closer to the views of Rousseau in this instance: ‘Le père donne à l’enfant sa foi ou sa philosophie; l’état donne à l’enfant l’enseignement positif.’⁴⁹⁸

Rousseau similarly attributes fathers with the responsibility of cultivating genius, intellect, and philosophy in their sons, while such qualities were not deemed important within women’s education which was primarily orientated towards their maternal and

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 111-112

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁹⁷ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 271.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid*

domestic duties. In *Emile*, Rousseau also assigns to the father, the task of teaching catechism to his daughters: ‘Hors d’état d’être juges elles-mêmes, elles doivent recevoir la décision des pères et des maris comme celle de l’Eglise.’⁴⁹⁹ Hugo also comes closer to Rousseau’s educative model in relation to the relevance of scientific instruction in the education of women.

The exclusion of women from scientific instruction in 19th century France.

Many 19th century feminists refuted the exclusion of women from philosophical instruction as philosophy was explicitly associated with the domain of male intellect, logic, and reason, and the exclusion of women therefrom thus served to re-enforce sexist assumptions of male intellect as the faculty of reason and female intellect as the faculty of sentiment. Deraismes argued that such gendered assumptions concerning the rational strength of men and the emotional strength of women kept women in a state of oppression and perpetuated the strict division of public and private spheres. In *Emile*, the inequitable gendered educative system which Rousseau proposes is based upon a long-held assumption of women as the inferior sex, both mentally and bodily. Throughout the 19th century, presumptions concerning women’s biological and mental inferiority defined the treatment of both sexes within the national educative system. In *Le code des femmes*, Richer declares that the entire *Code civil* rests upon the assumption of women’s physical and moral inferiority: ‘[...] la base de toute sa doctrine, son idéal: l’infériorité physique et morale de la femme [...]’⁵⁰⁰ Such an assumption of women’s mental and physical inferiority is particularly evident in the exclusion of women from scientific and philosophical instruction in 19th century France.

Deraismes describes how such a gendered educative programme re-enforces a strict division of labour by strictly limiting the specific training and instruction provided to both sexes in accordance with the division of their public and private roles: ‘Fonctions: gouvernement, suprématie d’une part, dévouement et maternité de l’autre. Ayant fait de la maternité une spécialité pour la femme, il s’en est suivi deux programmes d’éducation absolument différents. Absorbée, soi-disant, par son rôle de procréatrice physique...la femme est inepte aux travaux de l’esprit et à un exercice cérébral

⁴⁹⁹ *Emile*, pp. 492-493

⁵⁰⁰ Richer, *Le code des femmes*, p. 69.

soutenu.⁵⁰¹ Deraismes declares that it is men who are responsible for the lack of women's intellectual development by imposing upon them an education built upon religious superstition as opposed to scientific reason: 'Ce sont les hommes qui ont empêché le cerveau de la femme de s'exercer et qui lui ont imposé, par une éducation arriérée, la superstition, l'erreur, et qui se plaignent aujourd'hui, de la récolte lorsqu'ils ont fait la semence !'⁵⁰² Richer similarly condemns the religious, non-scientific education of women for its exclusion of women from philosophy and reason which were exclusively identified as the faculties of male intellect: 'On leur dit, et elles finissent par le croire, que la philosophie trouble les cerveaux humains; que la raison, ce guide, cette lumière, est un leurre, un piège de Dieu [...]'⁵⁰³ For Richer, the omission of philosophy reflects the fundamental flaw in female education – namely its failure to extend reason and intellect to women: 'Mais on serait très fâché...d'y enseigner...la chimie, la physique, la philosophie, – surtout, la philosophie ! – toutes choses qui...développent dangereusement les intelligences; toutes choses aussi qui habituent à raisonner.'⁵⁰⁴

Given that Hugo explicitly designates philosophical instruction as the duty of fathers within his letter, he would appear to be associating himself with certain Rousseauist assumptions concerning women such as their superstition and lack of independent judgement, as opposed to the inclusive principles of Deraismes and Richer, and is thus presenting a less than enlightened vision of female education in this instance. Similarly, Hugo's argument concerning scientific education incorporates gendered assumptions inherent within Rousseau's educative model concerning the polarised education of the sexes, rather than espousing the liberating proposals made by Wollstonecraft and Condorcet to extend the education of science and philosophy to women. In Wollstonecraft's view, a lack of 'serious scientific study' had created a skewed education in which women were taught to 'dwell on effects and modifications without tracing them back to causes', in which they receive only a superficial knowledge of the world, and in which their faculties of understanding and reason and judgement are never put to reason.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid*

⁵⁰² *Ibid*, p. 80.

⁵⁰³ Richer, *La femme libre*, p. 160.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 169.

⁵⁰⁵ Wollstonecraft, pp. 88-89

While Hugo associates the education received in the home with the cultivation of conscience, he defines the instruction provided by the state as a science: ‘Le domaine de l’éducation, c’est la conscience; le domaine de l’instruction, c’est la science.’⁵⁰⁶ By associating the family with the cultivation of conscience, Hugo’s views on the early education of children closely resemble those of Deraismes, who similarly identifies the cultivation of conscience in the early life of children, as the primal role of the family, as distinct from the state: ‘Ainsi la famille...devrait être la meilleure école des consciences [...]’⁵⁰⁷ However, while Hugo follows Rousseau by attributing fathers with the task of cultivating the principles of conscience in their children, Deraismes specifically attributes the cultivation of conscience to women: ‘C’est au foyer, dans la vie domestique que la formation du caractère, de la conscience est appelée à s’opérer. [...] À la mère, à la sœur est dévolu ce rôle d’initiatrice.’⁵⁰⁸

Hugo’s conception of state instruction as a science also comes closer to the exclusionary gendered terms of republican pedagogical discourse than the views expressed by his contemporaneous feminists, Deraismes and Richer. This notion of instruction as a science assumed a prominent place within public discourse on education during the Third Republic and is strongly foreshadowed by the writings of Rousseau. In *Emile*, Rousseau had already prescribed science as the teaching of man’s duty: ‘Il n’y a qu’une science à enseigner aux enfants: c’est celle des devoirs de l’homme [...]’⁵⁰⁹ Rousseau argues that the natural presence of spirit, observation, and intuition with which women are endowed is the science of women: ‘La présence d’esprit, la pénétration, les observations fines sont la science des femmes; l’habileté de s’en prévaloir est leur talent !’⁵¹⁰ He argues that there is no place in women’s education for the study of abstract truths, speculation or science, but advocated an applied, practical education for women: ‘leurs études doivent se rapporter toutes à la pratique...et c’est à elle de faire les observations qui mènent les hommes à l’établissement des principes.’⁵¹¹ Instead, he argues that given the diversity of women’s duties, their education should be strictly orientated towards practical domestic tasks: ‘En général, s’il importe aux hommes de borner leurs études à des

⁵⁰⁶ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 272.

⁵⁰⁷ Deraismes, *Ève dans l’humanité*, p. 45.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 190.

⁵⁰⁹ *Emile*, p. 55.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 504.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 507.

connaissances d'usage, cela importe encore plus aux femmes, parce que la vie de celles-ci...étant ou devant être plus assidues à leurs soins...ne leur permet de se livrer par choix à aucun talent au préjudice de leurs devoirs.'⁵¹²

In an educational tract which appeared during the Third Republic, science is proposed as one of the core subjects within an explicitly male-orientated educational programme: 'L'étude des langues vivantes, des sciences et arts d'application, de l'agriculture, de l'industrie et du commerce, constituera le fonds de son programme. Elle formera des praticiens au travail, des ingénieurs...des géomètres...des architectes, des mécaniciens...des physiciens...des physiologistes et des hygiénistes.'⁵¹³ In *Amour*, Jules Michelet further presents a gender-specific notion of scientific education by defining the science of justice in terms of fraternity, while the science of life and love is identified as the realm of femininity: 'Les sciences de la vie, qui sont celles de l'amour...nous disent la vie identique, la commune parenté et la fraternité des êtres. Les sciences de la justice, qui sont la haute charité et l'amour impartial. C'est la fraternité encore. [...] Voilà la science moderne, unique, identique, à deux sexes.'⁵¹⁴ The administration of the Third Republic was responsible for the establishment of numerous 'écoles ménagères' such as those established in Reims in 1873 and Rouen in 1879, which were designed specifically with the purpose of teaching women how to fulfil their domestic duties,⁵¹⁵ while the teaching of 'l'économie domestique' was defined as a science and assumed particular importance in the educative program in girls' primary schools: 'L'économie domestique est la science [...] Le foyer domestique est le centre des affections et des intérêts de la famille...C'est là que les uns et les autres sont entourés des soins dévoués de la mère de famille.'⁵¹⁶

The educative views of Condorcet offered a considerably more inclusive and progressive model of female education than that gender-specific notion of science

⁵¹² *Ibid*, p. 480.

⁵¹³ Hureauux, *Les principes de l'éducation républicaine pour l'enseignement dans les écoles*, (chez les libraires: Paris, 1878), pp. 61-62 <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb340337955q> [Accessed 31 January 2013]

⁵¹⁴ Michelet, *Amour*, (L. Hachette: Paris, 1870), pp. 94-95, <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb30943151n> [Accessed 14 July 2014]

⁵¹⁵ *Dictionnaire de Pédagogie et d'instruction primaire, Tome I*, (Hachette: Paris, 1882-1893), p. 780. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb30175079> [Accessed 21 June 2013]

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 789.

proposed by Rousseau, or indeed by the majority of republican legislators active in the debate on female education a century later such as Ferry, Proudhon, Gambetta, and Michelet. In *Cinq mémoires sur l'instruction publique*, Condorcet refutes an exclusively masculinist perception of science by advocating equal scientific instruction for women as a means of extending the boundaries of their domestic confinement, while also arguing that the qualities which women acquire through their educative roles pre-dispose them to excel in scientific professions: '[...] pourquoi celles (les découvertes) des femmes, dont la vie ne doit pas être remplie... en entier par des occupations domestiques, ne travailleraient-elles pas utilement pour l'accroissement des lumières, en s'occupant de ces observations, qui demandent une exactitude presque minutieuse, une grande patience, une vie sédentaire et réglée ?'⁵¹⁷

Demonstrating how far his conception of female education surpasses the gender-specific precepts of Rousseau's educative model, which was perpetuated by republican legislators throughout the following century, Condorcet argues that it is women's explicitly feminine and maternal qualities which endow them with the potential to rival and even surpass men in certain aspects of scientific professions: 'Peut-être même seraient-elles plus propres que les hommes à donner aux livres élémentaires de la méthode et de la clarté, plus disposées par leur aimable flexibilité à se proportionner à l'esprit des enfants qu'elles ont observés dans un âge moins avancé, et dont elles ont suivi le développement avec un intérêt plus tendre.'⁵¹⁸ As far back as 1680, Fénelon had foreshadowed Condorcet by similarly arguing that scientific instruction should be included within women's education so as to improve their maternal and wifely roles: 'Les jeunes filles doivent être élevées à devenir les campagnes éclairées d'agriculteurs, d'industriels, de commerçants, d'artistes, de savants, d'hommes utiles dans tous les genres, et surtout à devenir de bonnes et intelligentes mères de famille. La pédagogie expérimentale, scientifique, doit donc faire partie de tout programme d'éducation générale, surtout pour les filles.'⁵¹⁹

In the 19th century, the inequalities and prejudices engendered by male scientific instruction and female religious instruction continued to underpin the objections of

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid*

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid*

⁵¹⁹ Fénelon, cited in 'Sur l'éducation des filles' in *L'éducation pratique selon la science pour les deux sexes et la liberté de l'enseignement*, vol I, (Bourg-la-Reine: Paris, 1879), p. 51.
<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark://12148/cb31173643s> [Accessed 16 June 2013]

French feminists to women's exclusion from male scientific education. Deraismes argues that it was a vital part of the educative duty of mothers to provide their children with a rudimentary scientific education: 'La mère instruite, sachant tout le parti qu'on peut tirer de cette disposition, stimule cette tendance. Elle inculque ainsi les rudiments de la science sous des formes appropriées au jeune âge de ses élèves [...]'⁵²⁰ Flora Tristan similarly condemns the omission of science from female instruction by condemning the use of scientific arguments by philosophers to justify women's inferior social status, and by shedding light on how the denial of women's scientific capacity served to bolster dominant perceptions of women's inferior mental and physical strength and their superstitious, infantile dispositions: 'Femme, il a été constaté par la science que, d'après ton organisation, tu es *inférieure* à l'homme. – Or, tu n'as pas d'intelligence, pas de compréhension pour les hautes questions...aucune capacité pour les sciences...enfin, tu es un être faible de corps et d'esprit...superstitieux; en un mot, tu n'es qu'un enfant capricieux, volontaire, frivole [...]'⁵²¹ Richer also argues that scientific instruction provides a source of reason and intelligence which should be common to all: 'La science est la grande source où toutes les intelligences, sans distinction, doivent pouvoir s'abreuver. Elle n'appartient exclusivement à personne; c'est le réservoir commun...L'esprit n'a pas de sexe.'⁵²² Richer, Tristan, and Deraismes thus espoused the more progressive views on female scientific education expressed by Wollstonecraft and Condorcet, rather than the masculinist conception of science endorsed by Rousseau, and are thus demonstrating a more enlightened vision of female education than that which Hugo prescribes in his decidedly Rousseauvian model of male scientific education.

In the final lines of his letter, Hugo's language again appears to present a notably Rousseauvian model of education, which, although considered progressive in 1762, was not so over a 100 years later in light of the progressive views of feminists such as Richer and Deraismes, when he proclaims that the combination of scientific instruction provided by the state, and the cultivation of conscience in the home, will produce wholesome male citizens: 'Plus tard, dans l'homme fait, ces deux lumières se

⁵²⁰ Deraismes, *Ève dans l'humanité*, pp. 64-65

⁵²¹ Tristan, Flora, cited in *Les révolutions du XIXe siècle, 1852-1872*, (EDHIS: Paris, 1852-1872), p. 234, <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb37700866p> [Accessed 19 June 2013]

⁵²² *Ibid*, p. 188-9

complètent l'une par l'autre.'⁵²³ However, while such an emphasis on the role of education in the formation of male citizens seems to re-affirm the gendered perceptions inherent within Rousseau's concept of 'republican motherhood', the fact that Hugo delineates his argument for female education in such terms should not be simply seen as a retrogressive stance which undermines Hugo's argument for the equal education to women. In fact, if one compares Hugo's discourse on education with that of Condorcet, one will find that Condorcet, who was devoted to female access to education, and who even surpassed Hugo's vision of female education in terms of extending scientific instruction to women, explicitly and repeatedly refers to education in terms of its role in the formation of male citizens, although he had women very much in mind when articulating his vision for an egalitarian, non-elitist, common national education for both sexes: 'Le devoir de la société...consiste..à procurer à chaque homme l'instruction nécessaire pour exercer les fonctions communes d'homme, de père de famille et de citoyen...'⁵²⁴, '[...] l'instruction forme des hommes [...]'⁵²⁵ That Hugo's vision of national education extended to include both sexes, as Condorcet's did, is evident from his letter to A.M. Trébois in which he re-iterates his support for the introduction of women's access to secular education as a logical and utilitarian measure for social reform at the inception of the Third Republic: 'Votre fondation d'enseignement laïque pour les jeunes filles et une œuvre logique et utile [...]'⁵²⁶

Furthermore, while at times the gender dichotomies which appear within Hugo's letter appear to reflect his espousal of some of the more gendered assumptions of Rousseau's educative model, the gender-specific terms which sometimes frame Hugo's public discourse on women during the early Third Republic can be read as part of the contextual gendered thinking which evolved among male republican leaders in their discussions of female education during the foundational years of the republic. When compared with the majority of his republican peers, Hugo's views on female education ultimately come far closer to those of his feminist contemporaries and predecessors. The specific manner in which feminists such as Tristan, and later Richer and Deraismes, invoke women's specific educative duties in the formation of future

⁵²³ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 272.

⁵²⁴ Condorcet, *Cinq Mémoires*, p. 64.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 75.

⁵²⁶ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 272.

citizens, the creation of domestic harmony, and wider social unity, reflect their espousal of the fundamental precepts of Enlightenment thought.

This is precisely the stance adopted by Hugo in his veneration of women's educational role, and thus proves that Hugo's support for female education was very much in line with much of the feminist thinking of his time. Just like Richer and Deraismes, and earlier Wollstonecraft and Condorcet, Hugo proposes a secular education for women as distinct from the flawed religious and superstitious one to which they had hitherto been subjected. He also envisions the extension of a secular education to women in terms of its wider social utility, 'une œuvre logique et utile.'⁵²⁷ It is precisely this invocation of women's natural, educative, and harmonising qualities as a justification for their access to an equal national education which aligns Hugo with the most progressive arguments of the Enlightenment, which distinguishes him from the dominant gendered perceptions of education espoused by his republican peers, and which affirms his distinctly feminist stance on female education during the early years of the Third Republic.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid*

Hugo's Letters in Support of Women's Rights during the Third Republic.

Women and the Third Republic.

Although women have been considerably overlooked within historical analyses of the Third Republic, Elinor Ann Accampo has illustrated how the gravity of social issues which confronted the regime such as depopulation and falling birth rates necessitated the inclusion of women within the legislative framework of the republic: 'It has become increasingly clear that men of the Third Republic did not simply ignore women as they built the state and implemented legislation; they had women very much in mind. [...] Legislation regulating the treatment of children and female and child labor, as well as regulating motherhood itself, began in the 1870s and 1880s.'⁵²⁸ Accampo argues that republican ideology and the nature of the twentieth-century state cannot be properly assessed without understanding the gendered thinking which shaped the legal, ideological, and social formation of the early Third Republic: 'Although this legislation developed independently of labor reform for men, an examination of its history demonstrates that "the social question" and the very conceptualization of these "questions" and responses to them linked them directly to the ideology of republicanism itself. Second, this legislation and the abundant discourse behind reform efforts demonstrate that the Republican conception of citizenship and the theory and practice of republicanism that shaped politics after 1870 were highly gendered.'⁵²⁹ Accampo argues that during the early Third Republic, the implementation of public and private policies 'operated to define women in the service of the state', 'to construct gender roles through legislation and bureaucracy', and to ultimately 'define a Third Republic.'⁵³⁰ She attributes such gendered thinking to those involved in the implementation of legislation and the engineering of social reform such as Jules Michelet, Eugène Pelletan, Alfred Naquet, Gustave Dron, Richard Waddington, Paul Strauss, and Victor Hugo, as each of these men either 'directly or

⁵²⁸ Accampo, Elinor Ann, 'Gender, Social Policy, and the Formation of the Third Republic: An Introduction' in *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870-1914*, (John Hopkins University Press: London, 1995), ed. Elinor Ann Accampo, Rachel Ginnis Fuchs, and Mary Lynn Stewart. p. 2.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 2-3

⁵³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 3.

indirectly, exercised major influence on state policy’, and ‘set the parameters for women and workers who were the object of social reform.’⁵³¹

However, as with the reforms in female education, the incorporation of women within legislative reforms did not reflect republican sympathy towards feminist demands. Neither did it represent republican commitment to extending equal citizenship and civil equality to women. Rather, women became objects of republican legislation whose presence within the legislative framework of the Third Republic reflects the attempts made by the government to combat grave social issues such as depopulation, falling birth-rates, and clandestine prostitution. The pertinence of women to these issues was such that republican legislators had no choice but to include women within their reforms. Furthermore, there were considerable disparities within the gendered thinking which Accampo attributes to republican politicians as diverse as Jules Michelet, whose misogynist writings on women were fiercely protested by feminist women such as Jenny d’Héricourt, and the gendered thinking of Victor Hugo, who was widely acknowledged as a defender of women’s rights and an ally to the feminist cause. Stone describes how the legislators of the Third Republic inherited assumptions from the French Revolution concerning the hierarchical structure of the family, and the corresponding legitimation of women’s exclusion from citizenship, politics, and public life: ‘From its origins...modern republicanism associated male political equality with a hierarchical family. The apparently universal principles of the public realm depended on the exclusion and subordination of women. Men were individuals and citizens, active in the state; women were mothers who produced and nurtured future citizens.’⁵³²

Stone describes how during the Second Empire, when republicans were faced with the formidable challenge of ‘transforming an authoritarian state into a republican one without civil war’ and ‘defining the appropriate role of the family’, Michelet, the republican poet and historian, along with Hugo, played a significant role in reviving the revolutionary model of the republican family: ‘All republicans of this 1840s generation would acknowledge the powerful influence of Jules Michelet and Victor Hugo. During the crucial decades of the Second Empire the historian and the poet

⁵³¹ *Ibid*

⁵³² Stone, Judith F., ‘The Republican Brotherhood: Gender and Ideology,’ in *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870-1914*, details as before, p. 31.

significantly refashioned an earlier republican tradition. Both explicitly linked the future creation of a republic to the condition of the family and the role of women.⁵³³ Stone describes how Michelet's treatment of women focused on the need for republican mothers to counter grave social issues: 'Divisiveness among what ought to be a republican brotherhood could be politically disastrous, but an even more fundamental danger for France and the republican cause was the women question. In his view, the absence of authentic republican mothers was undermining France and progressive political movements. Michelet increasingly stressed issues of "secular morality," in which the conditions of women, their relations with men, and the reform of those relations figured prominently.'⁵³⁴

These themes are explored extensively within Michelet's social tracts on marriage and the family, in which he venerates the establishment of a solid republican family to counter issues such as the corruption of bourgeois women by luxury, idleness, and clericalism, and the degradation of working-class women by abject misery.⁵³⁵ His solution to these issues involved stressing the moral and civic responsibility of bachelors to establish families, and promoting the social, civic, and moral importance of women's role as 'republican mothers.'⁵³⁶ In *La Femme*, Michelet promotes the ideal republican mother as a 'femme simple', a woman who submits completely to the authority of her husband, who subsumes all the natural, tender qualities of her sex, and invests these qualities in her maternal responsibilities: 'Comme épouse, la *femme simple* qu'on peut élever un peu. [...] Avec cette bonne épouse, associée, de cœur... à la foi de son mari, celui-ci, suivant la voie fort aisée de la nature, exercera sur son enfant un incroyable ascendant d'autorité et de tendresse.'⁵³⁷

Michelet argues that the vital role played by the 'femme simple' in the creation of a harmonious home is indispensable in the regeneration of the family and society at large: '[...] la *Femme*, l'adorable idéal de grâce dans la sagesse, par lequel seul la famille et la société elle-même vont être recommencées.'⁵³⁸ Although the '*femme*

⁵³³ *Ibid*, p. 32.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 32.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 33.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid*

⁵³⁷ Michelet, Jules, *La Femme*, (Calmann Lévy: Paris, 1879), p. 69.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb426030862> [Accessed 15 February 2013]

⁵³⁸ *Ibid*

simple’ plays an instrumental role in the regeneration of society, he sees women’s role as firmly anchored within the domestic sphere of home life and not in politics or public life. He espouses Rousseau’s view of women as being completely dependent on men, while children in turn, depend on women for survival: ‘La femme ne vit pas sans l’homme pas plus que l’enfant sans la femme. Tous les enfants trouvés meurent.’⁵³⁹ Like Rousseau, Michelet’s emphasis on women’s maternal role is based on an irresolute set of assumptions concerning their inherent nature as obedient, submissive, monogamous, always searching for love, and eager to bestow their love upon others: ‘Elle veut régner chez elle, être maîtresse...dans tout son petit monde [...] Le point...fondamental, c’est que toute femme se sent comme un centre puissant d’amour, d’attraction, autour duquel tout doit graviter [...] Cette obstination d’amour...implique un foyer très pur, exclusif, et monogamique.’⁵⁴⁰ His fundamental argument thus invokes an essentialist representation of women as tender, maternal, obedient beings as a justification for their circumscription within their domestic and maternal roles.

Michelet also condemns the degenerative social effects of women’s entry into the workplace for its ruinous effects on the family, forcing impoverished women into a life of misery, prostitution, and child abandonment, and attributes the growing problem of depopulation to the rise in women workers: ‘L’ouvrière! mot impie, sordide...qui balancerait à lui seul tous nos prétendus progrès. [...] La population n’augmente plus, et elle baisse en qualité. La paysanne meure de travail, l’ouvrière de faim. Quels enfants faut-il en attendre? Des avortons, de plus en plus.’⁵⁴¹ Stone argues that Michelet’s critique of women’s entry into the workplace reflects Hugo’s scathing denunciation of class war and his emphasis on the urgent need to establish solid republican families in *Les Misérables*: ‘The problem lay in the intense experience of separation, dehumanization, and isolation [...] The family, however, might...be the source of overcoming this multiple despair. Such a family, centred around the...*femme simple* described by Michelet, would be the source of harmony, unity, and solidarity. [...] *Les Misérables* offered the hope of a better republican future for all of France, but only if such...families could be established.’⁵⁴² Stone further argues that Cosette functions as Hugo’s model of Michelet’s ‘*femme simple*’ within the novel: ‘The novel

⁵³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 66.

⁵⁴⁰ Michelet, *Amour*, pp.75-76

⁵⁴¹ Michelet, *La Femme*, p. 22.

⁵⁴² Stone, p. 37.

turned around the regenerative powers of...Cosette, the quintessential *femme simple*. [...] Cosette created family peace and by extension a larger social and political reconciliation. Her ability to end conflict had little to do with rational persuasion and much to do with her instinctive “‘feminine’” qualities to promote love and harmony.’⁵⁴³

However, while Hugo does emphasise the regenerative powers of women in the creation of solid republican families, and while his portrayal of Fantine’s social descent strongly reflects Michelet’s condemnation of women in the workplace and its degenerative effects on society, Cosette does not neatly fit Michelet’s ‘quintessential *femme simple*’ as Stone suggests.⁵⁴⁴ Nicole Savy argues that Cosette, though seemingly the quintessential and virtuous ‘*femme idéale*’ of bourgeois society is inherently flawed by her vanity and selfishness: ‘Mais cette perfection a bien des faiblesses [...] la vanité sottise de la jeune baronne; reste sa cruauté égoïste, digne d’une fille Goriot, quand elle oublie – elle n’a pas de mémoire – un père qui meurt d’amour pour elle, et d’abandon.’⁵⁴⁵ Further, Hugo does not idealise Cosette as a maternal heroine – indeed we are told by Valjean that Cosette cannot identify with the devoted, sublime motherhood of Fantine: ‘elle a eu en malheur tout ce que tu as en bonheur’⁵⁴⁶, while her obliviousness to Valjean’s suffering⁵⁴⁷ following her marriage to Marius further distance her from the all-sacrificing, maternal love which Hugo attributes to both Fantine and Valjean.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid*

⁵⁴⁴ In an enlightening study of Cosette, Nicole Savy describes how the character of Cosette is so imbued with contradictions and inconsistencies that a true representation of her character is impossible. Savy describes how Cosette assumes many conflicting functions within the text: she is the heroine of the story yet never the active participant; she is a constant object of love, desire, and hatred, the victim of financial exchange and transactions; yet her fortune derives from the misery of others and her ascension in society leaves behind a bloody trail of death and destruction; she is both the product of misery and the creator of misery for others. Cosette’s character is situated in the indefinite realm of the social and the ideal, the real and the lyrical, the heroic and the mundane, and Hugo manipulates the dualities, inconsistencies, and ambiguities of her character to reveal the complexity of producing a Romanesque heroine, and the impossibility of representing a definite, unified, and cohesive, image of femininity. For more, see ‘Cosette: Un personnage qui n’existe pas,’ Nicole Savy in *Lire Les Misérables*, ed. Anne Ubersfeld and Guy Rosa, (Librairie José Corti: 1985) An in-depth examination of Hugo’s literary treatment of the maternal will be discussed in the following chapter of this thesis.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 129.

⁵⁴⁶ *Les Misérables V*, (Hachette: Paris, 1881-1882), p. 405.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb30625533c> [Accessed 22 February 2015]

⁵⁴⁷ ‘Cosette était venue retrouver dans l’azur son pareil, son amant, son époux, son mâle céleste. En s’envolant, Cosette, ailée et transfigurée, laissait derrière elle à terre, vide et hideuse, sa chrysalide, Jean Valjean.’ (*Ibid*, p. 337.) The maternal role assumed by Valjean in *Les Misérables* will be explored in the next chapter.

Neither does Stone's comparison of Michelet and Hugo present an accurate account of Hugo's perceptions of the possibilities of women's role within the newfound republic, and woefully dismisses the scope and diversity of his feminist activities during the later decades of the 19th century. Furthermore, the roles which Hugo envisaged for women differed considerably from several of his leading republican contemporaries such as Pelletan and Gambetta in his ability to invoke women's maternal function as republican mothers as a justification for their entry into public and political life and their rights to equal citizenship and civil equality, as opposed to a legitimation of their confinement to the private sphere of domesticity. Like Michelet, Pelletan's vision of women's social function was firmly fixed in their idealised, natural, and sacrificial role as republican mothers: 'Son enfant est là...une secrète harmonie veut qu'il vienne au monde comme une crise de la nature, et que la chose sainte de la maternité, la plus sainte de cette terre, commence dans l'auguste volupté de la douleur.'⁵⁴⁸ He sees women's destiny solely in terms of their role as wife and as mother: 'Or, ce destin, c'est l'enfant couché maintenant dans ce berceau; un homme en germe,'⁵⁴⁹ and the completion of men's existence: 'L'homme en dehors de la famille n'est que le commencement de l'homme; pour mettre la dernière main à son existence, il faut qu'il ait versé en lui le cœur d'une mère, d'une sœur, d'une femme, d'une fille...l'âme réunie de l'homme et de la femme, l'harmonieuse androgyne de Platon.'⁵⁵⁰ Like Hugo, Pelletan advocated the indispensable role of republican mothers as educators and 'transmitters of a particular moral vision', and attended the *Congrès du droit des femmes* in 1878, whose honorary presidents were Hugo and Vacquerie.⁵⁵¹ However, his support for female education was grounded in a vision of female domesticity which did not envision suffrage rights for women. Siân Reynolds comments on how Ferry's educative reforms did not intend to extend citizenship to women: 'Even when the Republic tried to win women away from the Church, it did so with the intention that they should act as Rousseau had exhorted the women of Geneva to do. Behind the provisions for girls' education in the Jules Ferry Laws of the 1880s...lay the aim not of making women citizens, but of making them the major

⁵⁴⁸ Pelletan, Eugène, *La famille: la mère 3^e édition*, (Librairie internationale: Paris, 1866), p. 246. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb31075467j> [Accessed 16 Febraury 2013]

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 246-247

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 247.

⁵⁵¹ Stone, p. 41.

repositories of republican values for the benefits of their sons.⁵⁵² Thus Hugo's support for women's citizenship, suffrage rights, and the participation of women in politics reveal how his aspirations for female education extended far beyond that of his republican peers by encompassing a far-reaching vision of women's public and political participation in the republic.

Gambetta similarly espoused a narrower vision of women's education than that of Hugo. For Gambetta, women's instrumental maternal and domestic role justified the strict division of private and public spheres and their exclusion from public life. Charles Sowerwine describes how Léon Gambetta sought political advice from his mistress and long-term political *égerie* Léonie Léon while constructing the new republic, but resolutely endorsed the exclusion of women from politics: 'Léonie lisait tous les journaux et lui signalait des articles importants...En effet, c'est avec Léonie qu'il élabore la base de la stratégie des années 1870, non pas la tactique anti-cléricale, mais le fond républicain au cœur de la lutte patriotique, Gambetta a créé un mouvement avec une base, surtout en province, et rend possible la République militante de 1792, ni la République sociale de 1848...Pour faire accepter cette République...Gambetta...dépendait de Léonie.'⁵⁵³ Sowerwine further argues that the men of the Third Republic excluded women from politics not because they upheld the views of the conservatives concerning the patriarchal division of the role of the sexes, but because of their belief that republican women would best serve the interests of the public sphere from the private sphere of the home: '[...] la légitimité de leurs activités politiques se basait sur le fait qu'ils représentaient un ménage et, pour que le ménage existe, il fallait que les femmes s'y consacrent. C'était là, cantonnée dans la domesticité, que la femme apporterait sa contribution à la République, c'était depuis la sphère privée qu'elle œuvrerait pour la sphère publique.'⁵⁵⁴

While Gambetta supported women's right to education, he did not endorse the extension of civil and suffrage rights to women: "Nous atteindrons ce but...si nous maintenons fermement la constitution républicaine et si nous étendons l'éducation [et

⁵⁵² Reynolds, pp. 115-116

⁵⁵³ Sowerwine, Charles, 'La politique, "cet élément dans lequel j'aurais voulu vivre": l'exclusion des femmes est-elle inhérente au républicanisme de la Troisième République ?' in *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, <http://clio.revues.org/4282;DOI:10.4000/clio.4282>, pp. 171-194, (para 28, 34 & 35 of 42) [Accessed 18 February 2012]

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid*, para 41 of 42.

non pas les droits] à flots aux nouvelles générations. C'est pour cela que j'ai consenti à devenir membre de la Ligue de l'Enseignement." Le choix est clair: l'éducation oui, les droits non.⁵⁵⁵ Sowerwine further observes how not a single reference to female suffrage or women's rights appears within Gambetta's expansive correspondence with Léonie despite the widespread discussions of these issues in the newspapers of the time: '[...] cela malgré le banquet de Richer en 1872 et le congrès féministe de 1878, événements que des lecteurs assidus des journaux comme Léonie et Gambetta devaient certainement connaître.'⁵⁵⁶ Thus while Gambetta, Michelet, and Pelletan each reflected Hugo's support for female education to assist in the regeneration of the republic, their failure to acknowledge the need to extend civil equality, full citizenship, and suffrage rights to women, and to include women within republican politics, demonstrate how far they were from Hugo's support for female education which acknowledged the need for sweeping reforms in women's rights, in the position of women within the legal, social, and judicial framework of the republic, the extension of full citizenship and civil equality to women, and the participation of women in political life.

As we have seen, the views on education espoused by Hugo and his contemporaneous feminists such as Richer and Deraismes were heavily based upon the progressive arguments of the Enlightenment. However, it is vital to acknowledge that the views shared by the majority of republican legislators such as Ferry and Gambetta were considerably less progressive than those expressed by their Enlightenment predecessors. Indeed, the republican administration of the early Third Republic was in no way keen to apply the fundamental tenets of Condorcet's proposed female educative model. This can be seen in their conception of the distinction between the provision of public instruction and the private education provided to women in the home. In order to fully understand how Hugo emerged as a pioneering figure for women's rights within the political climate of the Third Republic, it is vital to understand the ambiguity of his republicanism. Although Hugo had emerged as the 'roi sans couronne de la République'⁵⁵⁷ during his years in exile, and while Hugo

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid*, para 10 of 42. (Sowerwine's reference to Gambetta is taken from the English reference by Bury 1973:46. The original letter by Gambetta has not been found.)

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid*, para 40 of 42.

⁵⁵⁷ Agulhon, Maurice, *La République: L'élan fondateur et la grande blessure (1880-1932) Tome I*, (Hachette: Paris, 1990), p. 29.

heralded the pacifist, universal, fraternal, ideals of the newfound republic, his political position in the republic following his return from exile was decidedly more ambiguous and conflicted.

Although, the public lauded Hugo as ‘l’esprit du plus illustre et du plus admiré des Français vivants,’⁵⁵⁸ there was a marked disparity between the public adulation of Hugo as an emblem of republicanism and the political unease and suspicion which he aroused within the Senate and Legislative Assembly. Graham Robb describes how ‘to most politicians, Hugo was still the irresponsible demagogue, a vast and vacuous ego casting doubt on the seriousness of their profession,’ and describes how ‘even in republican circles, it was unfashionable to pay homage’ as ‘Hugo was tainted with bizarre spiritual beliefs.’⁵⁵⁹ An eye-witness account by Maurice Coste attests to the private animosity which existed towards Hugo among republican politicians: ‘This covert hostility of most of the leaders of the Third Republic toward the man they publicly lauded as one of their official glories, is one of the strongest memories I have of the republican milieu of that period.’⁵⁶⁰

However, despite such private animosity, and the embarrassment surrounding his outlandish spiritual beliefs,⁵⁶¹ Hugo’s mass public appeal both in France and throughout the world as the venerated hero of the republic was ‘too valuable to waste’: ‘The most famous man on earth was a French republican in the new world of international trade, Victor Hugo was worth a coal-field or a famous public monument. [...] Hugo was the republican answer to royalty.’⁵⁶² His relationship with republicanism during the years of the Third Republic was thus built upon an unsettling paradox whereby Hugo was publicly lauded as the emblematic hero of the republic, while being privately scorned within leading republican circles. The republican desire to capitalise on Hugo’s global public appeal can be most vividly seen in two major events organised to commemorate Hugo – namely, the celebration of his 80th birthday on 27 February 1881 which was transformed into a day of national celebration, and Hugo’s mass state

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid*

⁵⁵⁹ Robb, *Op cit*, p. 496.

⁵⁶⁰ Reference to Maurice Coste cited in Robb, *Op cit*, p. 496.

⁵⁶¹ Although the belief systems of ‘Spiritisme’ and ‘Occultisme’ may appear outlandish by today’s standards, it is necessary to concede that such spiritual practices were quite in vogue and had many followers during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

⁵⁶² *Ibid*, p. 497.

funeral in Paris on 31 May 1885. Agulhon describes the symbolic acts undertaken to ensure the success of these events in consolidating the republic: 'La *Marseillaise* est choisie comme hymne national (1879) et le 14 Juillet pour fête nationale (1880). C'est à l'occasion de cette première célébration qu'entre en vigueur l'amnistie des Communards... Ces grandes décisions marquent symboliquement la victoire du régime sur les forces de droite, et son rattachement à la Révolution française.'⁵⁶³

Despite the immense ideological values conveyed by such events and their insertion within French national memory, Robb argues that the real influence exerted by Hugo in the early Third Republic 'is more diffuse and intimate,' and resides in 'his ploy of making the glory of the nation hinge on the question of amnesty,' and showing that 'it was possible to be a patriot and a humanist at the same time.'⁵⁶⁴ Robb argues that it was Hugo's 'determination to apply personal morality to national and international behaviour' that had 'an important tempering influence on belligerent capitalism, not only in France.'⁵⁶⁵ He identifies Hugo's denunciation of clerical education as one major issue which illustrates his ability to combine his 'patriotism and humanism' within his political career.⁵⁶⁶ As well as condemning the ruinous effects of clerical education, the humanism which Hugo applied to the debate on education is even more powerfully seen in the way in which he privileged the rights of children over paternal rights regarding equal access to education. His support for female education can be seen in the same light as the combination of 'patriotism and humanism' which Robb attributes to his parliamentary successes during the Third Republic and the profound devotion to social reform which underpinned Hugo's engagement in the struggle for female emancipation.

While Hugo's letter to A.M. Trébois defines women's education in accordance with republican values as the preparation for their maternal role in creating a fraternal, unified nation, elsewhere his arguments are delineated in decidedly more universal, inclusive, and egalitarian terms which contain no such overt gender codes synonymous with discourse on women during the Third Republic. On the occasion of his annual banquet in aid of the poor children of Guernsey in 1869, Hugo delivered an address to

⁵⁶³ *Ibid*, pp. 30-32

⁵⁶⁴ Robb, p. 492.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 498.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 499.

the congregation in which he fervently proposes children's access to education as an act of liberation which reaches even the most oppressed and miserable classes of society: 'Dans l'assistance et dans l'éducation, il y a de la libération...Nous affranchissons de la maladie le corps et de l'ignorance l'esprit.'⁵⁶⁷ Hugo describes how the success and progress of the future depends on the present education of children: 'En élevant l'enfant, nous élevons l'avenir [...] Éclairons et enseignons cette enfance qui est là sous nos yeux, le vingtième siècle rayonnera.'⁵⁶⁸ The universal and inclusive terms in which Hugo describes education in this instance reveal how his republican vision extended to incorporate female emancipation as an essential part of his republican agenda for social, political, and legal reform.

The gender-coded language which at times frames his discourse on women does not thus expose an inherent flaw within Hugo's feminism but rather reveals a further complexity therein, and the challenge which he faced in articulating his debate for female access to education to a republican leadership which largely believed that women's education was secondary and inferior to their maternal and domestic function. Unlike the majority of his republican peers, the issue of female education was thus central to Hugo's wider, messianic vision for a just, egalitarian, and democratic republic.

Hugo's letters to Léon Richer and the New Republic.

Just as Hugo's support for female education is grounded in his wider vision of social reform, so his support for feminist demands during the Third Republic is marked by a strong socialist agenda.

One letter in particular which illustrates the socialist dimension of Hugo's feminism is a letter to Léon Richer, expressing his regret at not being able to attend a banquet for women's rights at the Palais Royal.⁵⁶⁹ Hugo's letter, which was read aloud to the

⁵⁶⁷ Hugo, *Œuvres complètes de Victor Hugo, Actes et Paroles II*, (Albin Michel: Paris, 1880-1926), p. 491. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb373094302> [Accessed 24 February 2013]

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 491-492

⁵⁶⁹ For a detailed analysis of Léon Richer's contribution to the feminist movement in the early Third Republic, see Alban Jacquemart, 'Les hommes dans les mouvements féministes français (1870-2010). Sociologie d'un engagement improbable. (École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales: Paris, 2011), pp. 60-78. Jacquemart describes how Richer's recruitment of influential men such as Hugo was a notable feature of first-wave feminism: 'La mobilisation des hommes constitue...en ce début de construction du mouvement féministe un enjeu de premier ordre, ceux-ci bénéficiant de dispositions sociales et d'atouts matériels dont les femmes sont généralement dépourvues. Cette

150 guests, and published thereafter in the Parisian press, testifies to his ardent support for the vast legal, marital, and social reforms proposed by Richer in his far-reaching campaign for women's rights. Richer's programme of reform encompassed a sweeping revision of the *Code civil* regarding issues such as women's citizenship, maternal rights, property rights, divorce, and the reversal of the sexual double standard which prevailed in relations between the sexes during the 19th century.

Richer's faith in Hugo as a fervent and long-term ally in his struggle to radically reform the *Code civil* is evident from his opening address in *Le code des femmes*, published in 1883, which he prefaces with the letter he received from Hugo on 5 August 1877 in support of his endeavour. In his letter, Hugo endorses Richer's efforts to redress the exclusion of women from the male-defined law enshrined in the *Code*: 'Dans nos codes, il y a une chose à refaire: c'est ce que j'appelle "la loi de Femme."' L'homme a sa loi, il se l'est faite à lui-même: la femme n'a pas d'autre loi que la loi de l'Homme.'⁵⁷⁰ In this letter, Hugo's words deeply reflect the language employed by his contemporaneous feminists when he declares: 'La femme est civilement mineure, et moralement esclave.'⁵⁷¹ His description of women in terms of their inferior civil identity and moral enslavement strongly reflects the language employed by Richer within his critique of the *Code*, such as when denouncing 'l'incapacité *personnelle* de la femme mariée': '[...] toute femme qui veut agir doit être autorisée, – soit par son mari, soit par justice. Elle est *toujours* mineure.'⁵⁷² At times, Richer's language is even more incendiary than that of Hugo, such as when he declares that the marriage contract as outlined by the *Code* not only confers a minority identity upon women, but in fact annihilates their identity altogether: 'Toute femme qui se marie s'annule.'⁵⁷³ Hugo's letter re-iterates his support for female education which he condemns as being marked with the double standard of women's civil inferiority and moral enslavement: 'Son éducation est frappée de ce double caractère d'infériorité. De là tant de souffrances, dont l'Homme a sa part [...]'⁵⁷⁴

orientation stratégique, définie en partie par un contexte social et historique spécifique, va d'ailleurs marquer la grande majorité des mouvements féministes de la première vague.' (p. 64.)

⁵⁷⁰ Hugo sent a letter to Richer on 5 April 1877 to commend his publication of *La Femme libre*. This letter appeared in the préface of *Le code des femmes*. Richer, Léon, *Le code des femmes*, p. 5.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid*

⁵⁷² *Ibid*, p. 101. (emphasis in original)

⁵⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 105.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid*

This description of education in terms of a double standard closely reflects Deraismes' critique of female education in which she attributes the double morality inherent within the hierarchical relations of the sexes for women's flawed education, and its detrimental effects on their lives: 'En fait d'idées générales...la femme en est restée à la religion...à la superstition, aux préjugés, à l'erreur. Ses facultés mentales ne s'exerçant que dans un cycle restreint et faux, la femme accepte...les contradictions les plus flagrantes et les iniquités les plus formidables.'⁵⁷⁵ Hugo again delineates his arguments for the extension of equal education to women in terms of its wider impact on civilization, society, and enlightened progress: 'Une réforme est nécessaire. Elle se fera au profit de la civilisation, de la société et de la lumière.'⁵⁷⁶ He closes his letter to Richer by affirming his position in the struggle for female emancipation – namely as that of philosopher: 'Je vous remercie de vos nobles travaux, en ma qualité de philosophe; et je vous serre la main, mon cher confrère.'⁵⁷⁷

In another letter to Richer on 8 June 1872, Hugo grants his fulsome support to the diverse programme of social reform advocated by Richer in his vast campaign for female emancipation: 'Je m'associe du fond du cœur à votre utile manifestation.'⁵⁷⁸ What's more, Hugo identifies the issue of women's rights as a social struggle in which he has occupied a central position for the past forty years.⁵⁷⁹ Having identified the issue of women's rights as one of the greatest social causes of the 19th century and positioned himself at the centre of the struggle for women's rights, the remainder of Hugo's letter can be seen as a far-reaching socialist manifesto in which Hugo reveals his expansive socialist vision for women in late 19th century France.

Hugo's feminist discourse.

In contrast to the gender dichotomies which elsewhere appear within Hugo's letters, his letters to Richer demonstrate an acute sensitivity to the euphemistic, discriminatory terms employed by the *Code civil* which defined women in explicitly sexist terms as the subordinate class, enshrined their subjugation to men, and qualified women in terms of their secondary status as second-class citizens within the state, home, and

⁵⁷⁵ Deraismes, *Ève dans l'humanité*, p. 31.

⁵⁷⁶ Richer, p. 5.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid*

⁵⁷⁸ Hugo's letter was printed in Léon Richer's newspaper *L'Avenir des Femmes* on 8 Juin 1872.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid*

marital relations: ‘Il est douloureux de le dire, dans la civilisation actuelle, il y a une esclave. La loi a des euphémismes; ce que j’appelle une esclave, elle l’appelle une mineure. Cette mineure selon la loi, cette esclave selon la réalité, c’est la femme. L’homme a chargé inégalement les deux plateaux du code...l’homme a fait verser tous les droits de son côté et tous les devoirs du côté de la femme. De là un trouble profond. De là la servitude de la femme.’⁵⁸⁰

Hugo continues his tirade against the gender inequity encoded within the French legal system which denies the most fundamental legal rights to women within its flawed and discriminatory legislation. His language is marked by a profound sense of injustice at the legal subordination of women, and his steadfast commitment to redressing this gaping blot on social justice: ‘Dans notre législation, telle qu’elle est faite, la femme ne possède pas, elle n’est pas en justice, elle ne vote pas, elle ne compte pas, elle n’est pas.’⁵⁸¹ By thus singling out the denial of women’s right to vote, Hugo is demonstrating his support for one of the most pragmatic issues which characterised the evolution of feminist activity during the 19th century, namely women’s right to universal suffrage.

He further illustrates his acute awareness of the exclusionary terms in which women are defined within the legal and social framework in 19th century France when he declares: ‘Il y a des citoyens, il n’y a pas de citoyennes.’⁵⁸² Frédéric Treffel traces the first appearance of ‘citoyenne’ to the French Revolution during the years 1792-4 when the issue of suffrage rights assumed a prominent part of women’s revolutionary activity.⁵⁸³ Olympe de Gouges made revolutionary use of the term in her *Déclarations des droits de l’homme et de la citoyenne* – by identifying women as ‘citoyennes’, de Gouges was able to argue for the extension of public rights to women which had previously been denied to them on account of their non-citizen status such as equal property ownership, judicial, civil, and legal rights, and an equal place in public administration.⁵⁸⁴ She also foreshadowed the arguments made by 19th century feminists in favour of full citizenship for women by illustrating how the granting of equal citizenship and a civil identity to women in no way infringed upon their maternal

⁵⁸⁰ Hugo, *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 175.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid*

⁵⁸² *Ibid*

⁵⁸³ Treffel, Frédéric, ‘La confiance en question’, in *Le retour du politique*

⁵⁸⁴ De Gouges, *Op cit*, pp. 18-19

identity, but in fact formed the basis of their civil and legal equality: ‘La libre communication des pensées et des opinions est un des droits les plus précieux de la femme, puisque cette liberté assure la légitimité envers les enfants.’⁵⁸⁵

Hugo’s strategic use of the word in his correspondence with Richer thus echoes de Gouges’ employment of the term in 1792, and demonstrates his progressive thinking regarding the feminisation of public discourse, and the egalitarian way in which he envisions women’s social, legal, and civil inclusion in an ideal society where they possess full citizenship and share equal status with men. However, his use of ‘citoyenne’ is notable also for its mobilising impact upon his contemporaneous feminists. In particular, the radical feminist Hubertine Auclert was inspired by Hugo’s use of ‘citoyenne’ in her own campaign for women’s rights to equal citizenship and suffrage in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Deraismes similarly opened her speeches on behalf of women’s electoral reform and the abolition of prostitution with the address ‘Citoyens, Citoyennes.’⁵⁸⁶ In *Le code des femmes*, Richer vehemently contests the gender exclusiveness enshrined in the *Code civil* in terms such as ‘Tout citoyen’, which he attempts to rectify by proposing a complete re-formulation of the provisions outlined in *Article 8* which states that: ‘Tout Français jouira des droits civils’, a formulation which Richer contests as ‘Tout Français désigne seulement les hommes...’ and to which he proposes the following modification so as to include women within the rights to citizenship and civil equality: ‘Tout Français, sans distinction de sexe, jouira des droits civils.’⁵⁸⁷

Hugo’s use of the word in his correspondence with Richer thus reflects that of de Gouges and his contemporaneous feminists whose pioneering use of the word far pre-dates the developments in the feminisation of the French language, which only took hold in France in the following century from the 1950s on. Auclert argued that only by granting women the right to vote could they be integrated within the republic and share a position of equality with men: ‘[...] le vote est un principe premier...qui ne souffre aucune contestation et auquel s’accroche toute la chaîne des revendications féminines. C’est par cet affranchissement politique – et non par l’affranchissement

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 17. (emphasis in original)

⁵⁸⁶ Deraismes’ habitual custom of opening her speeches with the address ‘Citoyens, Citoyennes,’ can be seen in the speech she gave in Pecq on 14 July 1882 ‘A L’occasion de l’Inauguration du Buste de la République des Communes de Jacques France.’ (*Op cit*, p. 178.)

⁵⁸⁷ Richer, *Le code des femmes*, p. 14, 16 & 17

civil qu'il faut commencer.'⁵⁸⁸ Ozouf notes how Hugo's letter to Richer in which he deplores the absence of 'citoyennes' in the republic, mobilised Auclert to fight for women's electoral rights in order to earn full citizenship in the republic: '[...] l'instrument de cette découverte, c'est le message de Hugo qui capte Hubertine – 'Il y a des citoyens...il n'y a pas de citoyennes.'⁵⁸⁹ In her arguments for women's suffrage rights, Auclert exposed the inconsistencies and contradictions of the republic's exclusion of women from equal citizenship on grounds of their sexual specificity: 'Puisque aucune spécificité naturelle n'entraîne d'interdit, pourquoi empêcher les femmes à glisser un bulletin dans l'urne? [...] Il est absurde de réserver à qui n'enfante pas le droit de légiférer, mais si des républicains professent cette absurdité, c'est qu'ils sentent obscurément que le vote féminin commande tout le reste et les contraindrait à remettre sur le chantier leur république.'⁵⁹⁰ Like Hugo, Auclert was intent on exposing the gender-coded terms which framed women's exclusion from equal citizenship and universal suffrage within republican legislation since the French Revolution. Siân Reynolds remarks that since the time of the French Revolution, 'when the Republic said "universal suffrage" it meant "unisexual suffrage" [...] when it said fraternity, it really meant brotherhood. The citizens of its heavenly city were all male.'⁵⁹¹

Joan B. Landes further comments on how the Rousseauvian model of Republican motherhood, which precluded women from attaining citizenship on the basis of their private maternal duty in the formation of future citizens, permeated nineteenth century republicanism and the formation of a gendered republic: '[...] radical republicans from Rousseau to the Jacobins upheld a sexually differentiated standard of virtue (citizenship for men, motherhood for women), and in the Revolution republican men displayed outright hostility toward feminist initiatives. The Republic was constructed against women, not just without them, and nineteenth century republicans did not actively counteract the masculinist heritage of republicanism. Even those who subscribed to feminist aims often did so, on the basis of a culturally gendered doctrine of separate spheres.'⁵⁹² Carole Pateman observes that, despite the fact that the principles of 'liberté, égalité, fraternité' were proclaimed by the Revolution, 'the

⁵⁸⁸ Ozouf, *Op cit*, p. 211,

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 207.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 210-211

⁵⁹¹ Reynolds, *Op cit*, p. 115. (The term 'unisexual suffrage' was coined by French feminists Hauser and Kenney, 1984.)

⁵⁹² *Ibid*, pp. 171-2

alliance between the three elements was forged much earlier’, and that ‘modern patriarchy is fraternal in form and the original contract is a fraternal pact.’⁵⁹³ Pateman argues that ‘when the father no longer embodies political right, patriarchy becomes fraternal, sex-right can no longer be subsumed under the power of fatherhood...and masculine right over women is declared non-political.’⁵⁹⁴ However, she points out that ‘a contradiction soon became apparent in pictures of the state of nature in which women are denied the same natural capacities as men and excluded from the status of ‘individual.’⁵⁹⁵ Fraternity thus ensured that ‘masculine right was secured even as paternal right was defeated.’⁵⁹⁶ Under the code of fraternity, ‘women were deprived of an economic basis for independence by the separation of the workplace from the household and the consolidation of the patriarchal structure of...capitalism.’⁵⁹⁷

Joan Wallach Scott describes how the universal suffrage practiced by the Third Republic adopted a strategy whereby ‘the state did not represent the people and so could not be legitimated as an expression of their will’ but rather served ‘a managerial function to arbitrate and balance different conflicting interests’, and that ‘exercising the vote, in other words, was considered neither a means to social reform nor the expression of popular sovereignty’, but ‘a process of consultation that made a gesture to democratic ideas of rights.’⁵⁹⁸ She further describes how the new republic established a separation between the state and the people which had important implications regarding the role of the state in the lives of women and children: ‘The social had neither direct political representation nor independent agency. But it could be addressed by the state, as it was increasingly in the course of the Third Republic. The state regulated wet nursing in order to lower infant mortality in 1874, provided tutelage for “morally abandoned” children in 1899, and enacted protective legislation

⁵⁹³ Pateman, Carole, *The Sexual Contract*, (Polity Press: Cambridge, 1988), p. 77.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 90.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid*, In *The Sexual Contract*, Pateman exposes how sexual contract which has been consistently repressed by contract doctrine was underpinned by the exclusion of women from the central masculinist category of ‘individual’ which has provided a robust mechanism for the preservation of a patriarchal construction of womanhood and the maintenance of male sex-right over women’s bodies in civil and social society through a variety of contracts, most notably the employment contracts, the marriage contract, the prostitution contract, and in the 20th century, the surrogacy contract, all of which arguably maintain male sex-right over women.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid*

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid*

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 92-93

for working women in 1892.⁵⁹⁹ Foucault describes how the prohibitive, clandestine public discourse on sex during the 19th century was characterised by the dissimulation of truth which was inextricably bound up with the restoration of public morality, hygiene, propriety, and the regulation of venereal disease: ‘[...] elle se posait en instance souveraine des impératifs d’hygiène, ramassant les vieilles peurs du mal vénérien avec les thèmes nouveaux de l’asepsie...elle prétendait assurer...la propreté morale du corps social, elle promettait d’éliminer les titulaires de tares, les dégénérés et les populations abâtardies.’⁶⁰⁰ As we have seen in the case of regulation, it was women who were explicitly targeted by the practices of observation, surveillance, and regulation and who fell victim to the hypocritical discourse of sexuality.

Such an attempt to regulate the social behaviour and treatment of women is further reflected in the political discourse of the time. Scott describes how the Third Republic conceived of the individual as a social being, while difference was perceived as a permanent aspect of social life that needed to be represented in political discourse: ‘Acknowledging the primacy of social difference provided a new basis for citizenship; the abstract individual – autonomous, independent, rights-bearing no longer served to typify man, the citizen.’⁶⁰¹ The system of social reform advocated by Léon Bourgeois incorporated these ideas of difference and social identity as the defining characteristics of individuals, but while the vote was seen as an expression of the different interests produced by social differences and thus should have included women in the right to vote, this was not the case.⁶⁰² Stone observes that the programme of ‘solidarité’ proposed by Bourgeois was seen as a measure to ‘reduce the consequences of unjust social inequalities, but it had no intention of disturbing the results of what were regarded as natural inequalities. Bourgeois listed those as “differences in sex, age, race, physical force, intelligence, and will.”’⁶⁰³ She describes how Bourgeois campaigned for ‘gender-specific and universal labour reforms principally as a means to protect the working-class family and by extension the “fatherland,” while the language adopted by Bourgeois and solidarists centred on the metaphor of the family and the fatherland, with Bourgeois describing himself as the healing physician or “le

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 93.

⁶⁰⁰ Foucault, Michel, *Histoire de la sexualité, Vol I, Le volonté de savoir*, (Gallimard: Paris, 1976), p. 73.

⁶⁰¹ Scott, p. 95.

⁶⁰² *Ibid*

⁶⁰³ Stone, p. 50.

bon père de famille.’’⁶⁰⁴ Although the programme of ‘solidarité’ was purportedly based on the mutual interdependence of members of society, the language which shaped it was thus profoundly paternalist, gender-specific, and exclusionary. Thus in ‘recognising’ difference, the Third Republic solidified discrimination.

The paternal analogy of the state and father which figured the republic as ‘le bon père de famille’ created a logic of exclusion for women from the public and political life of the republic by defining republican legislators as primary, all-powerful care-takers of women’s welfare in the private sphere of the home, motherhood, and family life. Scott describes how this identification of the state with male citizens created ‘clear distinctions between the sanctity of the family’ and the ‘disciplinary role of the state’, but also served to ‘align masculinity and politics in a new way’: ‘Whereas maleness had been the prior common ground of those who spoke for the nation in 1789, and of those who held property rights in...1848, by the 1890s it was the other way around: the state conferred masculinity on its citizens. While such a conception secured the loyalty of citizens in the republic, it also suggested that the lines of sexual difference were less transparent, and hence less secure, than many believed them to be.’⁶⁰⁵ While evolution provided ‘a natural explanation of sexual difference’, it ‘could not entirely dispense with the contradictions for democratic theory created by a republic that no longer relied on popular sovereignty for its legitimation’ and that it is here that feminism enters the question, with pioneering feminists such as Auclert ‘exposing and embodying the contradiction’ inherent within public discourse on women during the Third Republic.’⁶⁰⁶

Auclert fervently protested against the use of sex difference as a justification for women’s right to citizenship as a violation of the principles of the republic. In her *Discours prononcé au congrès ouvrier socialiste de Marseille* in 1879, she addressed her listeners as ‘Citoyens, Citoyennes,’ and exposed the deception and inequity encoded within the apparent universality and equality of republican discourse: ‘Ah, nous vivons sur une façon de République qui prouve que les mots les plus sublimes deviennent de vains titres...quand dans les sociétés les principes qu’ils représentent ne sont pas intégralement appliqués. Une République qui maintiendra les femmes dans

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 49.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 98.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid*

une condition d'infériorité ne pourra pas faire les hommes égaux.⁶⁰⁷ Auclert's widespread use of 'citoyenne' in her speeches, and in her newspaper *La Citoyenne*, illustrates the direct impact of Hugo's use of the term in her campaign for women's rights to equal citizenship and suffrage. Like Hugo, Auclert's language similarly draws attention to the specificity of the 'woman question': 'il y a une question des femmes, parce qu'il y a une situation toute particulière faite aux femmes.'⁶⁰⁸ She further echoes the deeply Hugolian idea that by oppressing women, men are keeping themselves in a permanent state of oppression: 'Le droit de la femme ne vous ôte pas votre droit. Mettez donc franchement le droit nationale à la place de l'autorité; or, tiens vertu de l'autorité, l'homme opprime la femme, par le fait de cette même autorité, l'homme opprime l'homme.'⁶⁰⁹ While Hugo's use of terms such as 'citoyenne' illustrates his acute awareness of the need for a feminization of language to legitimate his argument for female enfranchisement, Auclert similarly tailored her public addresses and writings in *La Citoyenne* 'to meet republican standards of citizenship, and thus to prove that women could be citizens.'⁶¹⁰

Scott describes how Auclert's campaign for female suffrage relied on "persuasion" not on force, by which she meant the power of logical reasoning.⁶¹¹ In one statement which appears in *La Citoyenne*, Auclert urges women to create a counterforce to the legal power of men. Her words echo almost precisely those of Hugo in a letter to *La Société pour l'Amélioration du sort des femmes* in which he protests that so long as laws are made by men alone, the oppression of women will persist: Hugo states that 'l'homme a fait verser tous les droits de son côté et tous les devoirs du côté de la femme,'⁶¹² while Auclert states 'pendant que les hommes feront seuls les lois, ils les feront pour eux contre nous.'⁶¹³ The striking similarity in the language and argumentative devices employed by both Hugo and Auclert demonstrates the mobilising impact of Hugo's words on his feminist peers, while also attesting to the progressiveness and modernity of his thought on the need for a radical feminization of

⁶⁰⁷ Auclert, Hubertine, *Égalité sociale et politique de la femme et de l'homme: discours prononcé au Congrès ouvrier socialiste de Marseille*, (A. Thomas: Marseille, 1879). p. 1.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 9.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁶¹⁰ Scott, p. 100.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 106.

⁶¹² Hugo, *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 175.

⁶¹³ Scott, p. 106. (Cited by Scott – Original reference taken from "Le suffrage des femmes", in *La Citoyenne*, p. 133)

language to accompany the insertion of women within the social and legal framework of the republic. Like Hugo, Auclert was aware of the immense power of language ‘to change the material reality’ of women, and sought to change the language which ‘inscribed women’s inferiority and rendered women invisible’ by proposing a ‘feminization of language’ and the ‘introduction of specifically feminine equivalents of hitherto exclusively male terms.’⁶¹⁴ As can be seen in Richer’s *Code des femmes*, Auclert similarly drew attention to the male-exclusiveness enshrined within the discriminatory language of the *Code civil* and emphasised the urgent need for its reformulation: ‘En lisant – tout Français – on croirait qu’il est question de toute la nation. Point du tout: cela ne comprend qu’une partie de la nation: Les hommes.’⁶¹⁵

Like Hugo, Auclert was acutely sensitive to the gender inequity encoded within the terms of the *Code* and was keenly aware that the attainment of equality for women required a radical revision of the provisions therein. While Hugo condemned its discriminatory language for enshrining women’s legal, civil, and judicial inferiority, and for creating the basis for female servitude ‘l’homme a fait verser tous les droits de son côté et tous les devoirs du côté de la femme’,⁶¹⁶ Auclert similarly refuted the gender inequity enshrined by the *Code* when she declared it responsible for prescribing ‘moins de droits à la femme, plus de rigueur contre elle.’⁶¹⁷ However, like Hugo, Auclert’s discourse does at times exhibit essentializing tendencies and an appeal to “the paradox of sex difference.”⁶¹⁸ Yet, as with Hugo, such an appeal to women’s maternal specificity also assumes a strategic function within her most radical arguments for female emancipation where it often has a mobilising and emancipatory effect. Such is the case with regards Auclert’s demands for the recognition of women’s maternal role as equal work in order to legitimate her claims for paid housework: ‘Nous voulons que...la mère...puisse prétendre à l’indépendance économique, par cette raison qu’être nourrice est une profession rétribuée [...] C’est qu’enfin, au rebours de

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 108.

⁶¹⁵ Auclert, Hubertine, speech cited in *Séances du Congrès ouvrier socialiste en France 3^e session, tenue à Marseille du 20 au 31 octobre 1879*, (J. Doucet: Marseille, 1879), pp. 152-3 <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb34577258s> [Accessed 23 June 2013]

⁶¹⁶ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 175.

⁶¹⁷ Auclert, *Ibid*, p. 153.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 111.

ce qui est socialement admis, je fais passer avant l'indépendance économique de la femme qu'incombe naturellement la charge de l'enfant.'⁶¹⁹

One feature of Auclert's public discourse on women which elicited criticism from her feminist peers was her frequent use of the term 'esclave' to describe women: 'La citoyenne Auclert a souvent et constamment répété les mots *esclaves, serves*, un peu trop même, selon nous. [...] Nous croyons...que le mot "esclave" veut dire: qui vit en servitude sous la puissance absolue d'un maître, qui est le dispensateur de la vie...Je ne pense pas que ce genre d'esclave vive en France...Donc, citer et poser la femme actuellement comme esclave est un mot que je crois hasardé et même déplacé.'⁶²⁰ Her use of the term was perceived as a retrogressive stance which jarred with her otherwise modern, reasoned, and authoritative discourse: 'Pour ne citer qu'un fait...c'est, qu'ayant eu l'occasion de discuter, dans la Commission du travail des femmes, avec la citoyenne Auclert, je puis vous dire qu'elle parlait avec l'autorité d'une maîtresse et non avec la soumission d'une esclave...son idée s'imposait sur la discussion, la raison même [...]'⁶²¹ However, it must also be acknowledged that while Auclert's use of the term may appear retrogressive, the context in which she used it was in reference to the civil, judicial, and legal inferiority imposed on women by the *Code civil*, and thus reflects her attempts to mobilise women to escape their state of servitude and emancipate themselves: 'Oublions notre sort particulier d'esclave. Confondons nos revendications avec celles des hommes !'⁶²²

Similarly in his letter to Richer, Hugo describes the inferiority of women enshrined by the male-defined double-standard terms of the *Code civil* as a form of legal, judicial, and civil servitude: 'L'homme a chargé inégalement ces deux plateaux du Code...De là la servitude de la femme.'⁶²³ Hugo sees women's civil inferiority and moral enslavement as the damning heritage of the *Code civil* and exposes the true slavery of women concealed by such terms as 'mineure': 'Cette mineure selon la loi, cette

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 155.

⁶²⁰ *Compte rendu lu en assemblée corporative, le 15 février 1880, (Congrès socialiste ouvrier de Marseille, 1879)* (A. Mourre et J. Dauthier: Paris, 1880), pp.20-21
<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb34577257f> [Accessed 23 June 2013]

⁶²¹ *Ibid*, p. 21.

⁶²² Auclert cited in *Séances du Congrès socialiste de France*, p. 153.

⁶²³ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 175.

esclave selon la réalité, c'est la femme.⁶²⁴ Richer similarly uses the word in his call for a complete redress of the oppression and subjugation of women enshrined by the *Code*: 'Il faut que toutes les consciences se redressent énergiquement, violemment contre cette oppression brutale, contre cette honteuse et dégradante sujétion. Mais la femme est la pire des esclaves!'⁶²⁵ Thus for these feminists, the description of women in terms of slavery was not a retrogressive stance which undermines the progressiveness of their public discourse on women, but an acute observation of women's material existence, their civil, legal, and moral oppression enshrined in law since the formulation of the *Code civil*, which serves as an urgent, mobilising, and incendiary demand for their emancipation.

Furthermore, as we have seen in relation to Hugo's essentialist descriptions of women, which at times also appear to undermine his feminism, the specific way in which he invoked women's maternal essence to justify and promote their entry into the public and political domain, reflect the subversive way in which feminists of the 19th century began to invoke women's maternal and feminine specificity as a way of arguing for their social and political emancipation. Auclert, similarly, evoked women's specificity in a radical way in her call for the female emancipation: 'Une République qui maintiendra les femmes dans une condition d'infériorité, ne pourra pas faire les hommes égaux.'⁶²⁶ While venerating the need for a parental as distinct from paternalist state in order to achieve 'the enfranchisement of women...of the social and the restoration of the potency of citizenship',⁶²⁷ Auclert also argued that women's "virility" was needed to uphold the republic.⁶²⁸ Scott observes how Auclert's arguments were based on the idea that women's expertise was needed in the "cuisine administrative" of the state as the 'denial of women's right to vote called into question the state's ability to ensure the masculinity of its citizens,' and 'the subordination of women was symbolically and actually the subordination of the social to the political and the state.'⁶²⁹

⁶²⁴ Furthermore, as we have already seen, the term 'white slavery' was employed by feminists and by Hugo in late-19th century debates on the abolition of prostitution.

⁶²⁵ Richer, *Le code des femmes*, p. 112.

⁶²⁶ Auclert cited in *Séances du Congrès socialiste de France*, p. 149.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 115.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 114.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid*

This is clearly seen in Aucert's writings in which she echoes Condorcet and Hugo, by declaring that so long as women did not remain citizens, men could never call themselves citizens: '[...] je devrais dire pour l'émancipation de l'humanité, car l'homme ne peut séparer son sort de celui de sa mère, de sa fille... La femme, la mère n'étant pas citoyenne, l'homme né d'elle n'est qu'un mélange de serve et d'affranchi, c'est un citoyen bâtard.'⁶³⁰ Her use of the word 'virility' in terms of women reflects Hugo's use of the word in his eulogy to George Sand. That both Hugo and Auclert attributed this word to women at a time when the notion of virility was so consonant with masculinist republican discourse, and so rarely associated with women, reveals the extent to which they both desired the particular and enriching contribution of women to the new state. Both Hugo and Auclert evidently believed that women would bring a humanizing force to French politics and society.

Hugo's support for feminist issues in his correspondence with Léon Richer.

In his letter to Richer, Hugo attributes philosophers with the responsibility of effecting women's social and legal reform by enriching the static social perspective of government leaders with their enlightened vision of social progress: 'Je sais que les philosophes vont vite et que les gouvernants vont lentement; cela tient à ce que les philosophes sont dans l'absolu, et les gouvernants dans le relatif; cependant, il faut que les gouvernants finissent par rejoindre les philosophes.'⁶³¹ He argues that such a union between legislators and thinkers is necessary to prevent the outbreak of revolution, and defends his campaign for women's equality with the same urgency and immediacy which characterised his combat against the death penalty: 'Sur beaucoup de questions à cette heure, les gouvernants sont en retard. Voyez les hésitations de l'Assemblée à propos de la peine de mort. En attendant, l'échafaud sévit.'⁶³² By aligning himself with philosophers in the quest to reform the social and legal position of women in the republic, Hugo is identifying his ability to contribute to the cause of women in terms of his popular appeal to the public, as opposed to his limited power in the Senate and Legislative Assembly. Furthermore, by pointing out the need for an alliance between philosophers and legislators, Hugo is demonstrating his awareness

⁶³⁰ Auclert, lettre-préface in *Le roman de la femme chrétienne: étude historique* by Léon Giraud, (A. Ghio: Paris, 1880), p. 2. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb30511584x> [Accessed 23 June 2013]

⁶³¹ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 175.

⁶³² *Ibid*

of the reluctance of republican leaders to extend civil rights to women, and the need for the enlightening perspective of philosophy to shape the creation of legislative reforms. That he believed he could provide this source of enlightenment for republican leaders illustrates how Hugo identified his perspective on women to be far more enlightened and progressive than that of his republican peers.

In his letter, Hugo identifies the issue of divorce and women's enfranchisement as an integral part of his socialist agenda for the republic, along with the secularization of education, the abolition of the death penalty, and the rights of children: 'Dans la question...de l'irrévocable qu'il faut ôter du mariage et de l'irréparable qu'il faut ôter de la pénalité, dans la question de l'enseignement obligatoire, gratuit et laïque, dans la question de la femme, dans la question de l'enfant, il est temps que les gouvernants avisent.'⁶³³ Hugo thus aligns his support for female emancipation with his distinctly socialist vision for reform – he attributes philosophers with the ability to envisage 'l'idéal social' and implores his fellow thinkers to pursue their combat on behalf of female emancipation: 'Nous philosophes, nous contemplateurs de l'idéal social, ne nous lassons pas. Continuons notre œuvre.'⁶³⁴ Hugo echoes Marx when he declares that the resolution of the 'woman question' will resolve the major social problem of the 19th century: 'Étudions sous toutes ses faces, et avec une bonne volonté croissante, ce pathétique problème de la femme dont la solution résoudrait presque la question sociale toute entière.'⁶³⁵ Marx argued that so long as a capitalist patriarchal society persisted, women would always be oppressed, and linked the cause of female emancipation to his wider vision of social emancipation which involved the abolition of the monogamous family as the commercial unit of society, the end of the husband's supremacy, and the attainment of equal legal rights for both sexes. The realisation of Marx's social vision depended on the transformation of domestic labour into large-scale social production and the contribution of both sexes to public industry, and was thus relative to the degree of women's social emancipation: 'The change in a historical epoch can always be determined by women's progress towards freedom, because here, in the relation of woman to man, of the weak to the strong, the victory of human nature

⁶³³ *Ibid*

⁶³⁴ *Ibid*

⁶³⁵ *Ibid*

over brutality is most evident. The degree of emancipation of woman is the natural measure of general emancipation.’⁶³⁶

Marx believed that by granting women freedom, the great social ills engendered by capitalist bourgeois society such as the exploitation of child and female labour, prostitution, and infant mortality would end, and that his vision for social equality and productive, collective industry would be realised. However, for Marx and Engels the emancipation of the social classes took precedence over the emancipation of women, whereas, for Hugo, the emancipation of the social classes would appear to be contingent upon, and the result of, female emancipation, or at the very least, he considered the emancipation of women as an integral part of his vision for social reform. In his letter to Richer, Hugo declares that the attainment of social peace cannot be reached until the ‘woman question’ has been resolved: ‘La paix sociale est à ce prix. La solution résoudrait la question sociale tout entière.’⁶³⁷ Although the emancipation of women was seen by Marx as a secondary or subordinate issue to the emancipation of the working-classes, and while he did not openly support campaigns for women’s rights, Marx, like Hugo, did have considerably more enlightened views on women than other thinkers of his time.

Like Hugo, Marx similarly refutes the natural basis for the oppression of women when he argues that ‘the slavery latent in the family only develops gradually with the increase of populations, the growth of work, and with the extension of external relations both of war and of barter.’⁶³⁸ This belief in the basic equality in the nature of the sexes is fundamentally important for Hugo and Marx because it enabled them both to identify instances of female oppression in society. Marx’s exposure of female oppression centred around women’s role in the family where they performed an unpaid domestic labour and a sexual and reproductive function for men, and were transformed into a ‘valuable commodity...to be bartered out by her family in exchange for the male son of another family.’⁶³⁹ However, Hugo’s belief in the basic equality of the sexes led him to extend women’s social oppression to a critique of their wider political, legal,

⁶³⁶ Marx, Karl; Engels, Friedrich; Lenin, Vladimir Il’ich, *On women and the family*, (Repsol: Dublin, 1983), p. 86.

⁶³⁷ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 175.

⁶³⁸ Marx, Karl, *The German Ideology, Part 1: Feuerbach*, (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1974), p. 44.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 25.

and judicial oppression and to argue for their enfranchisement on the basis of that equality.

Furthermore, Hugo's feminist stance on prostitution is also more liberating than that of Marx. Pateman rejects the Marxist perception of prostitution which posits an analogy between capitalist workers and prostitutes on the basis of their exploitation and degradation by a capitalist economy as this analogy as it ignores the original question of subordination. By comparing the worker to the prostitute, Marxist feminists see prostitution as a consequence of the economic coercion, exploitation, and alienation of wage labour which they derive from Marx's statement that "prostitution is only a *specific* expression of the *general* prostitution of the labourer."⁶⁴⁰ She describes how the inherent flaw of this analogy lies in the fundamental difference between the prostitution contract and the employment contract – 'the prostitution contract is a contract with a woman and, therefore, cannot be the same as the employment contract, a contract between men.'⁶⁴¹ Furthermore, the prostitution may be paid or unpaid.⁶⁴² While the prostitute can be seen as 'contracting out' labour services, the capitalist cannot contract to use the proletarian's services or labour power and while the capitalist has no intrinsic interest in the body and self of the worker, 'the men who enter into the prostitution contract have only one interest; the prostitute and her body [...] In prostitution, the body of the woman, and sexual access to that body, is the subject of that contract.'⁶⁴³

Pateman argues that 'in modern patriarchy, the sale of women's bodies in the capitalist market upholds the story of the sexual contract', in that 'the patriarchal construction of masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection, and that sexual mastery is the major means by which men affirm their manhood.'⁶⁴⁴ She further argues that 'in such a context, the "sex-act" itself provides acknowledgement of patriarchal right', and that 'when women's bodies are on sale as commodities in the capitalist market, the terms of the original contract cannot be forgotten; the law of the male sex-right is publicly affirmed, and men gain public

⁶⁴⁰ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. D. J. Struik, (International Publishers: New York, 1964), p. 133.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 202.

⁶⁴² *Ibid*

⁶⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 203.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 207.

acknowledgement as women's sexual masters – that is what is wrong with prostitution.⁶⁴⁵ She thus exposes the fundamental flaw in Marxist theory on prostitution – namely that in comparing the oppression of the male capitalist worker with that of the female prostitute, it fails to acknowledge the prostitution contract as a 'contemporary expression of the 'original' sexual contract which 'upholds the law of male sex-right' by granting men the 'patriarchal right of access to women's bodies.'⁶⁴⁶

By contrast to contemporary Marxist feminists, Josephine Butler's campaign against the *CD Acts* exposed the "double-standard" of sexual morality which Pateman argues is 'the only morality compatible with the sexual contract,' in her identification of prostitution as the ultimate form of sexual domination, and acknowledgement of prostitutes as a "slave class."⁶⁴⁷ As we have seen from Hugo's letter of support for Butler's campaign and his literary treatment of prostitution, he similarly saw prostitution as a form of sexual slavery and followed the distinctly feminist abolitionist stance of Butler who called for the social restoration of prostitutes as opposed to the coercion and punishment imposed by state regulation. Thus while both Hugo and Marx saw the measure of female emancipation in a given society as a 'measure of general emancipation', Marx's vision for social emancipation remains specific to the *worker*, while Hugo's vision of social emancipation addresses grave instances of social injustice and oppression specific to *women*, upon whose resolution depends the emancipation of society at large: 'ce pathétique problème de la femme dont la solution résoudrait presque la question sociale toute entière.'⁶⁴⁸

Hugo's letter to Richer again identifies the primal role of philosophers such as himself within the struggle for women's rights not just in terms of their vision of justice, but also for their compassion: 'Apportons dans l'étude de ce problème plus même que la justice; apportons-y la vénération; apportons-y la compassion.'⁶⁴⁹ He thus identifies his role within women's emancipation as both an enlightened visionary for social emancipation and a compassionate ally for the cause of women. However, while keenly promoting the legal, social, and judicial emancipation of women as part of his wider programme of social reform, the forward-thinking socialist nature of Hugo's

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 208.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 199.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 196.

⁶⁴⁸ *Actes et Paroles III*, pp. 175-176

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 176.

letter corresponds with a deeply Romanticised vision of women which again reveals how deeply rooted his Romantic idealisation of women as angelic, beautiful, maternal beings co-existed with even his most radical visions of female emancipation.

Hugo's Romantic vision of femininity.

Towards the end of his letter, Hugo reverts to a deeply Romantic vision of women as sacred beings in need of protection and assistance. He again places central importance upon women's maternal role as their most sacred and fundamental social function: 'Quoi, il y a un être, un être sacré, qui nous a formés de sa chair, vivifiés de son sang, nourris de son lait, remplis de son cœur, illuminés de son âme [...]'⁶⁵⁰ Here the biologicistic terms employed by Hugo reveal how instinctively he accepted women's maternal role as the inherent nature of their sex and their primal function in society – while advocating women's social emancipation, his vision of women's social role thus remains firmly anchored within women's maternal duties. Furthermore, the helpless, submissive way in which Hugo describes women is reminiscent of his letter to the Cuban women wherein he assumes an authoritative stance within their struggle: 'cet être souffre, et cet être saigne, pleure, languit, tremble.'⁶⁵¹ Hugo describes men as the agents for female emancipation, while women are figured as the helpless victims – his choice of verbs is particularly telling: 'Ah ! dévouons-nous, servons-la, défendons-la, secourons-la, protégeons-la ! Baisons les pieds de notre mère ! Avant peu, n'en doutons pas, justice sera rendue et justice sera faite.'⁶⁵² The conflict which exists between Hugo's empathetic, compassionate stance in the struggle for female emancipation, and the authoritative, controlling role which he assumes with their struggle illustrate the difficulty for male feminists of adopting a female standpoint in their arguments for women's rights, moreover for Hugo whose perceptions of femininity were defined by his Romanticism. While Hugo may have identified men as the agents of female emancipation, feminist women such as Tristan and Auclert declared that women needed to become the agents of their own emancipation.

In the final lines of his letter, however, Hugo resumes his decidedly socialist argument for female emancipation when he connects the liberation of women with the welfare

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 176.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid*

⁶⁵² *Ibid*

of men, the family, and the larger social unit. Hugo declares that men will never be content so long as women are kept in a state of oppression: ‘L’homme à lui seul n’est pas l’homme’ and declares that the happiness of men can never be achieved by the suffering of women ‘[...] et reconnaîtra que, même au point de vue de notre égoïsme, il est difficile de composer le bonheur de l’homme avec la souffrance de la femme.’⁶⁵³ His argument that men’s well-being depends upon the emancipation of women again reflects the views of Marx and Engels, and utopian socialists such as Fourier, who argued that the measure of progress and social order in a given society can only be measured by the degree of women’s emancipation: ‘les progrès sociaux et changements de Période s’opèrent en raison des progrès des femmes vers la liberté, et les décadences d’ordre social s’opèrent en raison du décroissement de la liberté des femmes.’⁶⁵⁴ By explicitly connecting the issue of women’s liberation with the well-being of the family unit, Hugo is demonstrating how deeply his feminism is predicated upon socialist issues – like Marx and Engels, he views women’s emancipation in terms of its wider familial and social utility. He describes the family as the core unit of society, upon which the effective and productive organisation of society depends: ‘l’homme, plus la femme, plus l’enfant, cette créature une et triple constitue la vraie unité humaine. Toute l’organisation sociale doit découler de là.’⁶⁵⁵

Hugo argues that the rights of man, as enshrined by law, must legislate for this triadic familial unit: ‘Assurer le droit de l’homme sous cette triple forme, tel doit être le but de cette providence d’en bas que nous appelons la loi.’⁶⁵⁶ This conception of the family as a ‘triple forme’ is also evident in the writings of Michelet and Pelletan, but as we have seen from their arguments, the family unit which they envisaged was one in which the role of women in the creation of domestic and social harmony was contingent upon their strict exclusion from public life, whereas Hugo believed that women’s harmonising qualities would also provide an enriching and conciliatory contribution to public life. He declares that so long as society enslaves and oppresses women and children, it will precipitate its own ruin: ‘On en viendra...à comprendre qu’une société est mal faite...quand la femme est maintenue sans initiative, quand la

⁶⁵³ *Ibid*

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid*

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid*

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid*

servitude se déguise sous le nom de tutelle, quand la charge est d'autant plus lourde que l'épaule est plus faible [...]'⁶⁵⁷

Hugo's letter to Richer thus reveals the distinctly socialist dimension of his feminist vision for social and legislative reform, and the regeneration of the family as the core unit of society. By describing the degree of female emancipation in a given society as the measure of its larger social emancipation, his arguments echo those of Marx and Engels who acknowledged the need for female emancipation for the restructuring of the family, and the improvement of the larger social fabric. Further, the central importance placed upon women's maternal function within Hugo's vision for female emancipation further connects him with the socialist thinking of his time which at once welcomed women's entry into a variety of new social roles, while devoting fundamental importance to their unique function as a mother.

The correspondence of the women of *La Société pour l'amélioration du sort des Femmes* with Hugo.

La Société pour l'amélioration du sort des Femmes was one of many feminist organisations which militated for a diverse range of issues during the Third Republic such as women's right to education, civil liberty, legal equality, voting rights, and equal work opportunities. The society was originally known as *l'Association pour le Droit des Femmes* but changed its name in 1874 until the government forced it to dissolve in December 1875.⁶⁵⁸ It was presided over by Maria Deraismes and received considerable assistance from Léon Richer regarding the publication of articles in his newspapers and the organisation of public lectures and conferences for its members. Although the society aimed to convince the newly-established republican leadership of the legitimacy of women's demands for civil, social and legal equality, the initial years of the republic proved quite unpromising for feminists as the new leadership was marked by instability, cautiousness, and conflicting ambitions. It was not until feminists were finally on the side of the republicans in 1877 following their victory in the Chamber of Deputies' election that the government finally began to implement measures granting women fundamental liberties, took steps to guarantee the freedom of press, and gave its approval to the *Société* in 1879. The letter addressed by the

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid*

⁶⁵⁸ Moses, p. 195.

women of the society to Victor Hugo thus reflects their concerns that their demands had been, and continued to be, overlooked, and displays how the women turned to Hugo in the hope of raising mass public awareness for their campaign.

In their letter, the women herald Hugo as an ‘illustre maître’ and champion him as an ally for weak, oppressed, and disfavoured people throughout the world: ‘Il n’est pas une liberté que vous n’ayez pas revendiquée, pas une cause juste que vous n’ayez pas défendue, pas une oppression contre laquelle vous ne vous soyez pas éloquemment élevé.’⁶⁵⁹ They describe how the universal, non-discriminatory way in which Hugo has tirelessly defended the cause of the most oppressed groups in society made him a natural ally to their cause: ‘Votre œuvre n’est qu’une longue et infatigable protestation contre l’abus de la force. Il y a dans votre cœur une commisération profonde pour tous les misérables. S’agit-il d’un peuple ? s’agit-il d’une classe ? s’agit-il d’un individu ? peu vous importe.’⁶⁶⁰ The women applaud Hugo as a natural defender of women’s rights owing to his compassionate identification with oppressed people everywhere: ‘Toute souffrance vous atteint et vous touche.’⁶⁶¹ This provides a clear indication of the credibility of Hugo as a male feminist and his ability to achieve an empathetic, non-beneficiary standpoing in the struggle for women’s rights. The women were also aware of the fulsome practical advantages accruing to them by having the support of Hugo’s weighty public voice – in *Ève dans l’humanité*, Deraismes acknowledges the immeasurable value of his voice: ‘Aux élections, par exemple, la voix de Victor Hugo compterait pour cent mille, parce qu’il est le plus gran poète du siècle, et ainsi de suite.’⁶⁶²

As well as identifying Hugo as an ally for the cause of women by virtue of his natural empathy for the plight of the oppressed, they also identify him as such owing to his shared views with feminists of his time, and his extensive public activism in support of freedom, justice, and equality: ‘Le droit est violé quelque part, en quelqu’un; cela vous suffit. Pourquoi? Parce que vous êtes l’homme du devoir.’⁶⁶³ Their appraisal of Hugo as ‘l’homme du devoir’ reflects the concrete ways in which his defence of women in his literary and public discourse was matched by his decisive public action

⁶⁵⁹ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 176.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid*

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid*

⁶⁶² Deraismes, *Ève dans l’humanité*, p. 195. (original spelling)

⁶⁶³ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 176.

in defence of women's rights. Indeed Hugo himself demonstrated his awareness of the need to bolster his support for the cause of the oppressed with decisive public action on their behalf in his definition of socialism as the union between practice and theory: 'Le vrai socialiste unit la pratique à la théorie, et donne le pain au corps en même temps que les idées aux esprits.'⁶⁶⁴

The women further identify Hugo as a natural defender of female emancipation owing to his implacable commitment to truth, freedom, universal equality, and moral conscience, qualities which set Hugo apart in a century which inherited the system of moral anarchy and privileges of pre-revolutionary years by sanctioning the exclusion and oppression of women within the hierarchical terms of the *Code civil*: 'En ce siècle d'anarchie morale, où le privilège – contradiction bizarre! survit aux causes qui l'avaient produit et socialement consacré, vous proclamez l'égalité de toutes, vous affirmez la liberté individuelle et collective, vous affirmez la raison, vous affirmez l'inviolabilité de la conscience humaine.'⁶⁶⁵ The women further distinguish Hugo from his male contemporaries by his ability to recognise women's state of injustice and oppression within the French legal system: 'Et nous hésiterions – nous dont l'idée de justice est méconnue, à solliciter de votre dévouement l'appui que vous ne refusez à personne [...]'⁶⁶⁶

While the women thus identified Hugo as a natural ally for their cause owing to his unfaltering defence of oppressed people everywhere, the decisiveness of his social activism, and his empathy with the plight of the afflicted, their request for Hugo's support was also motivated by the practical reasons of attracting as much public awareness as possible for their cause, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of their demands to government. As arguably the most prominent representative voices for the cause justice, liberty, and equality in the 19th century, Hugo's support would dramatically raise the public profile of their campaign. The women thus sought 'l'irrésistible puissance' of Hugo's 'parole' and his 'incommensurable générosité de...cœur' to bring to light the many forms of legal inequity which relegated women to a minority position in 19th century France: 'Mère de famille, la femme est sans droit,

⁶⁶⁴ This pragmatic definition of his socialist theory appears in a personal letter written by Hugo to his wife on the subject of *Les Misérables* on 22 March 1862.

⁶⁶⁵ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 176.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 177.

ses enfants même ne lui appartiennent pas; épouse, elle a un tuteur, presque un maître; célibataire ou veuve, elle est assimilée par le code aux voleurs et aux assassins. Politiquement elle ne compte pas. Nos lois la mettent hors la loi.’⁶⁶⁷⁶⁶⁸

By seeking Hugo’s support for their vast vision of reform of the *Code civil*, the women’s letter provides a clear insight into how Hugo was perceived by feminists as an unrelenting ally to their universal demands for emancipation, liberation, and changing roles in 19th century France. They describe how the lack of representation for women’s rights led to the foundation of their society and proclaim that Hugo’s alliance will help to legitimise their society and its broad, universal claims for the attainment of women’s rights, and the radical reversal of women’s subordinate social, legal, and political status prescribed by the gendered legislative framework of the *Code civil*: ‘Et pour bien pénétrer dans l’esprit des masses l’importance sociale de la grande cause sociale à laquelle nous sommes attachés, nous avons...fondé en France une société à laquelle viendront apporter leur concours tous ceux qui pensent que le temps est venu de donner à la femme, dans la famille et ailleurs, la place qui lui est due...Notre humble Société a besoin d’être consacrée. Une adhésion de vous...serait, pour toutes les femmes intelligentes, pour tous les hommes de cœur, un encouragement à nous seconder [...]’⁶⁶⁹ By singling out the appeal of Hugo’s support

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid*

⁶⁶⁸ Under the terms of the *Code civil*, women were not permitted to record the birth of their own children: ‘La naissance de l’enfant sera déclarée par le père, ou à défaut du père, par les docteurs en médecine ou en chirurgie, sages-femmes, officiers de santé et autres personnes qui auront assisté à l’accouchement [...]’ (Art 56, p. 15.) Art. 213 of the *Code* stated that women owed obedience to their husbands: ‘Le mari doit protection à sa femme, la femme obéissance à son mari.’ (p. 53.) Art. 215 of the *Code* states that women’s rights of judgement are subject to the will of their husbands: ‘La femme ne peut ester en jugement sans l’autorisation de son mari, quand même elle serait marchande publique, ou non commune, ou séparée de biens.’ (p. 53.) While Art. 229 of the *Code* permitted men to seek divorce on grounds of adultery: ‘Le mari pourra demander le divorce pour cause d’adultère de sa femme.’ Art. 230 restricts the right of women to seek divorce on grounds of adultery to the case where the husband’s concubine was residing in the family home: ‘La femme pourra demander le divorce pour cause d’adultère de son mari, lorsqu’il aura tenu sa concubine dans la maison commune.’ (p. 56.) Art. 340 of the *Code* prohibited the discovery of paternity: ‘La recherche de la paternité est interdite’ while in Art. 341, the discovery of maternity is permitted: ‘La recherche de la maternité est admise.’ (p. 84.) While Art. 372. grants both parents authority over children: ‘Il reste sous leur autorité jusqu’à sa majorité ou son émancipation’, Art. 373 confers parental authority to the father: ‘Le père seul exerce cette autorité durant le mariage.’ (p. 92.) Art. 1549 of the *Code* grants full charge to the husband in the distribution of the marital dowry: ‘Le mari seul a l’administration des biens (dotaux) pendant le mariage. Il a seul le droit d’en poursuivre les débiteurs et détenteurs, d’en percevoir les fruits et les intérêts, et de recevoir le remboursement des capitaux.’ (p. 382.) *Code civil des français*, (Imp. de la République: Paris, 1804), <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb339642859> [Accessed on 26 June 2013]

⁶⁶⁹ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 177.

for the organisation among ‘toutes les femmes intelligentes’ and ‘tous les hommes de cœur’⁶⁷⁰, the women of the society are outlining the particular strategy adopted by feminists during the Third Republic. This strategy was characterised by the intellectual orientation of feminist activity, and emphasis on women’s education which propagated arguments for women’s emancipation through the medium of public lectures, conferences, feminist publications, and the parallel appeal to political leaders to acknowledge the legitimacy of their demands.

Hugo’s letter of reply to the women in support of their cause.

Hugo’s response to the letter from the women of the *Société* which included such leading feminists as Deraismes, Auclert, Louise Laffite, Julie Thomas, and Pauline Chaniac, demonstrates his full support for their demands and his eagerness to lend the weight of his voice to their public campaign. In his letter, Hugo applauds the women’s vast programme for social reform as both worthy and legitimate: ‘Je connais vos nobles et légitimes revendications.’⁶⁷¹ He re-echoes the words of the women by defining himself as an ally and moral conscience within their struggle against oppression, again attesting to the moralistic and compassionate underpinnings of his feminism: ‘Dans notre société, telle qu’elle est faite, les femmes subissent et souffrent; elles ont raison de réclamer un sort meilleur. Je ne suis rien qu’une conscience, mais je comprends leur droit, et j’en compose mon devoir, et tout l’effort de ma vie est de leur côté. Vous avez raison de voir en moi un auxiliaire de bonne volonté.’⁶⁷²

Hugo goes on to utter one of his most profound and liberating statements in favour of female emancipation when he declares that: ‘L’homme a été le problème du dix-huitième siècle; la femme est le problème du dix-neuvième.’⁶⁷³ By thus defining the issue of female emancipation as the most pressing ‘problème’ of the 19th century, Hugo is demonstrating his acute awareness of the failure of the French Revolution, and subsequent revolutions of the 19th century, to extend the rights of freedom, equality, and liberty to women. The particular reasons which compel Hugo to identify the issue of female emancipation as the most pressing ‘problème du dix-neuvième siècle’ again reveal how his personal feminism was underpinned by his wider socialist

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid*

⁶⁷¹ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 177.

⁶⁷² *Ibid*

⁶⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 178.

theory. He acknowledges the far-reaching social impact of women's freedom when he describes how the issue of female emancipation has a direct impact on the welfare of children, and thus determines the success and progress of future generations: 'Et qui dit la femme, dit l'enfant, c'est-à-dire, l'avenir. La question ainsi posée apparaît dans toute sa profondeur.'⁶⁷⁴

His argument for female emancipation is primarily delineated in terms of its larger social utility and its harmonising and unifying impact on society at large: 'C'est dans la solution de cette question qu'est le suprême apaisement social.'⁶⁷⁵ It is striking that almost exactly the same lines appear within Michelet's discussion of the ruinous effect of women's entry into the workplace in *La femme*: 'Qui dit la femme, dit l'enfant; en chacune d'elles qu'on détruit, une famille est détruite, plusieurs enfants, et l'espoir des générations à venir.'⁶⁷⁶ However, while Hugo shares Michelet's views on the social degeneracy resultant from women's entry into the workplace, he envisages the potential of women's maternal function in the creation of a solid republic in a far more progressive light than Michelet could have imagined. As we have seen, Hugo justified his demands for the extension of equal education to women on the basis of their unique role in the creation of domestic and wider social harmony, in the same way as feminists of his time such as Deraismes and Richer were doing, but also in the way that Enlightenment thinkers had done a century before. Thus, unlike Michelet, who argued that women's contribution to domestic and social harmony necessarily entailed their confinement to the domestic sphere and their exclusion from public life, Hugo argued that it was precisely the ability of women to contribute to social harmony which justified their claims to equal education, equal citizenship, and equal participation in the public sphere.

While women's maternal function deeply informs Hugo's socialist vision for female emancipation, this socialist dimension of his feminism also incorporates enlightened and forward-thinking views in relation to the equality of the sexes, and endorses the vast programme of civil, legal, and judicial reforms proposed by the women of the *Société*. Hugo's letter fervidly contests the inequity and oppression which exists in male and female relations despite the supremacy of women within the republican

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid*

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid*

⁶⁷⁶ Michelet, *La Femme*, p. 21.

home wherein women were defined as ‘la mère universelle’ to whom was attributed the special task of forming future citizens. Such a conception of women’s maternal role was often described as a special mission for which nature had specifically endowed them. It is this revered maternal supremacy of women which lies at the core of the concept of “republican motherhood”, and to which Hugo evidently refers when he declares ‘dans la famille, elle est toute.’⁶⁷⁷

According to the supremely maternal vision of women championed by ‘republican motherhood’, the order and harmony of the home depend entirely upon the exercise of women’s loving and maternal qualities, a task which necessarily precludes their participation in public life. Within the home, women are not only responsible for the well-being of her children, but also that of her husband: ‘Situation étrange et violente! Au fond, les hommes dépendent de vous, la femme tient le cœur de l’homme...Le foyer domestique est ce qu’elle le fait; elle est dans la maison la maîtresse du bien et du mal [...] La femme peut tout contre l’homme et rien pour elle.’⁶⁷⁸ While Hugo evidently venerated women’s role in ‘republican motherhood’, and regarded motherhood as women’s natural duty, here he is distancing himself from the limited, confining vision of ‘republican motherhood’ propounded by Rousseau, and perpetuated throughout the 19th century by republicans such as Michelet, Pelletan, and Gambetta, by exposing the legal, judicial, and civil oppression of women concealed by such a formulation of their supreme maternal mission which Hugo scorns as a ‘souveraineté compliquée d’oppression.’⁶⁷⁹

However, while the concept of ‘republican motherhood’ provided a robust ideological basis for the denial of women’s rights since its institution by the French Revolution, a recent debate between Joan B. Landes and Keith Michael Baker has shed new light on the possibilities of interpreting the ideology from a feminist and Enlightenment perspective. Landes describes how major feminist thinkers such as Condorcet and Wollstonecraft in fact helped to define the notion and ascribed to what she sees as a ‘feminist version’ of ‘republican motherhood’, which she sees as ultimately detrimental to their feminist aims. Landes argues that while ‘the feminist version of Republican motherhood was meant to respond to a strictly misogynist construction of

⁶⁷⁷ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 178.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid*

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid*

the dual spheres of home and state [...] the potential for providing women with a route into the public sphere by way of republican motherhood was undermined by...claims of nature' as 'in the sphere of sexual relations, nature was the guardian of inequality', and 'thus a demand based primarily on woman's performance of her maternal duty was easily refuted.'⁶⁸⁰ While Landes commends Condorcet's 'rationalist feminism, combined with cultural sensitivity' which led him to differ significantly on a crucial issue with mainstream republican thought – namely his identification of women's lack of education as the primary cause of their social inequality as opposed to any pre-existing natural difference in the sexes, she objects to certain aspects of Condorcet's thought which, she claims, 'bow to masculinist prejudices of republican doctrine.'⁶⁸¹

In particular, Landes refutes the way in which Condorcet invokes women's domesticity in the service of the wider polity, his endorsement of women's educative role in the formation not only of children, but also of men, and his admission that women should naturally lead a more retiring, domestic, life, which lead her to conclude that Condorcet's position is 'ultimately, Rousseauist' in his 'demand for the reform of domestic habits.'⁶⁸² Landes further argues that Wollstonecraft's model of female education 'is at the very core of the ideology of republican motherhood' as 'even as she resists the most inegalitarian implications of republican doctrine, her own rhetoric implies that the home and women's role within can be given a civic purpose; and, consequently, that women may come to be satisfied with a domestic rather than a public existence.'⁶⁸³ However, while Landes rejects Condorcet and Wollstonecraft's 'feminist version' of 'republican motherhood' for ultimately subscribing to the Rousseauvian notion of sexual difference, and which thus undermines their claims for the natural basis of female equality, Keith Michael Baker takes issue with Landes' view by arguing that the concept of women's role in the republic espoused by both thinkers does not concede to the essentialist, biologicistic assumptions of 'republican motherhood' but is in fact deeply anchored in the rationalist social thinking of Enlightenment discourse.

⁶⁸⁰ Landes, Joan B., *Women and the public sphere in the age of the French Revolution*, (Cornell University Press: New York, 1988), p. 138.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 116.

⁶⁸² *Ibid*, p. 117.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 129.

While Baker concedes that the revolutionary republican ideology embraced by the newly-emerging bourgeois public sphere of the late eighteenth-century drew upon Rousseauvian inspiration and was indeed ‘essentially, not just contingently, masculinist’⁶⁸⁴, he objects to Landes’ failure ‘to grasp the extent to which republican and rationalist conceptions of the public sphere derive from radically competing discourses in the eighteenth-century context’ which ‘was contingently masculinist to the extent that it admitted contingent grounds for denying women...full and immediate participation in the exercise of universal individual rights, but it wasn’t essentially masculinist in the sense that women are excluded from the exercise of such rights by definition of their very nature.’⁶⁸⁵ He argues that for both Condorcet and Wollstonecraft, the appeal to women’s nature did not inhibit their demands for equal access to education and social professions, or for individual rights in the public sphere. He rightly observes that while Condorcet assumes that the majority of women will continue their domestic functions once they’ve been admitted to the public sphere, ‘he sees no basis in women’s nature to confine them to these functions, to exclude them from active participation in political life, or to deny them full access to the public instruction upon which rational progress and the progress of society must depend.’⁶⁸⁶ Baker thus argues that ‘Condorcet does not need, then, to extract arguments for women’s emancipation from the recalcitrant lode of republican discourse’ as ‘he finds them abundantly available in the competing discourse of rational social progress underlying his entire philosophy.’⁶⁸⁷

Similarly, Baker points out that Wollstonecraft’s arguments for women’s equality are also deeply embedded in the rationalist, egalitarian principles of Enlightenment thought. While Baker grants that Wollstonecraft’s argument ‘is not entirely free of the ideology of republican motherhood’, contrary to Landes, he argues that ‘Wollstonecraft does not draw her feminism primarily from a republican spring’ but from the ‘Enlightened discourse of rational social progress [...]’⁶⁸⁸ It is Wollstonecraft’s appeal to the universal faculties of reason and knowledge and

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 7.

⁶⁸⁵ Baker, Keith Michael, ‘Defining the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century France: Variations on a Theme by Habermas,’ in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun, (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1992), p. 202.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid*

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 203.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 203-204

rationality which leads Baker to refute Landes' view of Wollstonecraft as conforming to a Rousseauvian model of 'republican motherhood': 'In arguing that Wollstonecraft "finds it difficult to deny the central presumption of her age, that women possess natures different from men,"'⁶⁸⁹ Landes therefore seems to me to have misconstrued the central rhetorical thrust of her *Vindication*' as Wollstonecraft specifically repudiates the claim that women's nature is qualitatively different from men's by admitting the hypothetical possibility that, while similar in nature, the two sexes might differ in degree.'⁶⁹⁰

Baker thus concludes that Wollstonecraft's argument is 'not a crippled feminist inflection on the ideology of republican motherhood but a daring appeal for the realization of women's rights within the contrary discourse of the progress of modern society through the cultivation of individual human reason.'⁶⁹¹ He further argues that both Wollstonecraft and Condorcet imagine 'a society progressing through the differentiation of occupations and professions exercised by individuals, who remain equal in their rights even as they differ in their rational abilities and social responsibilities', and argues that both thinkers therefore derived their 'fundamental arguments for women's emancipation from the rationalist discourse of the social', and while 'these arguments were unsuccessful at least in the short run...their ability to formulate these arguments as implications of basic assumptions of individual rights and social progress shows that this discourse was far from being "essentially, not just contingently, masculinist."' '⁶⁹² Baker's interpretation of Condorcet and Wollstonecraft's arguments as a rationalist social discourse which provided a contrary discourse to 'republican motherhood', and which is deeply anchored in the universalistic, rationalist, principles of Enlightenment thought allows for a much more progressive interpretation of Hugo's discourse on women.

While Hugo's arguments were also inflected with the concept of 'republican motherhood' just as those of Wollstonecraft and Condorcet, they were also profoundly anchored in the rationalist, universal, precepts of Enlightenment reason. As we have seen in relation to Hugo's support for female education, equal citizenship, universal

⁶⁸⁹ Landes, p. 130.

⁶⁹⁰ Baker, p. 205.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 207.

⁶⁹² *Ibid*

suffrage, and women's civil, judicial, and legal equality, his defence of female emancipation was based on precisely the same tenets of his Enlightened feminist predecessors – namely that no natural basis occurs for the inferior social existence of women, that women's naturally feminine qualities can provide a harmonising and conciliatory contribution to society, that the maintenance of women in a state of inequality creates inequality and corruption in men and in society at large. Furthermore, while Hugo similarly sees women's maternal role as the natural duty of their sex, he sees no reason why this role should preclude their entry into politics and public life. Thus the domestic sphere envisaged by Hugo owed much more to the 'rational social discourse' of Enlightenment feminist thinkers than the Rousseauvian discourse of 'republican motherhood' espoused by his peers such as Ferry, Gambetta, and Michelet.⁶⁹³

While his valorisation of women's maternal role constitutes an integral part of his social vision for female emancipation, Hugo, like Wollstonecraft and Condorcet, differs radically from the restrictive conception of 'republican motherhood' espoused by his republican peers by invoking women's supremacy within the home as a justification for their enfranchisement, but also for their entry into politics, civil liberty, and legal and judicial equality. His use of words such as 'souveraineté' is again revealing as this word was often used by republicans who venerated the sovereignty of women's domestic function as a means of naturalizing their exclusion from public

⁶⁹³ It is important to note that the concept of the domestic sphere was itself a relatively recent phenomenon in Hugo's time which had emerged during the late eighteenth-century and which was largely associated with the middle and upper classes and was primarily articulated through the performative mediums of art, literature, and home design. While Rousseau's vision of the domestic sphere was orientated towards the ideal of 'republican motherhood', and the strict separation of public (male) and private (female) spheres, the writings of thinkers such as Condorcet, Wollstonecraft, and de Gouges similarly advocated the primordial value of women's domestic and maternal duties but did not uphold Rousseau's rigid sex-differentiation. Instead, they argued that the education and enlightened reason required for the improvement of women's domestic duties could in turn be exercised in the public sphere through the entry of women into a variety of public professions, and their participation in politics. Hugo's ideal of the domestic sphere thus ultimately comes closer to that of Wollstonecraft, Condorcet, and de Gouges than the Rousseauvian model of 'republican motherhood' espoused by his republican peers. However, it must be said that while women such as Wollstonecraft and de Gouges were known for transgressing the ideal of domesticity articulated in their writings (Wollstonecraft was publicly scorned when her extra-marital affairs and illegitimate daughter by Gilbert Imlay were revealed), by contrast, Hugo, in his private life, did not easily accept the participation of women in his private life in the public arena and often had an over-bearing and stifling impact on the women in his life – Juliette Drouet was forced by Hugo to give up her successful public career as an actress, while Hugo's over-protective paternal role largely contributed to his daughter Adèle's descent into madness.

life. Furthermore, the explicit way in which Hugo invokes women's maternal role within his argument for female emancipation, while anchored within a deeply Romantic vision of women and the valorisation of maternity as the inherent quality of their sex, is remarkably forward-thinking in its ability to integrate women within a wider vision of social reform, legal equality, and entry into public life. Thus, although, Hugo's championing of 'republican motherhood' at times aligns him with the gendered thinking of his republican contemporaries, or the less-enlightened views of Rousseau, such ambiguities can be explained as part of the male gendered thinking of his time, and the inevitable challenges which arose for male feminists from Condorcet to Hugo, in trying to elaborate a gender-neutral, inclusive discourse in which to elucidate the terms of their support for female emancipation.

The final lines of Hugo's letter highlight this dichotomy – while proclaiming the attainment of complete equality between men and women as the most worthy social cause of the 19th century 'ce sera là une des grandes gloires de notre grand siècle: donner pour contre-poids au droit de l'homme le droit de la femme',⁶⁹⁴ Hugo's language simultaneously presents a gender-bias which defines men as the decisive but moral agents of women's emancipation, and women as the passive victims in need of male assistance to define the terms of their own liberation: 'Reconnaissons cette faiblesse et protégeons-la; reconnaissons cette puissance et conseillons-la. Là est le devoir de l'homme; là aussi est son intérêt.'⁶⁹⁵ By attributing men with the ultimate social responsibility of female emancipation, Hugo presents a decidedly less feminist stance than that of Tristan and Auclert, who identified women as the agents of their own emancipation. However, his position as a male feminist in the struggle for female emancipation cannot nonetheless be dismissed as arrogant, hierarchical, or controlling.

As we have seen, Hugo attributes philosophers with the power to effect social emancipation for the practical reason that it is they, more than any other group, who hold most sway with regards to male legislators. What's more, the fact that Hugo identified himself as a moral but decisive agent of female emancipation is of considerable significance as it illustrates the empathetic, non-beneficiary standpoint

⁶⁹⁴ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 178.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid*

he strived continuously to achieve within the struggle for female emancipation. That Hugo identified himself as a moral agent in the struggle for female emancipation is evident in the way in which he distinguishes philosophers from politicians not only in terms of their enlightened reason, but also in terms of the morality and compassion they bring to bear in their quest for social justice: ‘Il est urgent que les législateurs prennent conseil des penseurs, que les hommes d’état...tiennent compte du profond travail des écrivains, et que ceux qui font les lois obéissent à ceux qui font les mœurs.’⁶⁹⁶ Hugo clearly attributed philosophers with an enlightened and compassionate vision of social equality which he deemed lacking in the men of government: ‘Nous philosophes, nous contemplateurs de l’idéal social, ne nous lassons pas. Continuons notre œuvre.’⁶⁹⁷

That Hugo proved himself as a moral agent in the struggle for female emancipation has been seen time and time again through his compassionate plea for the social restoration of prostitutes, his self-identification with women’s shared experience of oppression on the basis of his own experience of exile and mourning, and his eagerness to assume a distinctly female standpoint in his discourse on women. However, perhaps the best vindication of all of the success of Hugo’s self-fashioning as a moral and decisive agent of female emancipation is seen in the response he elicited from his feminist contemporaries and his diverse female correspondents, which included afflicted women from around the world, who identified Hugo both as ‘l’homme du devoir’ and ‘homme de cœur’ who affirms both ‘la raison’ and ‘l’inviolabilité de la conscience humaine.’⁶⁹⁸

Finally, the fact that the women of the *Société* designated Hugo using the very masculine form ‘illustre maître’, for whom they share a ‘profond respect’, and to whom they look for the consecration of their feminist society, further illustrates how deeply they considered Hugo as an empathetic ally to their cause and an aspired representative voice for their society: ‘Une adhésion de vous aux réformes qu’elle poursuit serait..un encouragement à nous seconder [...]’⁶⁹⁹ The fact that the women of the committee which included such radical feminists as Auclert, looked to Hugo to

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 175.

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid*

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 176.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 177.

consolidate their demands illustrates the extent to which they viewed Hugo as a generous, decisive, and influential public ally, and were in no way threatened by the grandiosity of his persona, which they saw as a great advantage for their cause, or the fact that he saw male philosophers as the ultimate agents of female emancipation. While the shift in focus in the feminist movement from the 1880s and 1890s was marked by women seeking autonomy for themselves⁷⁰⁰ and inevitably led to a distancing from male allies such as Richer,⁷⁰¹ it is crucial to note that up until that point the presence of men was a defining characteristic of the French feminist movement in the 1860s and 1870s and that men such as Richer and Hugo ‘occupe une place centrale dans la constitution du mouvement et dans la définition de ses objectifs et de sa stratégie.’⁷⁰²

⁷⁰⁰ From the late 1870s, feminists began to assert themselves as the autonomous leaders of their own emancipation. Leading feminists such as Deraismes and Angélique Arnaud, while still in favour of the male presence in their organisations, wished for men to now assume a more secondary, supportive role while radical feminists such as Auclert believed that men should assume a separate, differentiated role in feminist organisations. (See Jacquemart, pp. 68- 71)

⁷⁰¹ Jacquemart notes that this focus on the need for women to become the autonomous agents of their own emancipation did not lead to a rupture from male allies such as Richer but marked an extremely significant development in the feminist movement of the Third Republic as the objectives and strategies adopted by the feminist movement would henceforth be delineated primarily by women. (p. 75.) As Hubertine Auclert declared ‘nous ne pouvons être accusées de mépriser le concours des hommes. Nous éprouvons au contraire la plus vive reconnaissance pour les hommes d’élite qui ont bien voulu combattre et lutter avec nous, qui n’ont craint ni le ridicule, ni les animosités quand il s’agissait de proclamer la justice et le droit. Mais...nous trouvons que l’élément féminin doit inspirer et guider l’organisation et les délibérations.’ (Auclert, *La citoyenne*, no. 139, December 1888.)

⁷⁰² *Ibid*, p. 68.

Hugo's maternal sublime – The Treatment of the Maternal in the Literary Works of Victor Hugo.

Hugo and the maternal

The maternal essence which lies at the core of Hugo's perception of women and femininity is undoubtedly the most problematic obstacle which one encounters when attempting to define Hugo as a male feminist of his time but also a forerunner, or at the very least, visionary, for developments in 20th century feminism. Such is the strength of Hugo's association with a Romantic, instinctive, and saintly maternal essence that arguments attempting to define his contribution to 19th century feminism in light of the developments in contemporary feminism appear wholly idealistic at best, or entirely implausible at worst. The paternalistic terms which frame Hugo's support for 19th century French feminism and the Romantic, essentialist idealisation of maternal femininity which underline even his most liberating visions of women's role in 19th century society define Hugo's feminism as both Romantic, yet revolutionary, far-reaching, yet restrained. In previous chapters I have endeavoured to explain Hugo's contradictory position in relation to 19th century feminism by illustrating how Hugo's idealised vision of maternal femininity in fact formed the basis of his arguments in support of some of the most radical issues which arose in 19th century French feminism, most notably women's rights to equal suffrage, full citizenship, and the participation of women in the public and political life of the newfound republic.

Furthermore, the maternal essentialism which appears within Hugo's public discourse on women can be seen to be very much in tandem with the strategic essentialism associated with Saint-Simonian feminists who invoked the social importance of women's maternal function as the basis for the equal inclusion of women in 19th century society. Unlike *Enfantin* and the male leaders of the Saint-Simonians who perceived women's special role in motherhood as their natural destiny, thus justifying their confinement to the domestic sphere, Hugo followed the line of Saint-Simonian feminists such as *Claire Démar* and *Jeanne Déroin* by assigning a positive valuation to women's unique role in motherhood to justify their participation in the public sphere. However, despite such a strategic appeal to women's maternal function as a justification for their inclusion in society, Hugo's inability to separate women from

their maternal function leave any arguments vaunting his feminist position wide open to attack from contemporary feminist theorists, who, following de Beauvoir and Irigaray, argue, in very different ways, that the inclusion of women in society is wholly contingent upon their complete separation from their maternal and biological function in motherhood.⁷⁰³

However, while the paternalistic framing of Hugo's feminist discourse and his inherent belief in a natural maternal essence make it all too easy for contemporary feminists to dismiss Hugo as a male feminist, as de Beauvoir so blithely did by labelling him a 'pseudo-feminist'⁷⁰⁴, a deeper interpretation of Hugo's treatment of the maternal within his literary works in fact proves a far more acute and enlightening means of appraising his credibility as a male feminist. Furthermore, while hindsight makes critics imagine that Hugo should be more advanced in his thought than his feminist peers, it is unfair and unreasonable to expect Hugo to be more progressive than his contemporaneous female feminists. What is vital to remember, however, is, that among feminists of his own generation, few women articulated a vision of women's future in more progressive and far-reaching a light than Hugo, and that while his feminism belongs very much to his time, his treatment of the maternal within his literary works illustrates how far his vision of women's future role in society extended beyond a purely essentialist and Romantic veneration of maternity.

While there is no denying that Hugo venerated women's maternal function as the natural fulfilment, completion, and idealisation of their role in society, this archetypal, one-dimensional image of the maternal is, by no means, the only, nor the most resounding vision of the maternal which appears within his literary works. Within his vast and varied literary representations of maternity, at the extremes of which reside his most revered figures of maternal sanctity incarnated by as the all-sacrificing Fantine, or his most abject aberrations of maternal femininity embodied by the

⁷⁰³ In *Le deuxième sexe*, Simone de Beauvoir condemns the notion of a pre-disposing maternal instinct in women as a culturally-produced myth which serves to enslave women in their maternal role and thus prevents them from achieving self-fulfillment: 'Ordinairement, la maternité est un étrange compromis de narcissisme, d'altruisme, de rêve...de dévouement, de cynicisme. Le grand danger que nos mœurs font courir à l'enfant, c'est que la mère à qui on le confie pieds et poings liés est presque toujours une femme insatisfaite. Sexuellement elle est frigide ou inassouvie; socialement elle se sent inférieure à l'homme; elle n'a pas de prise sur le monde ni sur l'avenir [...]' p. 372.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 195. 'De pseudo-féministes comme Victor Hugo desservent la femme en renforçant les clichés tels que l'intuition féminine.'

monstrous and ‘hommasse’ Madame Thénardier, reside a whole plethora of maternal figures, both male and female, who embody, in different ways, Hugo’s ideal conception of the maternal. Indeed, a remarkable feature of his treatment of the maternal is his fulsome distribution of maternal qualities to his male characters. Such a portrayal of the maternal as a universal, harmonising quality, undefined by sex, upon which depends the harmony and progress of humanity at large reveals Hugo’s ability to look beyond a gendered, feminised definition of the maternal and thus demonstrates that, for Hugo, the maternal is not a uniquely pre-determined feminine quality but a universal and harmonising quality to which all humankind must aspire.

Furthermore, Hugo’s veneration of female characters who are not in fact maternal types, yet still embody his ideals of heroic femininity, his politicised portrayal of women’s role in the Republic beyond the duty of ‘republican motherhood’, and his sensitivity to women who feel trapped by their maternity further illustrate that his treatment of the maternal within his literary works, far from demonstrating his inability to separate women from their maternal function, rather shines light on his ability to look beyond an explicitly gendered concept of maternity, and endorse a society in which maternal compassion is a universal quality to which both sexes must aspire. In thus working towards a re-conceptualisation and re-definition of male and female identification with the maternal, the multi-faceted and discerning treatment of the maternal which appears within Hugo’s literary works demonstrates the progressiveness and evolutionary nature of his feminist thought, at once aligning him with the major preoccupations of his contemporaneous nineteenth-century writers who sought to ponder the redefinition of male and female relations, while also demonstrating his anticipation of one of the most fundamental preoccupations of contemporary feminism – namely the need to articulate women’s role in society both in relation to, and separate from, their maternal function.

Maternal essence – Hugo’s archetypal mothers.

Within Hugo’s literary works, examples abound of his idealised, revered image of a maternal essence displayed as a crude, bestial, natural instinct, a sublime, redemptive quality, a super-human force, and an innately feminine quality. It is this idealisation of the maternal which appears most strongly to undermine his feminist agenda and which has fuelled the many arguments surrounding Hugo’s lack of wholly-rounded

and complex characterisations of women. Among the crudest displays of maternal essentialism which appear throughout his literary works, are the recurring imagery of maternal figures in distress repeatedly delineated in crudely animalistic terms in which Hugo re-iterates the biologicistic assumptions of 19th century physiology which stressed the analogy between animality and maternity. Commenting on the links between animality and maternity embodied by Hugo's archetypal maternal figures, Isabel Roche observes that: 'The archetypal maternal qualities of instinctive love and protection are transposed onto each of these mothers, whose love for their children is unconditional and so fierce that they are regularly likened to animals in their primal relationship to their children.'⁷⁰⁵

One such archetypal maternal figure who exemplifies the primal, bestial instinct of mothers to protect their children is the long-suffering mother of Esmeralda in *Notre-Dame de Paris*. Following the kidnapping of her infant daughter by Egyptian gypsies, Paquette de Chantefleurie, or *la recluse* as she is more commonly designated within the text, whose life is spent searching for her estranged daughter only to be reunited with her moments before her death, presents a searing vision of maternal anguish at the loss of a child. In his description of Paquette's grief, Hugo employs notably animalistic imagery to denote the primacy of maternal grief and loss, as can be seen in her frenzied search through Paris to recover her missing child: 'Elle alla par la ville, fureta toutes les rues, courut ça et là la journée entière, folle, égarée, terrible, flairant aux portes et aux fenêtres comme une bête farouche qui a perdu ses petits. Elle était haletante, échevelée, effrayante à voir, et elle avait dans les yeux un feu qui séchait ses larmes.'⁷⁰⁶

Her railing malediction against the Egyptian women who surround her home is more akin to an animal cry than a human one: 'Son front se plissa d'horreur, elle étendit hors de sa loge ses deux bras de squelette, et s'écria avec une voix qui ressemblait à un râle. C'est donc encore toi, fille d'Égypte ! c'est toi, qui m'appelles, voleuse d'enfants !'⁷⁰⁷ When Esmeralda is to be hung in the place de Grève, Paquette, believing Esmeralda to be one of the gypsy women who stole her daughter, and not in

⁷⁰⁵ Roche, Isabel, *Character and Meaning in the Novels of Victor Hugo*, (Purdue University Press, West Lafayette, 2007), p. 73.

⁷⁰⁶ *Notre-Dame de Paris I*, (L. Hachette: Paris, 1858), p. 278. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb402370918> [Accessed 29 May 2014]

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 289.

fact her own daughter, is overcome with a violently animalistic desire for revenge: ‘Alors Paquette la Chantefleurie éclata d’un rire d’hyène...Elles m’ont dévoré ma petite fille, mon enfant, mon unique enfant..Elle était effrayante⁷⁰⁸ [...] Elle se mit à se promener à grands pas devant les barreaux de sa lucarne, échevelée, l’œil flamboyant, heurtant le mur de son épaule, avec l’air fauve d’une louve en cage...’⁷⁰⁹ When Paquette is finally reunited with Esmeralda, her natural maternal instinct to protect her daughter from impending death is again evoked as a decidedly primal, bestial instinct – Paquette is endowed with a supernatural strength which enables her to break the rusted iron bars of Esmeralda’s prison cell: ‘Tout à coup, elle se releva, éclata ses longs cheveux gris de dessus son front, et...se mit à ébranler de ses deux mains les barreaux de sa loge, plus furieusement qu’une lionne. [...] Il y a des moments où les mains d’une femme ont une force surhumaine.’⁷¹⁰

This supernatural, animal strength with which Hugo endows Paquette is further seen in her cunning attempt to conceal Esmeralda’s presence from the guards: ‘L’infortunée sentit que tout dépendait de sa bonne contenance, et, la mort dans l’âme, elle se mit à ricaner. Les mères ont de ces forces-là.’⁷¹¹ Her primal maternal instinct becomes even more heightened during Esmeralda’s capture when she physically assumes the raging, animalistic stance of a wild animal when protecting her daughter. It is not just her voice, laugh, and physical strength which are transfixed by her primal maternal instinct but her entire being: ‘La recluse se précipita sur sa fille avec un rugissement. Elle la retira violemment en arrière en lui enfonçant ses ongles dans le cou. Une mère tigresse n’y regarde pas de si près. [...] Dans cette attitude, on la voyait promener intrépidement sur tous ces soldats son regard, qui était redevenu fauve et insensé.’⁷¹² So transformed is Paquette by her sheer bestial instinct to protect her daughter that the soldiers themselves recoil from her in fear: ‘Au moment où Henriet Cousin s’approcha de la loge, elle lui fit une figure tellement sauvage qu’il recula.’⁷¹³ In her desperate pleading with the soldiers, Paquette further assumes the guise of a wild animal, but this time appears in a state of despair and exhaustion: ‘Alors s’adressant à Tristan, écumante,

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 131-2

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 132.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 311.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 317.

⁷¹² *Ibid*, pp. 320-321

⁷¹³ *Ibid*, p. 321.

l'œil hagard, à quatre pattes une panthère, et toute hérissée.'⁷¹⁴ However, at the moment when Esmeralda is finally being led away by the guards, she is suddenly filled with a new surge of strength and attacks the soldiers like a wild animal targeting its prey: 'En ce moment la mère, accroupie sur le pavé, ouvrit tout à fait ses yeux, sans jeter un cri, elle se redressa avec une expression terrible; puis, comme une bête sur sa proie, elle se jeta sur la main du bourreau et le mordit.'⁷¹⁵

Such a vision of the maternal in terms of a primal, animalistic instinct is further illustrated by the central maternal figure of *Quatrevingt-Treize*, Michelle Flécharde, who is elevated by Hugo as a supreme emblem of maternal sacrifice. Jeffrey Mehlman points out how, for Hugo, Michelle Flécharde is 'a sublimely pre-political incarnation of maternity.'⁷¹⁶ As an embodiment of Hugo's conception of pre-political maternal consciousness, Michelle Flécharde represents an archetypal, universal vision of maternity. Isabel Roche comments on how Michelle Flécharde's insertion into the category of universalistic and archetypal motherhood can be seen in the way in which she is primarily defined by her maternity throughout the novel: 'In *Quatrevingt-Treize*, Michelle Flécharde is rarely designated by either her first or last name; rather, she is nearly uniformly referred to as *la femme* or *la mère*, which underscores both her categorical role as a French peasant woman, and her central, archetypal role of mother.'⁷¹⁷ Throughout the text, the recurrent imagery of breastfeeding women and the naked, bleeding, or mutilated breasts of Michelle Flécharde are deployed to evoke the primacy and sheer bestial quality of maternal grief. When Michelle Flécharde first appears in the text, her exposed breasts place her within a distinctly feminised space in which she appears outside the realm of politics and interrupts the male space of revolutionary violence: 'La femme la considérait, terrifiée.[...] Elle laissait voir son sein nu avec une indifférence de femelle.'⁷¹⁸ In this crude opposition of animality and maternity, Roche sees 'the extremes of the grotesque (animality) and the sublime

⁷¹⁴*Ibid*, p. 324.

⁷¹⁵*Ibid*, p. 328.

⁷¹⁶Mehlman, Jeffrey, *Revolution and Repetition: Marx/Hugo/Balzac* (University of California Press; Berkeley; Los Angeles; 1977), p. 47.

⁷¹⁷ Roche, p. 24.

⁷¹⁸ *Quatrevingt-Treize I*, (Michel Lévy frères: Paris, 1874), pp. 10-11

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb306255848> [Accessed 20 October 2014]

(divinity)...joined and even fused together through the woman's transcendent role as a mother.⁷¹⁹

By depicting Michelle Flécharde's maternity in terms of a primal, animal instinct, Hugo positions Michelle distinctly outside the virile, exclusively masculine sphere of revolutionary violence and politics. When questioned by the soldiers of the revolutionary battalion about her political alliances, her replies are aghast and uncomprehending: 'De quel parti es-tu?' 'Je ne sais pas.' 'Es-tu des bleus ? Et-tu des blancs ? Avec qui es-tu ?' 'Je suis avec mes enfants.'⁷²⁰ While the soldiers speak in abstract, political terms, she speaks in relative, immediate terms in relation to her starving children in need of bread: 'Ah dit la mère, ils ont bien faim.'⁷²¹ Throughout the text, the recurrent imagery of breastfeeding women and the dead, mutilated or bleeding breasts of women in distress present the primacy of women's maternal instinct as an inherently bestial, pre-disposition in women. When Tellmarch discovers the seemingly dead body of the 'vivandière' along with that of the paysanne Michelle, the deformed breasts of the mother again serve to critique the violence of the Royalist insurrection as an irremediable and abject act of betrayal against the motherland: 'Deux femmes étaient gisantes côte à côte derrière le mur, fusillées aussi. [...] L'une de ces femmes avait une sorte d'uniforme...c'était une vivandière...Tellmarch examina l'autre. C'était une paysanne. [...] Ses vêtements, dont les fatigues, sans doute, avaient fait des haillons, s'étaient ouverts, dans sa chute, et laissaient voir son torse à demi nu. Tellmarch acheva de les écarter, et vit à une épaule la plaie ronde que fait une balle; la clavicule était cassée. Il regarda ce sein livide.'⁷²²

Thus, while Hugo's natural mothers embody the qualities of harmony and conciliation, they are also endowed with the potential for defensive, instinctive, violence and even capable of sheer bestial violence if their children are under threat. However, there is an important distinction between the defensive, instinctual violence displayed by these mothers, and the bestial, intentional violence which he attributes to his unnatural, malevolent characters. The bestiality which he attributes to the beastly Madame Thénardier for instance is altogether more akin to that of the primitive,

⁷¹⁹ Roche, p. 73.

⁷²⁰ *QVT I*, pp. 15-16

⁷²¹ *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁷²² *Ibid*, p. 184.

uncivilised man than the instinctual, defensive animality displayed by his natural mothers. While the violence displayed by mothers can be explained as a primal, defensive instinct, the deliberate violence displayed by his male characters is thus seen to be all the more abhorrent and reproachable for its futility and ill intent.

Yves Gohin explores the complex role played by landscape in evoking the recurrent theme of Nature/Humanity which is central to Hugo's vision of history within the novel, and which forms the backdrop to his exploration of relationships between the reality of the world and the activities of man: 'Evoqué comme faisceau de sensations charmantes et d'impressions heureuses, le paysage n'est pas vraiment l'objet d'une description, mais le médium d'un message, celui d'une force d'harmonie, beauté et bonté indissociable; le vertical des échanges entre le ciel et la terre traverse la succession horizontale des violences humaines, de toute sorte que la Nature peut être posée, en sa matérialité même, comme l'accomplissement du bien absolu.'⁷²³ Within the text, Michelle Flécharde incarnates the values of harmony and humanity for which the natural pastoral setting stands but she also displays the potential for defensive violence to which mothers instinctively have recourse in order to protect their children. When she first appears, hiding in terror in the Vendée forest, the soldiers of the battalion of the *Bonnet-Rouge* are oblivious to the nature all around them. Gohin points out how Gauvain and Cimoudain are equally too consumed by their war duty to notice the nature which surrounds them.⁷²⁴ However, Gohin argues that while the insensitivity to nature displayed by the soldiers can be seen as their inability to heed the eternal advice to humanity proffered by nature, the state of petrified ignorance in which Michelle Flécharde is found hiding in the Vendée forest, is a source of danger as it threatens her life and that of her three young children: 'De fait, ni Gauvain, ni Cimourdain, tout absorbés par leur fonction de guerriers citoyens ne paraissent à aucun moment être sensibles à cette prodigieuse présence.' [...] Mais il est grave pour Michelle Flécharde qu'elle ne comprenne rien aux violences de la guerre civile, mettant de ce fait en péril elle-même et ses enfants, et se rendant suspecte aux blancs comme aux bleus.'⁷²⁵

⁷²³ Gohin, Yves, 'Aternance et adhérence des contraires dans *Quatrevingt-treize*,' in *Romancier de l'abîme*, ed. J.A. Hiddleston, (European Humanities Research Centre: Oxford, 2002), pp. 158-159

⁷²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 160-161

⁷²⁵ *Ibid*

Such a juxtaposition of the natural role fulfilled by the nurturing, protective breastfeeding women with the violent destructive activities of man can be further seen in *Les Orientales* wherein the bleeding, mutilated breasts of distressed mothers serve as a violent critique of the destruction and annihilation of humanity at the hands of man. Here the sustenance provided by the tortured, wounded women is presented as the exact inversion of the sustenance provided by religious communion: ‘Quelle communion ! Des mourans immobiles, Cherchant l’hostie offerte à leurs lèvres débiles, Des soldats défaillans, mais encor redoutés, Des femmes, des vieillards, des vierges désolées, Et sur le sein flétri des mères mutilées Des enfants de sang allaités !’⁷²⁶ The stark opposition of the violence and destruction of men pitted against the primal maternal instinct of women is further evoked in *L’homme qui rit* in which Hugo frames his critique of society’s neglect of its most defenceless and vulnerable through his description of the discovery of a young orphan child who survives on the last frozen drop of milk from her mother’s lifeless breasts: ‘La neige éclairait la morte. [...] La nudité des seins était pathétique. Ils avaient servi; ils avaient la sublime flétrissure de la vie donnée par l’être à qui la vie manque, et la majesté maternelle y remplaçait la pureté virginale. A la pointe d’une des mamelles il y avait une perle blanche. C’était une goutte de lait, gélée. Sombre confiance voulue par la nature, car il semble que le dernier allaitement soit possible à une mère, même après le dernier soupir.’⁷²⁷

Through their all-sacrificing devotion, the primal, maternal instinct of these universal maternal figures is elevated to a state of supreme maternal majesty, and Hugo elevates their misery and suffering to a form of sublime sacrifice. Gohin describes how ‘the essence of motherhood’ illustrated by the universal mother-figure of la mère Fléhard ‘is sacrifice, the sacrifice of bread that the starving Michelle Fléhard gives to her children.’⁷²⁸ Further commenting on the sublimation of maternal sacrifice exemplified by Hugo’s archetypal maternal figures, Roche observes that ‘situated at the high end of the scale of the sublime in Hugo’s novels are mothers and children. Mothers, such as Michelle Fléhard in *Quatrevingt-Treize*, Paquette de Chantefleurie in *Notre-Dame*

⁷²⁶ *Les Orientales*, (G. Chamerot: Paris, 1882), p. 47.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb306254364> [Accessed 20 August 2014]

⁷²⁷ *L’homme qui rit*, (E. Hugues: Paris, 1886), pp. 153-154

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb306255174> [Accessed 20 January 2014]

⁷²⁸ Roulin, Jean-Marie, ‘Mothers in Revolution: Political Representations of Maternity in Nineteenth-Century France,’ in *Yale University Press*, 2001(1):120, p. 197.

de Paris, and Fantine in *Les Misérables*, are defined in relation to their principal trait of self-sacrifice, presented as the ultimate form of maternal sublimation.⁷²⁹ From the cult of the Virgin Mary to the Spartan mother, the representation of the mother as a suffering figure has of course a long, rich historical tradition in literary portrayals of maternity. Indeed if maternity can be seen in the advice literature and domestic literature of the nineteenth century as ‘the natural culmination of womanhood’⁷³⁰, then the experience of suffering is what defines the maternal experience of all-sacrificing, devoted mothers.

Nancy M. Thériot observes that: ‘If the moral mother was necessarily self-renouncing and long-suffering and if motherhood was the major characteristic of female maturity, it followed that suffering and self-sacrifice were somehow inherent in femaleness. Because the traits were associated with mothering, they were also associated with “femininity.”’⁷³¹ Thériot further comments on how ‘even more than a feminine virtue, suffering was viewed as the major avenue of womanly transcendence’⁷³² and observes that in the advice literature, diaries, and popular fiction of the nineteenth-century, ‘women celebrated self-sacrifice to the point of suffering as part of true womanhood because this trait was a necessary part of motherhood’ and that ‘by defining herself as a mother and consecrating her life to her child, a woman was assured of potency, transcendence, and the full experience of adult womanhood.’⁷³³

The ‘maternal sublimation’ which Hugo attributes to his archetypal suffering mothers presents an ‘avenue of transcendence’ which elevates his universal mothers to a divine form of martyrdom and sainthood. Such a sanctification of motherhood is most powerfully illustrated by Fantine’s tragic earthly demise and divine sublimation in death in *Les Misérables*. When Fantine is first rescued and carried in from the streets by Valjean, the sisters who tend to her sickbed treat her with repugnance as she is a girl of the streets: ‘Les sœurs n’avaient d’abord reçu et soigné “cette fille” qu’avec répugnance.’⁷³⁴ However, very soon, they are disarmed by Fantine’s inherent maternal

⁷²⁹ Roche, *Op cit*, p. 73.

⁷³⁰Theriot, Nancy M., *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-century America: The Biosocial Construction of Femininity*, (The University Press of Kentucky: Kentucky, 1993), p. 26.

⁷³¹ *Ibid*

⁷³² *Ibid*, p. 27.

⁷³³ *Ibid*, p. 28.

⁷³⁴ *Les Misérables I*, (Pagnerre: Paris, 1862), p. 145. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb30625522> [Accessed 19 July 2013]

instinct and her desire for redemption: ‘Mais en peu de jours, Fantine les avait désarmées. Elle avait toutes sortes de paroles humbles et douces, et la mère qui était en elle attendrissait.’⁷³⁵ In particular, the saintly and pious Sœur Simplice, senses in Fantine an innate maternal instinct and purity which cannot be ravaged by the ills of society or the underworld of sin into which she was forced to descend: ‘La pieuse fille avait pris en affection Fantine, y sentant probablement de la vertu latente, et s’était dévouée à la soigner presque exclusivement.’⁷³⁶ Indeed, the love and devotion which propelled Fantine’s fall justify her actions and bring her closer to God: ‘J’ai été une pécheresse, mais quand j’aurai mon enfant près de moi, cela voudra dire que Dieu m’a pardonnée [...] C’était pour elle pourtant que je faisais le mal, et c’est ce qui fait que Dieu me pardonne.’⁷³⁷ By selling her body and eventually dying for her child, Fantine makes the ultimate sacrifice for her daughter and such is the sublime nature of her maternal sacrifice that, in death, Fantine is redeemed of a life of sin and restored to her virginal and angelic purity: ‘Elle dormait. Son souffle sortait de sa poitrine avec ce bruit tragique qui est propre à ces maladies, et qui navre les pauvres mères lorsqu’elles veillent la nuit près de leur enfant condamné et endormi. [...] Sa pâleur était devenue de la blancheur; ses joues étaient vermeilles [...] Toute sa personne tremblait de je ne sais quel déploiement d’ailes prêtes à s’entr’ouvrir et à l’emporter, qu’on sentait frémir, mais qu’on ne voyait pas.’⁷³⁸

Valjean echoes this sublime transformation of Fantine when he venerates her as a martyr by virtue of her sublime maternal sacrifice: ‘Je priais le martyr qui est là-haut...pour la martyre qui est ici-bas.’⁷³⁹ In his examination of the origins of Hugo’s characters, Olin H. Moore argues that Hugo’s idealisation of Paquette, and his later sanctification of Fantine, can be seen as part of his Romantic tendency to idealize prostitutes, mother-prostitutes in particular: ‘La recluse, as finally conceived, is no fine lady...but a former *filles de joie*. Thus the secret of her evolution is Victor Hugo’s romantic tendency to idealize prostitutes, and he even names her for Saint Gudule. [...] The glorification of *la recluse* is complete when she is made the personification of mother love. Thirty-one years later, Victor Hugo will idealize another prostitute

⁷³⁵ *Ibid*,

⁷³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 173

⁷³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 145.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 33- 35

⁷³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 142.

mother, Fantine, who dies with a halo over her head, mourned by the saintly Sœur Simplicie.⁷⁴⁰ Further commenting on the sublime transformation and redemption of prostitute-mothers in Hugo's novels, Roche observes that as 'motherhood in Hugo's novels is...equated not only to a transformation, but a complete and sublime *transfiguration* from which there is no return [...] this transfiguration authorizes a mother to go to any length in the name of her children, including prostitution, presented in Hugo's novels as the ultimate maternal sacrifice.'⁷⁴¹ It is thus for this reason that Hugo's archetypal maternal figures who turn to prostitution in the name of their children, most notably Paquette, Michelle Flécharde, and Fantine 'wear prostitution like a mark...that their sublime state of maternity is capable of washing away, if given the opportunity.'⁷⁴² Hugo's archetypal mothers thus incarnate a pre-existing feminine essence, a divine quality of redemption, and a sublime maternal sacrifice. This vision of maternity is profoundly anchored in Hugo's Romantic perceptions of femininity wherein 'la majesté maternelle' is seen as the sublime fulfilment of female identity beyond the 'pureté virginale' of girlhood.⁷⁴³

However, at the other extreme of his archetypal female characterisations, the anti-maternal types which appear in Hugo's works, most notably, the vile Madame Thénardier, are presented as a gross aberration of their sex and a transgression of the laws of nature. Everything from la Thénardier's appearance to her physical strength and language exhibit a grossly abject femininity: 'Tout tremblait au son de sa voix...Son large visage, criblé de taches de rousseur, avait l'aspect d'une écumoire. Elle avait de la barbe. [...]. Elle jurait splendidement; elle se vantait de casser une noix d'un coup de poing.'⁷⁴⁴ Whereas Hugo reveres the primal instinct of his archetypal mothers as a sublime maternal essence, the bestiality attributed to Madame Thénardier is defined as savage and monstrous, thus equating her with the bestiality of a primitive human as distinct from the instinctive, defensive animality incarnated by Hugo's natural mothers: '[...] cette Thénardier grande, blonde, rouge, grasse, charnue, carrée, énorme et agile; elle tenait...de la race de ces sauvagesses colosses qui se cambrent

⁷⁴⁰ Moore, Olin H., 'How Victor Hugo Created the Characters of Notre-Dame de Paris,' in *PMLA*, (124):8, p. 262.

⁷⁴¹ Roche, p. 74.

⁷⁴² *Ibid*, pp. 74-75

⁷⁴³ *L'homme qui rit*, p. 154.

⁷⁴⁴ *Les Misérables III*, (Pagnerre: Paris, 1862), p. 190.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb306255232> [Accessed 24 July 2013]

dans les foires avec des pavés pendus à leur chevelure.’⁷⁴⁵ While the animality which manifests itself in his archetypal mothers is triggered by their primal, instinctual need to protect their children, la Thénardier is rendered beast-like through the inhumanity of her treatment of Cosette: ‘[...] quand on la voyait manier Cosette, on disait: C’est le bourreau.’⁷⁴⁶ Most tellingly, she is not a mother by virtue of any natural or innate maternal instinct but by sheer biological facticity: ‘Elle était mère parce qu’elle était mammifère.’⁷⁴⁷ By presenting la Thénardier as the exact antithesis of the sublime, devotional, and unconditional maternal love embodied by his archetypal maternal figures, Hugo is thus exposing the horror of child neglect and exploitation at the hands of a woman devoid of maternal feeling who resides like a ‘bourreau’⁷⁴⁸ over a ‘domestique sinistre.’⁷⁴⁹

It is this extreme polarisation of maternal types which has fuelled critiques of Hugo’s lack of fully-rounded and complex female characterisations as it suggests only one possible role for women – that of unconditional, devoted, all-sacrificing maternity, seen as the natural progression of women’s role beyond a state of virginal purity, while any woman incapable of fulfilling that role is vilified as a monstrous, gross aberration of humanity and nature.⁷⁵⁰ Criticising Hugo’s archetypal female characterisations, Georges Piroué argues that Hugo’s need to venerate women either as innocent virgins or as mothers, results from his general distrust of women, his inability to accept women as women, apart from their role in motherhood: ‘Hugo se méfie de la femme. Précisons: la fillette jusqu’à l’adolescente, la mère, oui, il les accepte, mais la femme, non, il ne se lasse pas de le répéter.’⁷⁵¹ Piroué finds in Hugo’s literary incarnations of maternity an abundance of examples which appear to suggest that, for Hugo, beyond their state of virginal purity, women must be mothers in order to be worthy of veneration: ‘Il fabrique artificiellement une continuité de la pureté par le télescopage

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid*

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 191.

⁷⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 190.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 191.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid*

⁷⁵⁰ The wealth of archetypal maternal figures in Hugo’s works can be compared for instance to the diversity and complexity of George Sand’s heroines or to Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*. While Balzac shared Hugo’s support for women’s right to divorce, his vision of women’s role in society was firmly grounded in their domestic and maternal duties, whereas Hugo supported women’s changing roles in 19th century society, in particular their active role in revolution, and their literary and artistic achievements.

⁷⁵¹ Piroué, *Op cit*, p. 100.

d'une existence. Ainsi ce comporte Gwynplaine qui, lorsque son amour pour Déa s'altère en désir, jette aussitôt les bases d'un nouvel équilibre en célébrant d'avance non la séductrice mais la mère, la nourrice, le ventre et la mamelle.⁷⁵² Hugo's archetypal female figures are assigned so many of the same attributes and patterns of behaviour that the traits of one can be easily transposed onto another. The shared traits of his historically and aesthetically-linked universal characters can be seen in Hugo's works as 'la facilité de l'auto-plagiat qui fait de Fantine une nouvelle Chantefleurie ou de la Thénardier un Quasimodo de l'autre sexe.'⁷⁵³

Another troubling issue which emerges from Hugo's portrayal of an archetypal and universal maternity from the point of view of his feminist sensibilities, is his analogy of maternity and animality wherein he would appear to be aligning himself with the most essentialist assumptions of the sexes which existed during his time, and which were widely invoked by the majority of his republican contemporaries to naturalize the confinement of women to the maternal sphere, to legitimate their exclusion from full, equal citizenship, and to deny their entry into the public and political life of the Republic. Hugo presents just such a naturalisation of women's domestic role and polarisation of the sexes when he seemingly reduces women's fundamental, unchanging role in society to their primordial biological function in motherhood: 'Et comment faire entendre raison à l'idée fixe d'une mère ? La maternité est sans issue; on ne discute pas avec elle. Ce qui fait qu'une mère est sublime, c'est que c'est une espèce de bête. L'instinct maternel est divinement animal. La mère n'est plus femme, elle est femelle.'⁷⁵⁴ Such a portrayal of women's maternal essence in terms of fixed essentialist assumptions of the sexes is further evident in *Notre-Dame de Paris* in which Hugo appears to align himself with the sexist assumptions underpinning the polarised education procured to men and women during the 19th century by defining female intellect in terms of instinct and emotion, and male intellect in terms of rationality and intelligence: 'Les instincts de femmes se comprennent et se répondent plus vite que les intelligences d'homme.'⁷⁵⁵ He again appears to be re-iterating the well-worn essentialist assumptions of 19th century debates on education which

⁷⁵² *Ibid*

⁷⁵³ Malandain, Pierre, 'La réception des "Misérables" ou 'Un lieu où des convictions sont en train de se former' in *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 1986, (86):6, p. 1069.

⁷⁵⁴ *QVT II*, (Michel Lévy frères: Paris, 1874), p. 102. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/12148/cb306255848> [Accessed 20 November 2014]

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 13.

hindered women's access to an equal, non-discriminatory education, when he further aligns female intelligence with the faculty of emotion, instinct, and intuition, whereas men are attributed with rational, logical, and scientific intelligence: '[...] la mère a quelque chose d'inférieur et de supérieur au raisonnement. Une mère a un flair. L'immense volonté ténébreuse de la création et en elle, et la mère. Aveuglément plein de clairvoyance.'⁷⁵⁶ This is indeed a far cry from Hugo's support of an equal, free, and secular education for both sexes exhibited in his speech to the Assemblée Nationale in 1850.

What then accounts for such an essentialist and one-dimensional vision of maternal femininity within Hugo's literary works given the progressiveness and evolutionary nature of his political discourse on women during his time in exile, and the early years of the Third Republic ? While the assaults on his lack of complex female characterisations have focused on such Romanticised and sublime images of maternity, which appear so flagrantly within his literary works, studies examining the significance and complexity of Hugo's literary treatment of the maternal have indeed been less copious. There have however, been several illuminating studies which have examined his literary treatment of maternity in light of his political views, his republicanism, and his wider socialist agenda. In particular, Hugo's pre-political portrayal of the maternal in *Quatrevingt-Treize* and the evolution of the maternal plot within the text has been the source of some enlightening critical attention. One such study is Jean-Marie Roulin's examination of the evolution of the theme of maternity in *QVT* in which Roulin observes 'the passage from a pastoral universe to a politicized vision of motherhood, where the mother is no longer only pure nature and life-giver, but also an educator,⁷⁵⁷ echoing the educative role assigned to women in Rousseau's *Emile*.

This transition from a pre-political, primitive conception of motherhood to an acknowledgement of the instructive function of motherhood is witnessed through the character of Cimourdain, whose decision to adopt the young orphaned Gauvain as his student can be seen as an act which brings Cimourdain closer to the humanity associated with motherhood: 'On lui avait ôté la famille, il avait adopté la patrie: on

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid*

⁷⁵⁷ Gohin, *Op cit*, p. 199.

lui avait refusé une femme; il avait épousé l'humanité.'⁷⁵⁸ Roulin argues that this 'instructive act is a way for Cimourdain to attain motherhood in his relationship with Gauvain': 'L'esprit allaite; l'intelligence est une mamelle. Il y a une analogie entre la nourrice qui donne son lait et le précepteur qui donne sa pensée. Quelquefois le précepteur est plus père que le père, de même que souvent la nourrice est plus mère que la mère.'⁷⁵⁹ He further points out how motherhood is defined here by an act of giving 'where the transmission of knowledge is placed at the same level as that of food.'⁷⁶⁰ He argues that within the text 'motherhood assures a physical relationship, while fatherhood implies an abstract operation:' '[...] if paternal authority is legitimate when it is maternal, it is because there is no author or legitimacy except in physical contact.'⁷⁶¹ This can be seen in Hugo's emphasis on the spirituality as distinct from materiality of Comourdain's affection for Gauvain: 'Cette profonde paternité spirituelle liait Cimourdain à son élève. La seule vue de cet enfant l'attendrissait.'⁷⁶² However, as Roulin observes, there is an alternative vision to this paternal authority presented by Gauvain, who offers, in opposition to Cimoudain's conception of spiritual fatherhood, 'a matriarchal vision' of parental authority in which woman can be seen to lead to God, who is described as a king or universal mother⁷⁶³: 'D'abord au père qui l'engendre, puis à la mère qui l'enfante, puis au maître qui l'élève, puis à la cité qui le virilise, puis à la patrie qui est la mère suprême, puis à l'humanité qui est la grande aïeule.'⁷⁶⁴

Significantly, within the text, it is the idealistic republican Gauvain who envisions this alternative 'matriarchal vision' of parental authority as it is Gauvain who most closely reflects Hugo's own conflicted position on the revolution and vision for the Republic within the novel. In his vision for the future republic, Gauvain presents a considerably more enlightened vision than that of Cimourdain, by demanding equivalent rights for the sexes. In the moments before he is to be guillotined in the place of Lantenac⁷⁶⁵, his

⁷⁵⁸ *QVT I*, p. 206.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 220.

⁷⁶⁰ Roulin, *Op cit*, p. 197.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp. 198-199

⁷⁶² *QVT I*, *Ibid*

⁷⁶³ Roulin, *Op cit*, p. 199.

⁷⁶⁴ *QVT II*, p. 416.

⁷⁶⁵ Isabel Roche comments on how 'at the moment when the uprising in Vendée has been crushed through Lantenac's capture...Gauvain cannot be satisfied with its result' and 'subordinating political imperatives to human ones, Gauvain takes Lantenac's place both in the dungeon and at the guillotine.' Roche's reading of Gauvain is deeply revealing of Hugo's own position as Roche sees in

words to Cimourdain profoundly echo those of Hugo in his letters to the *Société pour l'amélioration du sort des femmes* in which Hugo exposes the 'souveraineté compliqué d'oppression'⁷⁶⁶ concealed by the deceptive veneration of women's role in republican motherhood since the enactment of the *Code civil*. While Cimourdain wishes to retain women in the state oppression and servitude enshrined by the *Code*, Gauvain echoes Hugo's own enlightened vision of shared equality between the sexes: 'Gauvain reprit: Et la femme ? qu'en faites-vous ? Cimourdain répondit: Ce qu'elle est. La servante de l'homme. 'Oui. A une condition.' 'Laquelle ?' 'C'est que l'homme sera le serviteur de la femme.' 'Y penses-tu ? s'écria Cimourdain, l'homme serviteur ! jamais. L'homme est maître. Je n'admets qu'une royauté, celle du foyer. L'homme chez lui est roi.' 'Oui. A une condition. 'Laquelle ?' 'C'est que la femme y sera reine.' 'C'est-à-dire que tu veux pour l'homme et la femme...' 'L'égalité.' 'L'égalité ! y songes-tu ? les deux êtres sont divers. J'ai dit l'égalité. Je n'ai pas dit l'identité.'⁷⁶⁷

The roles have been inverted and Cimourdain is now the student who is being awakened to the enlightened views of his master, and like Hugo's own self-fashioning as a visionary of the republic of 1870, so Gauvain is figured as a prophet for the future republic: 'Gauvain parlait avec le recueillement d'un prophète. Cimourdain écoutait. Les rôles étaient intervertis, et maintenant il semblait que c'était l'élève qui était le maître.'⁷⁶⁸ The humane society which Gauvain envisions for the future republic is precisely the one which Hugo describes in his writings and speeches on behalf of women's rights in the early Third Republic, in which both sexes share equality, in which there are no slaves, convicts, or pariahs: 'Soyons la société humaine. [...] La société, c'est la nature sublimée. [...] Non, non, non, plus de parias, plus d'esclaves, plus de forçats, plus de damnés !'⁷⁶⁹ Again, Gauvain, like Hugo, identifies men as the agents of change in the future republic: 'je veux que chacun des attributs de l'homme soit un symbole de civilisation et un patron de progrès...'⁷⁷⁰ Commenting on the significance of Gauvain as a vehicle for Hugo's prophetic vision for a humane

Gauvain's action 'this profoundly moral choice – made at his own peril – highlights Gauvain's struggle with his greatest adversary: society and unyielding societal forces, as he is unable to equate Lantenac's self-sacrificing act of freeing the Flécharde children with its political compensation.' (For more see: Roche, Isabel, *Character and Meaning in the Novels of Victor Hugo*)

⁷⁶⁶ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 178.

⁷⁶⁷ *QVT II*, pp. 415-416

⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 418.

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 420-421

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 421.

republic, Gohin observes: ‘A l’extrême de sa vie, Gauvain semble répondre à l’exhortation que Hugo adressait aux inspireurs séculaires de l’humanité.’⁷⁷¹

However, if the egalitarian society which Gauvain, and by implication, Hugo, envision for the republic is one in which both sexes share equality in a humane society, such a Republic cannot be attained without an end to ‘masculine domination’ and ‘civil violence’ which can only be achieved with the humanity of motherhood.⁷⁷² Throughout the text, it is made quite apparent that motherhood alone can restore humanity and bring an end to civil violence. In the opening of the novel, it is the presence of Michelle Fléchard and her three children which interrupts the civil violence in the natural setting of the Vendée forest, as the soldiers who are on the verge of opening fire suddenly retreat before her in astonishment: ‘Cependant la vivandière s’était hasardée à regarder à travers les broussailles, et au moment où le sergent allait crier: Feu ! cette femme cria: Halte !’⁷⁷³ Roulin points out how it is this mediating presence of the mother in the forest which transforms the violence of the soldiers into an act of adoption and describes how ‘when faced with this rural model and its limitations’, the decision of the soldiers to claim paternal values and adopt the child’ illustrates the manner in which Hugo ‘offers two opposing politics in familial terms’⁷⁷⁴: ‘On the one hand, motherhood and reconciliation, likely to stop the civil violence, are characterized by sacrifice and lack of political consciousness, associated not with the home, but rather with nature, in what Sandey Petrey has called the pastoral discourse. On the other, symbolic paternity is immediately characterized by its potential for violence, yet is still capable of commiseration and welcoming, as the act of adoption shows.’⁷⁷⁵ Roulin further observes that this alternative is the only possible end to civil violence and masculine domination which can only be brought about by motherhood, and the assumption of an instructive rather than a primitive motherhood.⁷⁷⁶ In this way, the epilogue of the novel, in which the mediating presence of Michelle Fléchard interrupts the civil violence of the scene, foreshadows the prologue of the novel, in which the terrified bestial cry of Michelle at the sight of

⁷⁷¹ Gohin, p. 173.

⁷⁷² Roulin, p. 199.

⁷⁷³ *QVT I*, p. 6.

⁷⁷⁴ Roulin, p. 198.

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid*

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid*

her children in the enflamed tower has an utterly transformative effect on the violence of Lantenac and his soldiers.⁷⁷⁷

Once again, Hugo vividly evokes the primacy and bestial nature of maternal instinct in his description of Michelle's devastating shriek of anguish at the discovery of her children. Where the men's reaction is social and legal, the mother's reaction is natural and instinctive: 'La mère reconnut ses enfants. Elle jeta un cri effrayant. Ce cri d'inexprimable angoisse n'est donné qu'aux mères. Rien n'est plus farouche et rien n'est plus touchant. Quand une femme le jette, on croit entendre une louve; quand une louve le pousse, on croit entendre une femme. Ce cri de Michelle Fléchard fut un hurlement.'⁷⁷⁸ Once again, Hugo presents primal maternal instinct as something which is exclusive to mothers, and which endows women with a supremely divine strength: 'Les femmes sont faibles mais les mères sont fortes.'⁷⁷⁹ Such is the terror conveyed by Michelle Fléchard's 'shriek of maternal grief'⁷⁸⁰ that it immediately and brutally interrupts Lantenac's attack: 'C'était ce cri que le marquis de Lantenac venait d'entendre. On a vu qu'il s'était arrêté.'⁷⁸¹ The 'transfiguring effect'⁷⁸² of Michelle's ferocious bestial cry is such that it confronts Lantenac with a major moral dilemma at the turning-point of the story in which he must 'choose between his political commitment to the counter-revolution and the "pre-political" moral claim which the situation of the three menaced children makes on him.'⁷⁸³ Commenting on the significance of Michelle's 'sheer bestial cry' which 'works the transfiguring effect on Lantenac' at the 'pivotal point in the novel', Mehlman argues that 'maternity, reduced to its vocal essence comes to determine the future course of the action'⁷⁸⁴ as it presents 'an acoustic experience so intense as the dimension of primacy itself.'⁷⁸⁵ He argues that 'the cry...in all its phonic presence, is the voice of nature itself, nature – or maternity – as voice represents an irreducible reality beyond which, Hugo would seem to be saying, one cannot go.'⁷⁸⁶ Indeed, as we have seen, the abject imposition of

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid*

⁷⁷⁸ *QVT II*, p. 318.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 311.

⁷⁸⁰ Mehlman, p. 48.

⁷⁸¹ *QVT II*, *Ibid*

⁷⁸² Mehlman, *Ibid*

⁷⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 49.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 58.

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 62.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 57.

revolutionary violence within a natural pastoral setting and the incongruous presence of wounded breastfeeding women amidst the terror of revolutionary violence appear to unequivocally suggest that women and children should be removed from the sphere of revolutionary violence. Reflecting upon the sacred martyrdom which Hugo attributes to victims of revolution, Kathryn M. Grossman observes that just as ‘martyrdom is often the lot of those who, guided by divine justice transgress social norms’, yet nevertheless ‘their example may approach the political and aesthetic sublime’, so ‘by the same token, women, children, and most of the elderly enjoy a special status.’⁷⁸⁷

Gohin further points out how Hugo’s contradictory position in relation to the Revolution in which he both condemns the use of revolutionary violence yet acknowledges the necessity of ’93, is echoed by Gauvain’s desire to spare women and children from the wrath of civil violence: ‘Mais en le dotant de son propre idéal, il l’amène en fin de compte à ses propres contradictions. Ne traiter comme ennemis ni les enfants, ni les vieillards, ni les femmes; épargner les blessés, gracier les prisonniers; vouloir en pleine guerre civile fonder la concorde entre les citoyens, cela est beau, mais c’est un rêve, c’est agir en 93 comme si 93 n’existait pas.’⁷⁸⁸ Just as the adoption of three children illustrates an act of motherhood in the opening of the story, so the climax of the story demonstrates how motherhood alone can save humanity.⁷⁸⁹ In the Tourgue episode of the novel, Roulin comments on how the transfiguring effect of Michelle’s animal howl resolves the situation by abruptly bringing an end to the violence: ‘In fact, this cry leads Lantenac to free the children, breaking the virile logic of violence, adopting a parental attitude, or better still, making a sacrifice of political ideal in favour of the family.’⁷⁹⁰ He equates the liberation of the children with giving birth and the triumph of motherhood.⁷⁹¹ In particular, he sees Hugo’s use of cradle imagery to evoke the victory of humanity as ‘a sign of the future, but also in Hugo’s work a sign of man’s new attitude toward the social group.’⁷⁹²: ‘L’humanité avait vaincu l’inhumain. Et par quel moyen ? de quelle façon ? comment avait-elle terrassé

⁷⁸⁷ Grossman, Kathryn M., *Figuring transcendence in Les Misérables: Hugo’s romantic sublime*, (Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale, 1994), p. 117.

⁷⁸⁸ Gohin, *Op cit*, p. 164.

⁷⁸⁹ Roulin, *Op cit*, p.198.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid*

⁷⁹¹ *Ibid*

⁷⁹² *Ibid*

un colosse de colère et de haine ? quelles armes avait-elles employées ? quelle machine de guerre ? le berceau.⁷⁹³ Gohin also comments on how the absolute primacy evoked by Michelle's terrifying cry represents the victory of humanity as it awakens the latent humanity in Lantenac and functions as both 'une irradiation d'une bonté suprême et éruption en l'homme de sa surhumanité latente'⁷⁹⁴: 'De là ses deux interprétations successives et complémentaires de la transfiguration du féroce Lantenac: 'Le cri de la mère avait réveillé en lui le fond de vieille pitié humaine, sorte de dépôt de la vie universelle, qui est dans toutes les âmes, même les plus fatales. L'absolu de la pitié a donc été suscité par l'absolu de la maternité.'⁷⁹⁵ This sudden awakening of humanity evoked by the primacy of Michelle's maternal cry is further illustrated in the text by Radoub who similarly assumes maternal qualities during the liberation of the children: 'Radoub était près des enfants et de la mère, presque aussi maternel qu'elle [...]'⁷⁹⁶

This look of maternal tenderness is further poignantly etched on Cimourdain's face when he visits Gauvain in his prison cell on the eve of his execution: '[...] une mère regardant son nourrisson dormir n'aurait pas un plus tendre et inexprimable regard.'⁷⁹⁷ Mehlman concludes from this encounter between Gauvain and Cimourdain at the close of the novel, that the 'character of Cimourdain's grief is thus maternal,'⁷⁹⁸ and that 'a pressure in the text leads Hugo twice to imagine the preceptor as having mothered the young hero.'⁷⁹⁹ Indeed, Cimourdain does assume a maternal role in Gauvain's life and the tender gesture and inconsolable grief which he experiences upon Gauvain's death certainly displays the quality of maternal love. As we have seen, Cimourdain's first act of motherhood can be seen in his initial adoption of Gauvain, and his second occurs in his visit to Gauvain's prison cell before his death. Roulin similarly observes that when 'visiting Gauvain in prison, Cimourdain 'become a mother once again,' but also goes further by suggesting that Cimourdain's suicide at precisely the same time as Gauvain's death 'permits the final reconciliation of the mother's body' when the union of these two sister souls is finally complete⁸⁰⁰: 'Et ces

⁷⁹³ *QVT II*, p. 347.

⁷⁹⁴ Gohin, *Op cit*, p. 169.

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 170.

⁷⁹⁶ *QVT II*, p. 341.

⁷⁹⁷ p. 408.

⁷⁹⁸ Mehlman, p. 56.

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid*

⁸⁰⁰ Roulin, p. 199.

deux âmes, sœurs tragiques, s'envolèrent ensemble [...]'⁸⁰¹ Indeed, given the fact that Cimourdain remains a 'fanatical Jacobin'⁸⁰² and isn't swayed to the political views of Gauvain, who eventually becomes his instructor,⁸⁰³ it would appear that Cimourdain's suicide is very much the result of maternal grief and is something over which he has no control. When he sees Gauvain in the prison cell, he is overcome by a maternal love which is described as being stronger than himself: 'Ce regard était plus fort peut-être que Cimourdain [...]'⁸⁰⁴ Although he has not been enlightened by Gauvain's vision for the future republic, a life without him is nonetheless unbearable: 'l'ombre de l'une mêlée à la lumière de l'autre.'⁸⁰⁵ Roulin thus argues that 'Gauvain's death, and perhaps Cimourdain's as well, appears in the text as a sacrifice, a value of motherhood.'⁸⁰⁶

The conclusion of the novel thus represents the triumph of humanity and motherhood over civil violence.⁸⁰⁷ However, as Roulin observes, motherhood evolves within the story from the primitive pre-political motherhood incarnated by Michelle Fléchar, to the acknowledgement of the instructive role of motherhood by Cimourdain when he first adopts Gauvain and the maternal nature of his grief for him at the novel's close, and also by Lantenac's political sacrifice in favour of humanity.⁸⁰⁸ Roulin argues that only when this passage from 'a pastoral universe to a politicized vision of motherhood' is complete, can 'the child then move from the primitive attachment to the mother's body to a symbolic attachment to the country's body, which has become the fatherland.'⁸⁰⁹ He concludes that in this way, the novel thus 'imposes the primacy of the "wrestling" with the mother as a legitimization of the political tie' not only 'attachment to the land, but also assured by education' and that 'in this respect, it realizes Daumier's dual goal: that of mother/educator, in a vision at the heart of the Third Republic.'⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰¹ *QVT II*, p. 437.

⁸⁰² Mehlman, p. 119.

⁸⁰³ Cimourdain refuses to accept the humane, egalitarian, social republic which Gauvain envisions as a reality: 'Société plus grande que nature. Je te le dis, ce n'est plus le possible, c'est le rêve.' (*QVT II*, p. 420.)

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 408.

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 437.

⁸⁰⁶ Roulin, p. 199.

⁸⁰⁷ *Ibid*

⁸⁰⁸ *Ibid*

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid*

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 199-200

Houzarde and women in revolution.

While *QVT* presents an evolutionary vision of motherhood beyond a pre-political ‘pastoral universe to a politicized vision of motherhood’, the novel also presents an evolutionary vision of femininity wherein women are not defined by their maternity or lack of political consciousness but by their emergence from the private sphere of maternal life and their assumption of an active form of citizenship. This progressive and liberating vision of femininity is embodied most vividly in the novel by the character of ‘la vivandière’. The presence of ‘la vivandière’ among the battalion of the Bonnet-Rouge serves a conciliatory, tempering, and appeasing role within the novel – she is the one who prevents the soldiers from opening fire on Michelle Flécharde when they mistake her for a Royalist enemy: ‘Cependant la vivandière s’était hasardée à regarder à travers les broussailles, et au moment où le sergent allait crier: Feu! Cette femme cria: Halte!’⁸¹¹ Significantly, however, ‘la vivandière’ is not a mother and her insertion in the text thus serves to highlight Hugo’s awareness of the roles adopted by women during the revolution, but more importantly, his vision of female identity and the role of women in society beyond their maternal function.

Hugo’s portrayal of ‘la vivandière’ displays the ways in which maternity is not necessarily a feminine trait reserved uniquely to women who become mothers and whose life is defined by their maternity like Michelle Flécharde or Paquette de Chantefleurie. Despite not being a mother, ‘la vivandière’, is endowed with maternal qualities which enable her to appease the situation in the Vendée forest and gain Michelle’s trust: ‘Quel âge a ce môme ? demanda-t-elle. C’est vieux, dit la vivandière. Ça ne doit plus téter...Nous lui donnerons de la soupe. La mère commençait à se rassurer.’⁸¹² However, whereas Michelle’s pre-political maternal consciousness threatens her safety and that of her children, ‘la vivandière’ has a strong political consciousness and makes Michelle aware of the political import of her actions and the dangers of her ignorance: ‘Venir dans les bois se faire massacrer ! a-t-on idée de faire des bêtises comme ça !’⁸¹³ She is seen at once to embody the stern and authoritative stance necessitated by her position and the soft, feminine qualities of her sex: ‘Et la vivandière reprit de sa voix soldatesque et féminine, douce en dessous [..]

⁸¹¹*QVT I*, p. 8.

⁸¹² *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁸¹³ *Ibid*, p. 9.

Et la vivandière caressait avec sa grosse main la petite tête du nourrisson.⁸¹⁴ By thus exhibiting both virile and feminine qualities, ‘la vivandière’ is the embodiment of the revolutionary yet Romantic femininity which Hugo attributes to George Sand in his funeral eulogies to whom he attributes both ‘des dons virils’ and ‘des dons angéliques,’⁸¹⁵ and Louise Julien whom he venerates as ‘la femme de nos jours’ both by virtue of her self-sacrificing role in the revolution of ’48, and by virtue of her feminine softness and majesty ‘dans toute sa douceur, dans tout son sacrifice, dans toute sa majesté !’⁸¹⁶

Just such a vision of women in terms of a Romantic yet revolutionary femininity is strikingly evident within Hugo’s portrayal of ‘la vivandière’ in *QVT*. He portrays the revolutionary role adopted by the ‘vivandières’ during the Revolution as an act of independence and free will on the part of women who decided voluntarily to accompany the soldiers at their own peril, and to partake in the Revolution: ‘La vivandière du bataillon les accompagnait. Les vivandières se joignent volontiers aux avant-gardes. On court des dangers, mais on va voir quelque chose.’⁸¹⁷ However, while commending these women for exerting their independence, and assuming an active role in the revolution, Hugo also reveres their bravery as an essentially feminine quality: ‘La curiosité est une des formes de la bravoure féminine.’⁸¹⁸ In the case of the ‘vivandière’ in *QVT* however, a further complexity emerges within Hugo’s Romantic yet revolutionary model of femininity and his perceptions of women’s changing roles in 19th century society, owing to her identification with a strong maternal essence. Despite not being a mother, ‘la vivandière’ exerts a strong maternal presence within the text. This is seen through her ability to bring calm and harmony to a potentially catastrophic situation, thus enabling her to rupture the outbreak of violence, in the same way as Michelle Flécharde, Hugo’s archetypal maternal figure. La vivandière is able to restore order and harmony in a way that the men of the battalion are not capable of doing – she succeeds in calming and reassuring Michelle and assumes a protective and nurturing instinct towards the starving children.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁸¹⁵ *Actes et Paroles III*, (A. Michel: Paris, 1937-1940), p. 242.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb322627986> [Accessed 13 November 2014]

⁸¹⁶ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 53.

⁸¹⁷ *QVT I*, p. 7.

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid*

When the situation becomes strained, it is ‘la vivandière’ who intervenes and assumes a mediating presence between the mother and the soldiers: ‘La femme écoute, ahurie...La vivandière sentit le besoin d’intervenir. Elle se remit à caresser l’enfant qui tétait, et donna une tape sur la joue aux deux autres.’⁸¹⁹ Thus while ‘la vivandière’ does not represent the pre-political primitive form of motherhood incarnated by Michelle, she can be seen to exert a similarly fundamental role in awakening the values of humanity and conciliation in the soldiers, and in bringing about the act of adoption which, as we have seen, represents the first step towards a politicized and instructive evolution of motherhood within the text. Hugo would thus appear to be arguing, like he did so profusely within his public discourse on women during his exile and the early Third Republic, that the presence of women in the public and political sphere of the Republic would bring a harmonising, unifying, and conciliatory presence to the future Republic. That ‘la vivandière’ is attributed with the same harmonising function as Michelle despite not being a mother and despite her involvement in the virile public space of politics and revolutionary activity, is of considerable interest as it illustrates Hugo’s ability to envision women’s role in the newfound republic beyond their state of maternity. In this way, Hugo can be seen to be acknowledging that maternity is not the only potential role for women in the Republic, and that there may well be a role for women beyond and separate from their maternal duty.

This re-imagining of women’s role beyond their maternal function and their confinement to the domestic sphere can be seen in the way in which ‘la vivandière’ wilfully assumes an independent female identity. While Michelle’s life is wholly defined by her maternity and her devotion to her children ‘Je suis avec mes enfants’, the way of life of the ‘vivandière’ is made possible only through her lack of children ‘Il y eut une pause. La vivandière dit: Moi, je n’ai pas eu d’enfants. Je n’ai pas eu le temps.’⁸²⁰ Her decision to be referred to as Houzarde and not by her mother’s name can be seen as a further way in which she exerts her independence and identity as a woman outside the sphere of maternity and domestic life: ‘Je m’appelle Houzarde; c’est un sobriquet. Mais j’aime mieux m’appeler Houzarde que mamzelle Bicourneau, comme ma mère.’⁸²¹ Houzarde not only points out the dangers of Michelle’s lack of

⁸¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 14.

⁸²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 16.

⁸²¹ *Ibid*, p.17.

political awareness, she also instructs her on where her political allegiances should lie ‘vous voyez, madame, nous sommes de Parisiens, dit gracieusement la vivandière,’⁸²² and implores her to join the battalion to ensure her safety and that of her children ‘voyez-vous, madame, ne craignez rien. Vous devriez entrer dans le bataillon. Vous feriez comme moi.’⁸²³ However, just as Hugo venerates Sand and Julien as the embodiment of both virile and feminine qualities, so Houzarde, like Michelle, is placed outside the direct sphere of revolutionary violence and assumes a notably caring, nurturing role within the Revolution: ‘Je suis la cantinière, comme qui dirait celle qui donne à boire quand on se mitraille et qu’on s’assassine.’⁸²⁴ She fulfils the decidedly feminine role of tending to the women and children who fall victim to civil violence: ‘Oh ! c’est bien simple ! on a son bidon et sa clochette, on s’en va dans le vacarme, dans les feux de peloton, dans les coups de canon, dans le hourvari, en criant: ‘Qui est-ce qui veut boire un coup, les enfants. Ce n’est pas plus malaisé que ça.’⁸²⁵ Owing to her natural feminine qualities of softness and grace, Houzarde is able to transcend the animosity which exists between the Blancs and the Bleus and bring the values of humanity to bear on the horror of civil violence: ‘Moi, je verse à boire à tout le monde...Aux blancs comme aux bleus, quoique je sois une bleue. Et même une bonne bleue. Mais je donne à boire à tous. Les blessés, ça a soif. On meurt sans distinction d’opinion. Les gens qui meurent, ça devrait se serrer la main...comme c’est godiche de se battre.’⁸²⁶

However, while Houzarde is attributed with a fundamentally consolatory, nurturing role within the revolution, thus placing her outside the realm of civil violence, it is a role which she assumes with great bravery and dignity – she is fully aware and accepting of the possibility of death when she asks Michelle to join the battalion and is willing to make this sacrifice on her behalf: ‘Venez avec nous. Si je suis tuée, vous aurez ma survivance.’⁸²⁷ In this way, Houzarde’s self-sacrifice for the survival of the three children is akin to the sublime maternal sacrifice displayed by Hugo’s archetypal maternal figures. By thus exhibiting a harmonising, nurturing, and self-sacrificing role within the revolutionary activity, Houzarde can thus be seen as the realisation of

⁸²² *Ibid*

⁸²³ *Ibid*, p. 18.

⁸²⁴ *Ibid*

⁸²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 19.

⁸²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 19-20

⁸²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 20.

Hugo's 'femme digne de devenir citoyenne'⁸²⁸ who, like Sand and Julien, embodies the male essence of bravery and grandeur, and the feminine essence of softness and compassion. The source of Houzarde's heroism is thus not her maternal essence, but rather her feminine goodness and masculine bravery, and her ability to exert virile qualities while always retaining her essential femininity: 'Voyez-vous, j'ai l'air comme ça; mais je suis une bonne femme et un brave homme.'⁸²⁹

That Hugo envisioned an active form of citizenship for women beyond their maternal function is made clear from his portrayal of Houzarde. While endowed with maternal qualities, Houzarde is far removed from the primitive motherhood displayed by Michelle, whose lack of political awareness endangers her and her children: 'Pauvre paroissienne ! dit la vivandière !'⁸³⁰ Despite not being a mother, Houzarde's female identity is not seen to be lacking or incomplete – rather Hugo presents her lack of her maternal status as a fact owing to practical reasons which she accepts like the inevitable possibility of her death: 'Moi, je n'ai pas eu d'enfants. Je n'ai pas eu le temps.'⁸³¹ She is seen in no way to be lacking the maternal instinct which women acquire upon becoming mothers: 'La vivandière prit le gobelet à sa ceinture...versa quelques gouttes dans le gobelet et approcha le gobelet des lèvres des enfants.'⁸³² When the children are adopted by the Bonnet-Rouge, she rejoices that they have become children of the revolution: 'Voilà, dit-il, les enfants du bataillon du Bonnet-Rouge. La vivandière sauta de joie. Trois têtes dans un bonnet cria-t-elle.'⁸³³ Having allowed her children to be adopted by the battalion, the commander hails Michelle as a citizen of the Republic: 'Venez, citoyenne.'⁸³⁴

However, the citizenship implied here is Michelle's role as mother-citizen in the formation of future citizens. By contrast, Houzarde exhibits an active form of citizenship for women in the newfound republic which is not confined to the private sphere of the home and their role in 'republican motherhood', but one in which women actively participate in revolution, and where their essentially feminine qualities bring

⁸²⁸ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 53.

⁸²⁹ *QVT I*, p. 20.

⁸³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 23.

⁸³¹ *Ibid*, p. 16.

⁸³² *Ibid*, p. 23.

⁸³³ *Ibid*, p. 26.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid*

harmony, unity, and compassion to the newfound social republic. This is precisely the vision of women's role in the republic which Hugo describes in his public discourse on women's rights: 'Amis, dans les temps futurs, dans cette belle, et paisible, et tendre, et fraternelle république sociale de l'avenir, le rôle de la femme sera grand; mais quelle magnifique prélude à ce rôle que de tels martyrs si vaillamment endurés!'⁸³⁵ Houzarde thus embodies this active form of citizenship which Hugo envisions for women in the republic, and her death becomes emblematic of the martyrdom of women during the Revolution and their struggle to attain equal citizenship: 'Tellmarch se pencha sur elles. L'une de ces femmes avait une sorte d'uniforme; à côté d'elle était un bidon brisé et vidé; c'était une vivandière. Elle avait quatre balles dans la tête. Elle était morte.'⁸³⁶ By shifting from his habitual use of 'la vivandière' to the general, unspecified designation of 'une vivandière', Hugo is illustrating his awareness of the wider, universal struggle in which women were engaged during the revolution to attain their rights to equal citizenship.

Within the text, Hugo thus demonstrates a wide, far-reaching awareness of the various ways in which women contributed to the Revolution. He describes at length the public activity in which women were engaged in Paris and their strong public presence on the streets: 'On vivait en public...les femmes assises sur les perrons des églises faisaient de la charpie en chantant *La Marseillaise*...'⁸³⁷ He remarks upon the choice of plays being shown in theatres at the time: '*La Mère de famille sauvée des flammes*', and '*L'aînée des papesses Jeanne*.'⁸³⁸ Women were chanting 'Nous sommes jolies sous le bonnet rouge.'⁸³⁹ The women are described as being fervent patriots such as 'la maîtresse de Sylvain Bailly, bonne patriote [...]'⁸⁴⁰ Again Hugo describes the women engaged in revolutionary activity in terms of their soft, nurturing qualities but also in terms of their tenacity and bravery: 'Les femmes dans cette misère étaient vaillantes et douces. Elles passaient les nuits à attendre leur tour d'entrer chez le Boulanger.'⁸⁴¹

⁸³⁵ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 53.

⁸³⁶ *QVT I*, p. 184.

⁸³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 191.

⁸³⁸ *Ibid*

⁸³⁹ *Ibid*

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 193.

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 198.

However, while depicting the harmonising, conciliatory, maternal role played by women in the Revolution, Hugo also acknowledges the extent to which women actively re-asserted their roles during the revolution by unyielding themselves from the confining shackles of the private sphere, by defiantly exerting their sexuality, and, in some cases, adopting combative roles alongside men in the revolutionary struggle. He describes the combative presence of women on the streets of Paris: ‘La pique d’honneur du faubourg Saint-Antoine entrainée, portée par des femmes. [...] La section du Mont-Blanc apportait le buste de Lepelletier, et une femme posait un bonnet rouge sur la tête du président qui l’embrasait; “les citoyennes de la section du Mail” jetaient des fleurs “aux législateurs...”⁸⁴² Some of the women who presented themselves on the streets exude a defiant, tenacious sexuality: ‘les femmes de la section du Temple venaient à la barre jurer *de ne s’unir qu’à de vrais républicains...*’⁸⁴³ There are also descriptions of how peasant women accompanied men into the thick of the revolutionary struggle: ‘...quelques-uns ayant leur femme à côté d’eux; car souvent les paysannes suivaient les paysans; en Vendée, les femmes grosses servaient d’espions.’⁸⁴⁴

Michelet also comments on the willingness of young women to accompany men into revolutionary struggles in Brittany: ‘J’ai dit ailleurs l’héroïque initiative des femmes et filles d’Angers. Elles voulaient partir, suivre la jeune armée d’Anjou, de Bretagne, qui se dirigeait sur Rennes, prendre leur part de cette première croisade de la liberté, nourrir des combattants, soigner les blessés. Elles juraient de n’épouser jamais que de loyaux citoyens...’⁸⁴⁵ He also describes how the peasant women both accompanied their husbands and also assumed an active, combative role within the Vendée insurrection: ‘Ils avaient dans leurs rangs des femmes: madame de Lescure qui fut plus tard madame de La Rochejacquelein; Thérèse de Mollien, maîtresse de La Rouarie, laquelle brûla la liste des chefs de paroisse; madame de La Rochefoucauld, belle, jeune, le sabre à la main, raillant les paysans au pied de la grosse tour du château du Puy-Rousseau, et cette Antoinette Adams, dite le chevalier Adams, si vaillante que, prise, on la fusilla, mais debout, par respect.’⁸⁴⁶ Hugo describes how the essentially

⁸⁴² *Ibid*, p. 309.

⁸⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 310. (emphasis in original)

⁸⁴⁴ *QVT II*, p. 70.

⁸⁴⁵ Michelet, Jules, *Les femmes de la révolution*, (A. Delahays: Paris, 1855), p. 61.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb364330754> [Accessed 4 July 2014]

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 29.

feminine qualities of these women in no way hinder but rather enrich their ability to adopt these heretofore masculine roles: ‘Ce temps épique était cruel. On était des furieux. Madame de Lescure faisait exprès marcher son cheval sur les républicains gisant hors de combat; *morts*, dit-elle; blessés peut-être. Quelquefois les hommes trahirent, les femmes jamais.’⁸⁴⁷ In *Les Misérables* Hugo also alludes to the active role assumed by women in the revolutionary struggles of the republic through their participation in the barricades of June ’48: ‘Les trois femmes avaient profité du répit de la nuit pour disparaître définitivement; ce qui faisait respirer les insurgés plus à l’aise.’⁸⁴⁸

Hugo’s account of both the consolatory and combative roles adopted by women during the Revolution closely reflects the dynamic reality of women’s participation in the revolutionary struggle which can be seen as their first emergence *en masse* into the public sphere of French society. While the actions of leading women such as Olympe de Gouges and Théroigne de Méricourt have been well documented, the participation of ordinary Parisian women, from unemployed women, working-class women, laundrywomen to marketwomen, shop owners and wives of merchants and artisans, reveals the extent to which women contributed to the revolutionary activity. While the Storming of the Bastille can be seen as one of the major victories of the men of the revolution, Jules Michelet describes how the women’s march on 6 October can be seen as one of the major victories by the women of the Revolution, when the food shortages felt most acutely by the ordinary *femmes de foyer* brought women acutely into the revolutionary struggle: ‘Les hommes ont fait le 14 juillet, les femmes le 6 octobre. Les hommes ont pris la Bastille Royale, et les femmes ont pris la royauté elle-même, l’ont mise aux mains de Paris, c’est-à-dire de la Révolution.’⁸⁴⁹ In his account of the event in *Les femmes de la révolution*, Michelet describes how ordinary women across many crosssections of Paris joined in the march: ‘Les halles marchent, et, d’autre part, marchait le faubourg Saint-Antoine. Sur la route, les femmes entraînaient toutes celles qu’elles pouvaient rencontrer [...] Les femmes ne s’étonnèrent point. Elles chargèrent la cavalerie, l’infanterie, à coups de pierre...elle forcèrent l’Hôtel de Ville, entrèrent dans tous les bureaux [...] D’autres femmes, affamées, sauvages, criaient: *Du pain et*

⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 30.

⁸⁴⁸ *Les Misérables V*, (Pagnerre: Paris, 1862), p. 23. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb306255232> [Accessed 17 July 2013]

⁸⁴⁹ Michelet, p. 26.

*des armes!*⁸⁵⁰ He describes the forcefulness and tenacity with which these women defended their position against the *gardes du corps*: ‘Deux femmes furent blessés, et même des coups de sabre, selon quelques témoins’, and attributes the victory of 6 October to the women of Paris: ‘La révolution du 6 octobre, nécessaire, naturelle et légitime, s’il en fut jamais, toute spontanée, imprévue, vraiment populaire, appartient surtout aux femmes, comme celle du 14 juillet aux hommes. Les hommes ont pris la Bastille, et les femmes ont pris le roi.’⁸⁵¹ The resolve and force displayed by the women on the Bastille is further alluded to by F.A. Mignet: ‘Le 5, l’insurrection éclata d’une manière violente et invincible; le manque absolu de farine en fut le signal. Une jeune fille entra dans un corps-de-garde...et parcourut les rues en battant la caisse et en criant *du pain! du pain!* elle fut bientôt entourée d’un cortège de femmes. Cette troupe s’avança vers l’Hôtel-de-Ville en se grossissant toujours; elle força la garde à cheval qui était aux portes de la commune, pénétra dans l’intérieur en demandant du pain et des armes [...]’⁸⁵²

In *La Révolution française*, Jean-Clément Martin further describes how ordinary women were present, alongside men, in the first major acts of opposition against the king: ‘Elles ont soutenu la Révolution naissante, prenant part aux manifestations, puis aux fêtes, et surtout participant aux “journées révolutionnaires.” Les 5 et 6 octobre 1789, ce sont elles qui jouent le premier rôle dans l’opposition au roi. Le 20 juin 1792, des Parisiennes défilent, armées, obligeant, sous la menace, le roi à boire à la Constitution.’⁸⁵³ Winifred Stephens further comments on the prominent presence of female agitators in the Bastille: ‘At the citadel’s capture and demolition, women were present in large numbers. Mme de Genlis, who had brought her pupils, the Duke of Orléans’ children, to watch it, said she saw women helping to pull down the towers. Fashionable women were there, as well as women of the mob. If it was pity that first brought women into the Revolution, another impulse equally potent to provoke revolutionary action...kept them there: this was the economic impulse [...] It was this bread and cheese question that made it possible to organise that women’s...march to Versailles on the 5th and 6th of October, which was the second great insurrection of the

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 31-32

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 56.

⁸⁵² Mignet, François-Auguste-Marie-Alexis, *Histoire de la révolution française: depuis 1789 jusqu’en 1814, Volume I*, (F. Didot: Paris, 1827), pp. 130-131

⁸⁵³ Martin, Jean-Clément, *La Révolution française*, (Le Cavalier Bleu : Paris, 2008) pp. 36-37

Revolution.⁸⁵⁴ Stephens describes how this diverse mob of tenacious Parisian women transformed the streets of Paris into a ‘stronghold of femininity, refusing to admit any who were not of their own sex’: ‘So along the quays, past the Louvre, past the Tuileries Gardens, towards Versailles, they swarmed in the rain and mist of that October morning, those *ménagères*. They were also among these Hunger Marches women of various occupations: housewives, women of the markets, of Les Halles, of Saint Catherine’s Market, and Saint Paul’s. There were lace-makers, flower-sellers, and no doubt, women of the street.’⁸⁵⁵

While the events of the 6 October can be seen as a collective act of resistance led by the women of Paris, independent military women also assumed a combative role in the revolutionary struggles. Dominique Godineau describes how ‘militant women combined a desire to participate in the Revolution with a desire to go beyond the secondary places assigned to women in the Sovereign People.’⁸⁵⁶ Godineau describes how several women held leading positions in the various revolutionary insurrections throughout France: ‘These women fought bravely, shared the fate of the troops, bivouacked in the snow, and were present at all the sieges and battles. [...] these women were sometimes elected officers or non commissioned officers, such as Lieutenant Ursule Abu, or the non-commissioned officers Pélagie Palière: Anfélique Puchemin, to whom Napoléon III gave the region of Honor as a reward for her service record: Marie Schellinck, a young Belgian, who enlisted in 1793 and died in the army in 1802: and Catherine Pochetat, a young Parisian artist who took part in the Bastille in 1789 and the Tuileries on 10 August 1792.’⁸⁵⁷ Women were also active in the counter-revolutionary struggles. Martine Lapiéd describes the diverse activity of Provincial women in the counter-revolution in Arles: ‘On les retrouve dans les mouvements révolutionnaires, engagées pour ou contre le fédéralisme, participant à l’activité de certains clubs, et même au sein des ultimes luttes entre les Jacobins et leurs adversaires pendant la Convention thermidorienne et le Directoire.’⁸⁵⁸ In

⁸⁵⁴ Stephens, Winifred, *Women of the French Revolution*, (E.P. Dutton: London, 1922), pp. 25-27

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 28-29

⁸⁵⁶ Godineau, Dominique, *The women of Paris and their French Revolution*, transl. Katherine Streip, (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1998), p. 198.

⁸⁵⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 243-245

⁸⁵⁸ Lapiéd, Martine, *Les provençales actrices de la Révolution ? L’exemple des Arlésiennes* in *Pour la Révolution française: Recueil d’études en hommage à Claude Mazauric*, ed. Christine Le Bozec & Eric Wauters, (Publications de L’Université de Rouen: Rouen, 1998), p. 158.

particular, Lapied observes the diverse contribution of women in the counter-revolutionary activity in Arles: ‘La radicalisation d’une fraction du parti patriote favorise l’émergence du mouvement sectionnaire et, après Marseille et Aix, il s’empare du pouvoir à Arles le 19 juillet 1793 non sans que les Jacobins aient résisté. Des femmes dont certaines sont armées de fusils et de sabres participent à cette résistance, tentant de faire libérer les Monnaidiers emprisonnés. Après...l’écrasement de la rébellion fédéraliste en Provence, des femmes s’impliquent dans la politique de Terreur. A Arles, les Monnaidières réclament avec virulence sa mise en place. D’après des témoins, elles formaient une part essentielle des cortèges d’intimidation qui se déplaçaient dans la ville avec une guillotine. Elles se mobilisent également pour la célébration du culte de Marat auquel une statue est élevée sur la place des portefaix.’⁸⁵⁹ Lapied further notes how women were active on both sides of the revolutionary activity: ‘Les papiers des comités de surveillance montrent que des femmes participent aux luttes politiques, dans les deux camps.’⁸⁶⁰

However, female combatants were not well received in revolutionary armies and this is reflected in the sparse historical documentation of their revolutionary activity. Martine Lapied comments on the poor visibility of women in official documentation on the counter-revolutionary activity in Provence: ‘Lieu de forts antagonismes pendant la Révolution, le sud-est de la France a été le théâtre d’affrontements violents entre révolutionnaires et contre-révolutionnaires. Le rôle des femmes dans ces oppositions a été relativement peu étudié. [...] Il est vrai que la documentation disponible rend plus facilement visibles les victimes que les actrices de la Révolution puisqu’il s’agit essentiellement de témoignages issus de la répression: rapports des autorités révolutionnaires locales, dossiers des tribunaux révolutionnaires.’⁸⁶¹ Concerned that the growing numbers of women following men into revolutionary struggles would hamper the course of operations, Godineau describes how ‘the Convention decreed on 30 April 1793 that all women, combatants or not, would be dismissed, with the exception of washer women and cooks necessary for military service.’⁸⁶² While Michelet apparently commends the courage displayed by women during the October Days, Olwen H. Hufton identifies how Michelet’s account ultimately sees women

⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 159.

⁸⁶⁰ *Ibid*

⁸⁶¹ *Ibid*

⁸⁶² Godineau, p. 244.

involved in the revolutionary struggle as ‘privileged victims whose contact with daily needs, hunger, disease, and family responsibility made them impulsive but courageous instigators of revolt and, in his view, particularly laudatory ones because their violent behaviour was minimal. [...] Michelet makes women and sensibility equivalent and his equivalence becomes for him the explanation of the incompatibility of (generic) woman with the Revolution. For him, the Revolution represented the triumph of reason and this attribute is interpreted as male.’⁸⁶³ Hufton argues that the women of the bread riot were not only acting on the impulse of food scarcity as Michelet suggests, but were acting out of dissatisfaction with the government and in default of men who failed to take action: ‘The background to this *journée* was indeed the inadequacy of bread supplies...but it also included growing dissatisfaction with the role of government and with the king in particular. [...] In the days before the forcing of the Hôtel de Ville we hear that groups of women accused the men of hanging back – “les hommes traînent...les femmes sont des lâches...Demain des choses iront mieux: nous nous mettrons à la tête des affaires.”’⁸⁶⁴ Furthermore, various challenges emerge when attempting to estimate the true number of female soldiers who fought in revolutionary armies. Godineau describes the difficulties in estimating their exact number due to the flimsiness of historical records: ‘Whatever the petition of Manette Dupont may say, there were surely not nine hundred Parisian women fighting in the Republic’s armies. [...] We can find forty-four, but any real breakdown is impossible, because they were not listed...and it is often the chance of the archives that permits the discoveries of one here or there.’⁸⁶⁵ Godineau thus argues that ‘we can only say that the female soldier in the revolutionary armies is neither a myth nor an exceptional character.’⁸⁶⁶

A further way in which women asserted their emergence onto the public sphere during the revolutionary period was the growing political awareness of women. During the years of the Revolution, women actively acquired a political education through the attendance of political clubs, the dissemination of pamphlets, and by listening to street debates. Godineau describes how women took it upon themselves to acquire a

⁸⁶³ Hufton, Olwen H., *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution*, (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1992), *Foreword* p. xix.

⁸⁶⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 12-14

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid*

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid*

political education during the Revolution: ‘Glancing through police reports and registers, we find on the contrary a female Parisian population actively acquiring a true political education. This knowledge was certainly neither uniform nor bookish. Its stages were often modelled on those of militant engagement and came from the simple knowledge of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen through the regular reading of...Robespierre, and even in certain exceptional cases the theories of Enlightenment philosophers.’⁸⁶⁷ Martin further comments on the growing presence of women in political discourse during the revolution: ‘Elles sont nombreuses dans les tribunes des sections et des assemblées, engagées dans des sociétés “fraternelles” comme Etta Palm. Elles animent des journeaux politiques, comme Louise Robert-Kéralio, publient pièces et pamphlets comme Olympe de Gouges, ou jouent des rôles politiques indirects comme Germaine de Staël ou Manon Roland.’⁸⁶⁸ While the impact of women’s participation in political clubs remained limited owing to the low attendance rates, the lack of discourse on poverty, and the hostility of working-class women towards any perceived linkage of the clubs with the Girondin faction,⁸⁶⁹ the consolatory role which Hugo attributes to the women of the Revolution had a considerable impact on those suffering from the fallout of revolutionary activity. The consolatory role adopted by the women of Paris can be seen in the way in which women who were not actively involved in revolutionary combat donated gifts for those in need: ‘Women, who did not fight made it a point of honour to contribute to the defense of the nation. Although they were sometimes very modest, the gifts regularly received by the Convention represented a real sacrifice for the female donors. Several lives, saved from housekeeping expenses or put by to replace a worn-out piece of clothing but which they preferred to give to the nation...or to the soldier who knew how to show humanity and bravery.’⁸⁷⁰

As well as acknowledging these combative and consolatory roles adopted by women in the revolutionary struggles of the republic, Hugo observes the growing awareness of women’s assumption of an active, public role during the Revolution through the changes in public discourse reflecting the active, as distinct from passive and submissive citizenship adopted by women during the revolutionary struggle. In

⁸⁶⁷ Godineau, p. 197.

⁸⁶⁸ Martin, p. 37.

⁸⁶⁹ Hufton, pp. 24-5

⁸⁷⁰ Godineau, p. 241.

particular, he traces the insertion of the feminised ‘citoyenne’ into the public discourse of the people ‘on faisait des rondes de carmagnole; on ne disait pas *le cavalier et la dame*, on disait “le citoyen et la citoyenne”’⁸⁷¹, ‘...à la sortie des théâtres, des gamins offraient des cabriolets en disant: Citoyen et citoyenne, il y a place pour deux.’⁸⁷² Just as Hugo venerates Julien as ‘la femme digne de devenir citoyenne’ who ‘dans les jours de lutte civile...faisait de la charpie...et secourait les blessés de tous les partis’,⁸⁷³ so he venerates the women who tended to the wounded as ‘graves citoyennes qui faisaient de la charpie [...]’⁸⁷⁴ As we have seen from Hugo’s public discourse on women’s rights during his exile and the early Third Republic, his use of ‘citoyenne’ in his public speeches and eulogies demonstrates his awareness of the need to redress the secondary citizenship assigned for women by the *Code civil* and thus indicates the far-reaching and progressive nature of his feminism, which at once looked back to the Enlightened views on female equality and equal citizenship extolled by Condorcet and Mary Wollstonecraft, while also reflecting the progressive use of the term by his contemporaneous feminists such as Maria Deraismes, Léon Richer, and radicals like Hubertine Auclert.

This desire for legislative changes to reflect the entry of women into the public sphere during the Revolution is alluded to in *QVT* by Gamon, one of the revolutionaries in Paris, who calls for ‘une tribune publique réservée uniquement aux femmes.’⁸⁷⁵ Condorcet similarly believed that women should be represented in the tribunes. Such enlightened views on women’s inclusion in the republic are further voiced by Gauvain in *QVT*, whose humanistic, universal, and egalitarian vision for a social republic can be seen to profoundly resemble that of Hugo. By calling for the equivalence if not equality of civil rights for both sexes, Gauvain’s words echo those of Hugo in his public discourse on women wherein Hugo calls for ‘l’assimilation, sinon l’identité complète, des droits civiques.’⁸⁷⁶ This too is Gauvain’s enlightening response to Cimourdain who wishes to keep women in the state of servitude and secondary

⁸⁷¹ *Les Misérables V*, p. 195.

⁸⁷² *Ibid*, p. 202.

⁸⁷³ *Actes et Paroles, II*, p. 52.

⁸⁷⁴ *QVT I*, p. 198.

⁸⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 314.

⁸⁷⁶ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 54.

citizenship enshrined by the *Code civil*: ‘L’égale ! y songes-tu ? les deux êtres sont divers.’ ‘J’ai dit l’égale. Je n’ai pas dit l’identité.’⁸⁷⁷

Enjolras and women’s role in the republic.

Such a progressive vision of women’s rights in the future republic is similarly displayed by Enjolras in *Les Misérables*. Roulin describes how Enjolras’ declaration ‘Ma mère est la république’ can be seen as one the abundant textual examples illustrating how motherhood became perceived in the 19th century as ‘a privileged symbol of the nation, the republic, or the homeland.’⁸⁷⁸ Enjolras does indeed venerate women as soft, gracious, angelic beings who bring harmony and conciliation to the home: ‘Ah! ces charmants êtres si gracieux et si doux qui ont des bonnets de fleurs, qui emplissent la maison de chasteté, qui chantent, qui jasant, qui sont comme un parfum vivant, qui prouvent l’existence des anges dans le ciel par la pureté des vierges sur la terre, cette Jeanne, cette Lise, cette Mimi, ces adorables et honnêtes créatures qui sont votre bénédiction et votre orgueil...’⁸⁷⁹ However, the role which Enjolras outlines for women in the republic goes far beyond such the ‘symbolic and allegorical dimension of motherhood’ encapsulated by women’s role as a ‘privileged symbol of the nation, the republic, or the homeland.’⁸⁸⁰ In his speech to the men of the barricades, Enjolras acknowledges how women just as equally as men have shown themselves to be willing participants in the revolutionary struggle: ‘Savez-vous de quoi il est question ici? Il est question des femmes, oui ou non?...y a-t-il, oui ou non, des mères, qui poussent des berceaux du pied et qui ont des tas de petits autour d’elles? Que celui de vous qui n’a jamais vu le sein d’une nourrice lève la main. Ah! vous voulez vous faire tuer...’⁸⁸¹ He blames women’s lack of enlightened education for their state of dependency on men and their vulnerable state of victimhood in society, and condemns the hypocrisy of society which excludes women from politics but not from the wrath incurred from political fallout: ‘Amis, prenez garde, ayez de la compassion. Les femmes, les malheureuses femmes, on n’a pas l’habitude d’y songer beaucoup. On se fie sur ce que les femmes n’ont pas reçu l’éducation des hommes, on les empêche de

⁸⁷⁷ *QVT Tome II*, p. 416.

⁸⁷⁸ Roulin, p. 185.

⁸⁷⁹ *Les Misérables V*, p. 39.

⁸⁸⁰ Roulin, *Ibid*

⁸⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 38.

lire, on les empêche de penser, on les empêche de s'occuper de la politique; les empêcherez-vous d'aller ce soir à la morgue et de reconnaître vos cadavres ?'⁸⁸²

By identifying society as the principal cause of women's dependence on men and their fragile, vulnerable state of victimhood in society, Enjolras' speech also profoundly echoes Hugo's public discourse on women's rights.⁸⁸³ Within the text, Éponine tragically demonstrates the social misery which befalls women who do not receive an education: 'Tristes créatures sans nom, sans âge, sans sexe, auxquelles ni le bien, ni le mal ne sont plus possibles, et qui, en sortant de l'enfance, n'ont déjà plus rien dans ce monde, ni la liberté, ni la vertu, ni la responsabilité. [...] Rien n'était plus morne que de la voir s'ébattre et pour ainsi dire voleter dans la chambre avec des mouvements d'oiseau que le jour effare, ou qui a l'aile cassée. On sentait qu'avec d'autres conditions d'éducation et de destinée, l'allure gaie et libre de cette jeune fille eût pu être quelque chose de doux et de charmant.'⁸⁸⁴ However, it is not just their lack of education which accounts for the misery of Éponine and Jondrette so much as their destitution and neglect by society: 'Nous avons reçu de l'éducation, ma sœur et moi. Nous n'avons pas toujours été comme nous sommes.'⁸⁸⁵

Enjolras alludes to the readiness with which society preys on the destitution of women in his condemnation of prostitution which again closely reflects Hugo's public critique of regulation. Enjolras echoes the 'white slavery' discourse which appears within Hugo's public letters in support of the abolitionist campaign by explicitly identifying prostitution as a form of female slavery: 'L'homme mendie, la femme vend.'⁸⁸⁶ Enjolras equates prostitution with the trade in human flesh: 'Il y a un marché de chair humaine; et ce n'est pas avec vos mains d'ombres, frémissantes autour d'elles, que vous les empêcherez d'y entrer! Songez à la rue, songez au pavé couvert de passants, songez aux boutiques devant lesquelles des femmes vont et viennent décolletées et

⁸⁸² *Ibid*, p. 40

⁸⁸³ In his letter to the *Société pour l'amélioration du sort des femmes*, Hugo condemns the injustice of women's social oppression as a 'souveraineté compliqué d'oppression' whereby the veneration of women's primordial maternal function in the home legitimates their denial of an equal education, equal civil rights and their participation in the public and political life of the Republic: 'La femme peut tout contre l'homme et rien pour elle.' (*Œuvres complètes de Victor Hugo, Actes et Paroles, III*, (J. Hetzel: Paris, 1880-1926) pp. 277-278 <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb373094302> [Accessed 13 November 2014])

⁸⁸⁴ *Les Misérables III*, (Pagnerre: Paris, 1862), pp. 106-107, <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb306255232> [Accessed 9 October 2014]

⁸⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 109.

⁸⁸⁶ *Les Misérables V*, p. 40.

dans la boue.⁸⁸⁷ This reference to the ‘marché de chair humaine’ elsewhere appears in the text in relation to Thénardier’s enterprising move into the slave trade in America. Commenting on the links between prostitution and the slave trade in the text, Grossman argues that having sold Fantine into prostitution for his own self-gratification, Thénardier’s move into trading in human flesh ‘is for him a logical progression.’⁸⁸⁸

The ‘white slavery’ discourse which appears within Hugo’s public letters of support for the abolitionist campaign is further echoed in Enjolras’s emphasis on the exploited purity, fragility, and innocence of female victims of prostitution; ‘Ces femmes-là aussi ont été pures’⁸⁸⁹; and his condemnation of the regulatory system for its complicity in the servitude and misery of women: ‘La misère, la prostitution, les sergents de ville, Saint-Lazare, voilà où vont tomber ces délicates belles filles, ces fragiles merveilles de pudeur, de gentillesse et de beauté, plus fraîches que les lilas du mois de mai.’⁸⁹⁰ Within the text, Valjean similarly identifies prostitution as one of the many ills engendered by women’s social misery: ‘[...] la misère disparaît, et avec la misère disparaissent la débauche, la prostitution, le vol, le meurtre, tous les vices, tous les crimes!’⁸⁹¹ Enjolras declares that a Republic cannot be born out of the misery of women: ‘c’est bien; vous avez voulu soustraire le peuple à la royauté, vous donnez vos filles à la police,’⁸⁹² and thus implores the men of the barricade upon whom women and children depend, to leave the barricades in an act of bravery and sacrifice as distinct from an act of desertion or cowardice: ‘Voyons, il faut que ceux qui ont des familles soient bons enfants et nous donnent une poignée de main et s’en aillent...Je sais bien qu’il faut du courage pour s’en aller, c’est difficile; mais plus c’est difficile, plus c’est méritoire. On dit: J’ai un fusil, je suis à la barricade, tant pis, j’y reste...Mes amis, il y a un lendemain; vous n’y serez pas à ce lendemain...mais vos familles y seront.’⁸⁹³

⁸⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 39.

⁸⁸⁸ Grossman, p. 30.

⁸⁸⁹ *Les Misérables V*, pp. 39-40

⁸⁹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 39-40

⁸⁹¹ *Les Misérables I*, pp. 211-212

⁸⁹² *Ibid*, p. 40.

⁸⁹³ *Ibid*, pp. 40-4

Enjolras thus places women at the centre of his vision for a social, egalitarian, fraternal republic. His allusion to infant mortality in particular illustrates the fundamental role of women in societal reform: ‘Les statistiques constatent que la mortalité des enfants abandonnés est de cinquante-cinq pour cent. Je le répète, il s’agit des femmes, il s’agit des mères, il s’agit des jeunes filles...’⁸⁹⁴ Like Hugo, the vision for women which Enjolras foresees for the future republic is one in which equal rights are bestowed on all: ‘à tous le travail, pour tous le droit, sur tous la paix, plus de sang versé, plus de guerres, les mères heureuses. [...]’⁸⁹⁵ Once again, the words of Enjolras deeply reflect the socialist dimension underpinning Hugo’s vision for the republic, which placed women at the heart of social reform and the restoration of harmony in the republic: ‘Et qui dit la femme dit l’enfant, c’est-à-dire l’avenir.’⁸⁹⁶ Thus, while the mother may symbolically represent the republic, ‘Ma mère, c’est la république’, the vision of women in the republic envisioned by Enjolras is one which ultimately goes far beyond the symbolic and allegorical dimension of motherhood. The vision of the future social republic which Enjolras foresees is one in which the resolution of social injustice rests upon the egalitarian treatment of women and the extension of an equal primary and secondary education to all: ‘L’égalité a un organe: l’instruction gratuite et obligatoire...L’école primaire imposée à tous, l’école secondaire offerte à tous, c’est là la loi...Oui, enseignement! Lumière! Lumière! tout vient de la lumière et tout y retourne.’⁸⁹⁷

Again the words which Hugo attributes to Enjolras are almost precisely those which appear in his public discourse on behalf of women’s access to an enlightened, non-clerical education to redress their state of victimhood and dependence on men: ‘Votre fondation d’enseignement laïque pour les jeunes filles est une œuvre logique et utile.’⁸⁹⁸ Even more telling of the enlightened, egalitarian, vision of the future republic which Hugo attributes to his idealistic revolutionary is Enjolras’ progressive use of the word ‘Patria’, which illustrates the way in which Hugo acknowledged the need for language to represent the emergence of women into the public and political sphere, but also demonstrates a considerable progression from a fraternalist discourse towards

⁸⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 42.

⁸⁹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 51-52

⁸⁹⁶ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 278.

⁸⁹⁷ *Les Misérables I*, pp. 54-55

⁸⁹⁸ *Œuvres complètes, Op cit*, p. 272.

a conceptualisation of a feminised state, something which can also be seen in the works of his most radical feminist contemporaries such as Hubertine Auclert and Flora Tristan: 'Enjolras ne paraissait pas écouter, mais quelqu'un qui eût été près de lui l'eût entendu murmurer à demi-voix: *Patria*.'⁸⁹⁹

Thus from an allegorical symbol of the republic 'ma mère, c'est la république' to a feminised re-configuration of the homeland 'patria', the vision of women's role in the republic which appears in Hugo's revolutionary novels closely reflects the progressive, far-reaching, and evolutionary vision of femininity and women's role in the future republic which appears within Hugo's public discourse on behalf of women's rights. Just as Hugo venerates feminist women such as George Sand and Louise Julien as embodiments of a Romantic yet soft femininity, so he endows his fictional female revolutionaries with virile strength and soft femininity. Furthermore, while venerating the notably feminine, nurturing compassionate roles adopted by women during the revolutionary struggles of the republic, Hugo's female characters also embody the active citizenship which he attributes to women such as Louise Julien, women whom he sees as 'digne de devenir citoyenne' not merely by virtue of the feminine, compassionate roles they assume in restoring harmony and conciliation to the republic, but also by virtue of the active, combative role they adopted during the revolution, their presence on the barricades, and their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the republic, as Enjolras observes. Furthermore, the progressive way in which Hugo explores the theme of maternity within his revolutionary novels, most notably his ability to envision a role for women beyond and separate to their maternal function, where women are not defined by their maternity and exert an independent, resolute femininity, which is not seen in any way to be diminishing or detrimental to their female identity, reflect his support for the admission of women to the public and political sphere of the republic within his public discourse on women.

Finally, by using his idealistic, male revolutionaries to carry the enlightening, progressive vision for the future role of women in the republic displayed in his public discourse on behalf of women's through to his literary works, Hugo appears to suggest that, while women have already proved themselves worthy of an active, equal citizenship in the future republic, any change in the lives of women can only be

⁸⁹⁹ *Les Misérables V*, p. 115.

achieved with the granting of equal rights to women, the extension of an enlightened, equal education to both sexes, which can bring an end to the destitution and neglect which preys upon the victimhood of women and their socially-conditioned dependence upon men. Only then can the nation realise ‘cet avenir sublime dans ses flancs.’⁹⁰⁰

The representation of the maternal in Hugo’s male characters.

While male revolutionaries such as Gauvain and Enjolras play an instrumental role in articulating the active citizenship of women in the future French republic, and thus become the literary representatives for Hugo’s own vision of female emancipation, his male characterisations are also emblematic of the changing roles of the sexes in 19th century society. Within his literary works, the attribution of maternal characteristics to his male characters is one of the most recurring features of Hugo’s male characterisations. Such a manifestation of the maternal in his male characters is not however seen as a sign of weakness in these characters or a threat to their masculinity, and in no way represents a gross aberration of nature as the manifestation of aggressive masculinity is perceived when attributed to female characters such as Madame Thénardier. Rather Hugo’s attribution of maternal characteristics to his male characters is seen as a venerable, revered, compassionate quality which elevates these characters to a higher form of humanity, compassion and identification with human suffering. The male characters who assume maternal roles within his literary texts are mostly orphaned or socially alienated and the maternal role which befalls them occurs most often by chance, circumstance, or tragedy. However, it is a role to which they become naturally accustomed. While the assumption of a maternal role can often lead to heartbreak for these characters, it also endows them with a superior humanity, even leading distinctly to a saintly, if not sublime transformation. This sublime attribute of maternity is exemplified by Jean Valjean for whom the assumption of a maternal role offers a supreme form of redemption which guides him towards the path of righteousness, moral salvation, and ultimately sainthood.

As we have seen, Valjean venerates Fantine’s supreme maternal sacrifice as verging on “sanctity” through “martyrdom.”⁹⁰¹ The maternal role which he assumes in

⁹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 52.

⁹⁰¹ Grossman, p. 121.

Cosette's life is similarly sublimated to a form of divine maternal sacrifice: 'Jean Valjean jusqu'à ce jour n'avait pas été vaincu par l'épreuve. [...] Il n'avait reculé ni fléchi devant rien. Il avait accepté, quand il l'avait fallu, toutes les extrémités; il avait sacrifié son inviolabilité d'homme reconquise, livré sa liberté, risqué sa tête, tout perdu, tout souffert, et il était resté désintéressé et stoïque, au point que par moments on aurait pu le croire absent de lui-même comme un martyr.'⁹⁰² Just as Fantine was redeemed of a life of sin through her love for Cosette, so Valjean's love for Cosette grants him a superior virtue: 'En somme, et nous y avons plus d'une fois insisté, toute cette fusion intérieure, tout cet ensemble, dont la résultante était une haute vertu, aboutissait à faire de Jean Valjean un père pour Cosette. Père étrange forgé de l'aïeul, du fils, du frère et du mari, qu'il y avait dans Jean Valjean, père dans lequel il y avait même une mère [...]'⁹⁰³

Through his love for Cosette, Valjean acquires an identity, home, and rootedness, thereby escaping the faceless identity of Hugo's less fortunate *misérables* who 'without models, whether ethical or artistic...merge into an amorphous conglomerate' and for whom 'destitution provides a hideous version of nothingness.'⁹⁰⁴ By contrast, Valjean, who previously never experienced love and whose identity was merged with that of countless convicts 'avait cette enfant pour lumière, pour demeure, pour famille, pour patrie, pour paradis.'⁹⁰⁵ Just as Valjean's education legitimizes Cosette's identity as through learning to read and write, 'the bastard child is legitimized through this connection to historical France, to a shared national identity,'⁹⁰⁶ so Valjean's parental role in Cosette's life grants him a legitimate identity and sense of nationhood: 'Cosette était sa nation.'⁹⁰⁷ When Cosette marries Marius, thereby negating her need of his love and protection, the instinct of self-preservation which underpinned Valjean's obsession with survival, as for Fantine, as a means of protecting Cosette,⁹⁰⁸ is brutally and irrevocably annihilated: '[...] je ne suis que le père; je n'existe plus; quand il ne put plus douter, quand il se dit: Elle s'en va hors de moi! la douleur qu'il éprouva

⁹⁰² *Les Misérables V*, p. 359.

⁹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 361.

⁹⁰⁴ Grossman, Kathryn M., 'Homelessness, Wastelands, and Barricades: Transforming Dystopian Spaces in *Les Misérables*' in *Utopian Studies*, 1991, (4), p. 30.

⁹⁰⁵ *Les Misérables V*, *Ibid*

⁹⁰⁶ Grossman, *Figuring Transcendence*, p. 79.

⁹⁰⁷ *Les Misérables V*, p. 351.

⁹⁰⁸ *Figuring Transcendence*, p. 121.

dépassa le possible. Avoir fait tout ce qu'il avait fait pour en venir là ! et, quoi donc ! n'être rien !'⁹⁰⁹

If the 'espousal of misery is what Hugo calls "sublimation,"⁹¹⁰ then Valjean's self-imposed sacrifices elevate him to the maternal sublimation attributed to Hugo's archetypal maternal figures such as Fantine, Paquette de Chantefleurie, and Michelle Flécharde. Just as these mothers make the ultimate sacrifice for the survival of their children, so Valjean's self-sacrifice for Cosette is underpinned by the same wholly unselfish, devotional, and unconditional love. In the same way that Fantine sacrifices 'outer beauty for the inner vision of Cosette's survival,' making 'the child...the end of her desperate trades and machinations,'⁹¹¹ Valjean's privations similarly 'achieve a moral purpose' through his love for Cosette, and 'through pain, suffering, and humiliation', he too 'attains spiritual dignity.'⁹¹² Victor Brombert argues that 'Valjean's self-sacrifice and self-abnegation begin with a clear image of separation from the self.'⁹¹³ He argues that this 'self-effacement is part of a system of transience and transcendence that allows Valjean, while still alive, to become a luminous mediatory figure' whose 'image quite specifically merges with that of Christ.'⁹¹⁴ He further argues that it is the self-imposed sacrifices which 'elevate and liberate him'⁹¹⁵ as when he rescues Cosette in the obscure woods or shoulders Marius' body in the sewers.

The extent to which Valjean's redemption, moral salvation, and maternal sublimation depend upon the effacement of his own identity and self-interest are evident in the devastating moments when his maternal and parental tie with Cosette is severed and the self-serving instinct which previously defined his identity as a convict and a thief again resurface in Valjean: '[...] il eut de la tête aux pieds un frémissement de révolte. Il sentit jusque dans la racine de ses cheveux l'immense réveil de l'égoïsme, et le moi hurla dans l'abîme de cet homme.'⁹¹⁶ Laurence M. Porter further comments on how

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 361.

⁹¹⁰ Brombert, Victor, H., *Victor Hugo and the Visionary Novel*, (Harvard University Press: Boston, 1984), p. 134.

⁹¹¹ *Figuring Transcendence*, p. 121.

⁹¹² *Ibid*, 120.

⁹¹³ Brombert, p. 122.

⁹¹⁴ *Ibid*

⁹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 134.

⁹¹⁶ *Les Misérables V*, p. 362.

Valjean needs Cosette's 'daughterly love to preserve in virtue: 'As mayor, he had learned much more than before about social injustice; he had been sent back to prison for doing good; he needed the support of Cosette's dependence to keep him morally strong.'⁹¹⁷ However, his love for Cosette is not enough to preserve Valjean's virtue as 'through practicing virtue, he risks falling prey to pride.'⁹¹⁸ While 'Valjean's renunciation of freedom saves him from self-righteousness,' he must learn 'to relinquish this prideful, alienating sense of superiority' that follows the sense of having done good for others in order to preserve his virtue.⁹¹⁹ This he achieves through his all-sacrificing, self-renouncing love for Cosette. The self-imposed sacrifices which Valjean endures for Cosette thus redeem him in the same way as the privations endured by Hugo's quintessential mothers are redeemed by the all-sacrificing, devotional love underpinning their descent into prostitution and the depths of social degradation. As Roche observes, the formation of an adoptive tie between Cosette and Valjean after Fantine's death not only saves Cosette 'from a life of misery with the Thénardier family, it saves Valjean in many ways from himself.'⁹²⁰

By effacing his own identity and sacrificing himself for Cosette, Valjean surpasses a mere earthly identity and assumes the sublime, transcendence of a martyr. Like Fantine, Valjean's devotion and love for Fantine is presented as the ultimate form of self-sacrifice – Valjean too is 'absent de lui-même comme un martyr.'⁹²¹ The extent to which Valjean's own survival is dependent upon Cosette's need of his all-sacrificing, devotional love, in the same way that Fantine depended upon her, is echoed in the text by Gavroche, the orphan child whose own identity likewise devoid of any maternal love is merged with the people of the street, who senses the devastating annihilation taking hold of Valjean following Cosette's marriage. Gavroche replies to Valjean's question 'As-tu une mère?' by saying 'Peut-être plus que vous.'⁹²² Valjean himself further echoes this when he admits that he never properly belonged to a family or to the world apart from his adoptive tie with Cosette: 'Je suis le malheureux; je suis dehors. Ai-je eu un père et une mère ? j'en doute

⁹¹⁷ Porter, p. 132.

⁹¹⁸ *Ibid*

⁹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 139.

⁹²⁰ Roche, p. 138.

⁹²¹ *Les Misérables IV*, (Pagnerre: Paris, 1862), p. 359.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb306255232> [Accessed 21 July 2013]

⁹²² *Ibid*, p. 374.

presque.⁹²³ Roche notes how ‘in *Les Misérables*, the effacement of characters from the fictional world of the novel occurs in direct proportion to their lack of familial and social identity, as witnessed first and foremost by Jean Valjean’s itinerary.’⁹²⁴ So fundamental is his identification with the maternal and paternal role of carer and protector of Cosette since Fantine’s death, that, following her marriage to Marius, Valjean’s severed identity hastens his sudden and irrevocable decline into death. He no longer needs to adopt a new identity as his reason for survival has ceased to exist. ‘Pour vivre, autrefois, j’ai volé un pain; aujourd’hui, pour vivre, je ne peux pas voler un nom.’⁹²⁵ Grossman observes that ‘in denying any relation to his adopted child’, Valjean ‘relinquishes his claim to a legitimate place in society’ and that this ‘transfiguration from sinner to saint involves ceaselessly stripping away the layers of hypocrisy and egotism intended to deceive others [...]’⁹²⁶

Although Valjean presents an exemplary figure of maternal sublimation, the maternal tenderness which he embodies is reflected in a great many of Hugo’s male characters who undergo a similar maternal sublimation through their identification with maternal love and its attendant ‘espousal of misery’ and sacrifice. In *Les Misérables*, the characters of Gillenormand and Pontmercy both identify with the maternal and display maternal tenderness in their assumption of a parental role in Marius’ life. Grossman comments on how ‘though exempted from Fantine’s physical degradation, Pontmercy still suffers – as a mother. He writes Marius “very tender letters” that are never answered and, as he surreptitiously watches his son in church, he cries “like a woman.” Failing, as did Fantine, to see his child before he dies, he expires with a big tear coursing down his “manly face.”’⁹²⁷ It is this distinctly maternal suffering which is evident in the tender account of ‘l’aïeul maternel’ who appears in *Légende des Siècles* who similarly exhibits a blend of gender-related traits when mourning the death of his daughter: ‘Ce vieillard, c’est un chêne adorant une fleur. A présent un enfant est toute sa famille. Il la regarde, il rêve; il dit: C’est une fille: Tant mieux! Étant aïeul du côté maternel.’⁹²⁸ When confronted with the dead body of his daughter Isora, his

⁹²³ *Les Misérables V, Texte annoté par Guy Rosa*, Édition du groupe ‘Ebooks libres et gratuits’, p. 353.

⁹²⁴ Roche, p. 138.

⁹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 358.

⁹²⁶ *Figuring Transcendence*, p. 144.

⁹²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 121.

⁹²⁸ *La Légende des Siècles III*, (C. Lévy: Paris, 1877), p. 30.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb30625399r> [Accessed 29 May 2014]

masculinity trembles beneath the weight of his maternal affliction: ‘L’âieul tressaille avec la force d’un géant; Formidable, il arrache au brodequin béant son bras dont le bourreau vient de briser le pouce; les bras toujours liés, de l’épaule il repousse tout ce tas de démons, et va jusqu’à l’enfant, Et sur ses deux genoux tombe, et son cœur se fend. Il crie en se roulant sur la petite morte.’⁹²⁹ The maternal nature of Triboulet’s grief is similarly emphasised when he lies before Blanche’s dead body in *Le Roi s’amuse*: ‘Si ! c’est elle ! C’est bien elle ! (se jetant sur le corps avec des sanglots) Ma fille ! enfant ! réponds-moi...Parle-moi! Parle-moi! ma fille! ô ciel, ma fille!’⁹³⁰ Initiated by the instructive relationship which forms the maternal bond between Cimourdain and Gauvain in *QVT*, the instructive relationship which Lord David adopts with his pupil in *L’homme qui rit* is similarly defined by a strong identification with the maternal: ‘Il devenait nourrice. Il lui mesurait le vin, il lui pesait la viande, il lui comptait le sommeil. [...] Il veillait sur sa vertu. Cette sollicitude maternelle apportait sans cesse quelque nouveau perfectionnement à l’éducation du pupille.’⁹³¹

Similarly, when the orphan child Gwynplaine rescues Dea from imminent death in the depths of the snow blizzard in *L’homme qui rit*, he assumes both the role of ‘mère et nourrice’ in Dea’s life: ‘Elle savait que, toute petite, expirante sur sa mère expirée, tétait un cadavre, un être...l’avait ramassée; que cet être..avait accepté des mains de la nuit ce fardeau, un autre enfant; que lui, qui n’avait point de part à attendre dans cette distribution obscure qu’on appelle le sort, il s’était chargé d’une destinée...il avait été asile; qu’il s’était fait mère et nourrice [...]’⁹³² Gilbert similarly displays maternal and paternal love in his adoptive tie with Jane in *Marie Tudor*, though his feelings later turn to romantic love: ‘Toute petite, presque au berceau, j’ai été abandonné par mes parents. Vous m’avez prise. Depuis seize ans, votre bras a travaillé pour moi comme celui d’un père, vos yeux ont veillé sur moi comme ceux d’une mère.’⁹³³ Like Gwynplaine, Gilbert too is an orphan who experiences maternal love only through his adoptive tie with another orphaned child: ‘L’homme déposa l’enfant sur la table et dit: Voici une créature qui n’a plus ni père ni mère. L’ouvrier accepta

⁹²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 60.

⁹³⁰ *Le Roi s’amuse*, (Eugène Renduel: Paris, 1832), pp. 173-174
<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb322632653> [Accessed 23 May 2014]

⁹³¹ *L’homme qui rit*, p. 225.

⁹³² *Ibid*, p. 288.

⁹³³ *Œuvres complètes de Victor Hugo, Théâtre I*, (J.Hetzl: Paris, 1855), p.268.
<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/12148/cb42034109q> [Accessed 13 November 2014]

l'enfant, l'orphelin adopta l'orpheline.'⁹³⁴ The quintessential orphan child Gavroche similarly displays both a paternal and maternal role in his adoption and protection of the children of the street. As Grossman argues, 'he...paternally *and* maternally rescues la Magnon's two lost boys, his tone of "softened authority and gentle protection" recalling Pontmercy in his blend of gender-related traits.'⁹³⁵ In the same way as Hugo venerates mother-prostitutes with a greater spiritual dignity owing to their all-sacrificing love, the maternal love which Hugo attributes to such male characters, themselves devoid of the experience of maternal kindness due to their state of orphanage or social alienation, is similarly venerated as a form of sublime sacrifice for the survival of another.

However, the manifestation of feminine traits is not always an ennobling or venerable quality when assigned to Hugo's male characters. By contrast to the maternal tenderness displayed by Valjean, Pontmercy, and Gillenormand, Javert's feminine quality is an unnatural, ill-befitting quality which serves to undermine his rigid masculinity and unflinching authority. Grossman comments on how 'Javert's "feminine side" [...] exhibits only the wild instincts of a female beast.'⁹³⁶ 'Quel grenadier! fit Javert; la mère tu as de la barbe comme un homme, mais j'ai des griffes comme une femme.'⁹³⁷ Unlike the maternal tenderness attributed to Valjean, this feminine feature is an abject and emasculating feature in Javert which serves to reinforce the unnaturalness and lack of compassion with which he rigidly adheres to the letter of the law. That Javert possesses an unseemly feminine quality akin to the grossly abject masculinity embodied by the anti-maternal Madame Thénardier emphasises that, for Hugo, the feminine is a quality distinct from the maternal, but whereas the presence of maternal qualities is a venerable quality in men, Javert's effeminacy is seen to erode his masculinity, while la Thénardier's gross masculinity is equally admonished for she too repels the nature of her sex.

Javert is as unnatural in his uncompromising rigidity and inability to perceive a higher, humane, and moral form of justice as la Thénardier is in her abject failings as a figure of maternal kindness. For Hugo, each human face bears the imprint of an animal from

⁹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 160.

⁹³⁵ Grossman, *Figuring Transcendence*, p. 131.

⁹³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 85.

⁹³⁷ *Les Misérables III*, p. 283.

which can be deduced the vices and passions of one's soul: 'Dans notre conviction, si les âmes étaient visibles aux yeux, on verrait distinctement cette chose étrange que chacun des individus de l'espèce humaine correspond à quelqu'une des espèces de la création animale [...] Les animaux ne sont autre chose que les figures de nos vertus et de nos vices, errantes devant nos yeux, les fantômes visibles de nos âmes.'⁹³⁸⁹³⁹ Josette Acher comments on Hugo's recourse to animality to describe Javert's frighteningly predatory instinct in his pursuit of criminals: 'Pour la caractérisation du personnage, Hugo a recours à l'emblématique animale venue d'Orient via Lavater et en honneur chez les fouriéristes [...] Encore près de la bête, Javert, "chien, fils d'une louve", porte sur sa "face humaine" à la fois des expressions du fauve et des traits du dogue.'⁹⁴⁰

However, his attribution of feminine or masculine features to his anti-heroic and anti-maternal types does not uniquely serve to reinforce the unnaturalness or deceptiveness of certain characters. The "feminine side" of Javert is a source of interest in light of the subliminal homoeroticism which Bradley Stephens perceives in Javert's relentless pursuit of Valjean.⁹⁴¹ While la Thénardier's masculine features exhibit her grossly abject femininity and aberrant maternity, the attribution of masculine characteristics is a heroic, revered quality in other maternal figures. Masculine features are perceived as a sign of bravery and heroism when attributed to the women who defend the barricades. The wife of Hucheloup is described as being 'un être barbu, fort laid.'⁹⁴² However, she is also a figure of masculine bravery: 'Quant à la mère Hucheloup, c'est une vieille brave. Voyez les moustaches qu'elle a! Elle les a héritées de son mari. Une housarde, quoi! elle se battra aussi.'⁹⁴³ Her daughter Matelote is similarly revered for her heroism: 'Matelote est laide! criait-il, Matelote est la laideur-rêve! Matelote est une chimère. [...] Je vous réponds qu'elle se battra bien. Toute bonne fille contient un

⁹³⁸ *Les Misérables I*, pp. 243-244

⁹³⁹ For more on Hugo and animality, see 'L'animalité selon Victor Hugo: un alphabet formidable et profond.' Armengaud, Françoise, presented at the conference 'L'animal au XIXe siècle' organised by 'Littérature et civilisation du XIXe siècle' in Université Paris 7, October 2008. www.groupevictorhugo.fr [Accessed 10 November 2014]

⁹⁴⁰ Acher, Josette, 'L'anankè des lois,' in *Lire les Misérables*, ed. Anne Ubersfeld and Guy Rosa, (Librairie José Corti: 1985), p. 115.

⁹⁴¹ This notion of Javert's possible homosexuality was raised by Bradley Stephens in his paper 'The Afterlives of Victor Hugo's Inspector Javert' at the Eleventh Annual Conference of the *Society of Dix-Neuvièmistes*, at the University of Exeter, April 2013.

⁹⁴² *Les Misérables V*, p. 200.

⁹⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 229.

héros.⁹⁴⁴ While Hucheloup inherits her husband's heroism, Roland argues that it is women who inspire the heroism of the men on the barricades: 'Roland se fait tuer pour faire bisquer Angélique; tous nos héroïsmes viennent de nos femmes. Un homme sans femme, c'est un pistolet sans chien; c'est la femme qui fait partir l'homme.'⁹⁴⁵

While Hucheloup's masculine features are a mark of her bravery and heroism, Enjolras possesses an effeminate beauty and chastity, befitting of his idealistic revolutionary vision: 'Pâle, le cou nu, les cheveux épars, Enjolras, avec son visage de femme, avait en ce moment je ne sais quoi de la Thémis antique. Ses narines gonflées, ses yeux baissés donnaient à son implacable profil grec cette expression de colère et cette expression de chasteté qui, au point de vue de l'ancienne monde, conviennent à la justice.'⁹⁴⁶ When Éponine sacrifices her life for Marius on the barricades, thereby elevating her to the sublime martyrdom of Hugo's revolutionaries, she is 'habillée en homme.'⁹⁴⁷ She is, as Nicole Savy observes, 'elle dont la misère a presque fait un garçon.'⁹⁴⁸ Grossman comments on how Pontmercy similarly embodies both male and female traits: 'The blend of gender-related traits is reinforced when Marius gazes at the huge scar that "stamped heroism on the face where God had imprinted kindness." Through his double printing, Pontmercy constitutes a text at once male and female.'⁹⁴⁹

The manifestation of maternal kindness can at times also appear in Hugo's deeply flawed or malevolent characters. This is indeed the case with Claude Frollo whose deceptive guise of rigid clericalism conceals an all-consuming sexual obsession with Esmeralda, which ferments the vestiges of humanity and compassion displayed by his maternal affection for Quasimodo. Roche comments on how, unlike some of Hugo's more unusual character names, the names of Claude Frollo and Javert create a sense of 'social verisimilitude or reality.'⁹⁵⁰ However, the femininity attributed to Javert serves to undermine his masculinity, while the layers of deceptiveness and hypocrisy embodied by Claude Frollo in his self-destructive pursuit of Esmeralda prevent him from attaining the all-sacrificing, sublime maternal sainthood exemplified by Valjean.

⁹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 228-229

⁹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 114.

⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 265.

⁹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 331.

⁹⁴⁸ Savy, Nicole, 'Cosette: un personnage qui n'existe pas,' in *Lire Les Misérables*, details as before, p. 137.

⁹⁴⁹ Grossman, *Figuring Transcendence*, p. 121.

⁹⁵⁰ Roche, p. 206.

Within the text, there is a strong emphasis on the maternal as distinct from filial role which Claude Frollo assumes in Jehan's life: 'Il en prit souci et soin comme quelque chose de très fragile et de très-racommandé. Il fut à l'enfant plus qu'un frère; il lui devint une mère.'⁹⁵¹ Like Valjean, the maternal role which Claude Frollo comes to assume in Quasimodo's life appears to be underpinned by the same 'disinterestedness' or 'dévouement'⁹⁵² which Hugo associates with devotional, unconditional, maternal love: 'Il y avait là sans doute dévouement filial, attachement domestique; il y avait aussi fascination d'un esprit par un autre esprit.'⁹⁵³ It is only from the benevolent, protective walls of the *Notre-Dame* cathedral, described in the text as an 'édifice maternel,' and the maternal devotion of Claude Frollo that Quasimodo experiences the feelings of maternal love: 'Il n'était en rapport dans ce monde qu'avec deux choses: Notre-Dame et Claude Frollo.'⁹⁵⁴

However, while Valjean's complete and unwavering self-sacrifice and 'dévouement' for Cosette leads him to surpass his earthly identity and attain the sublime identity of sainthood, underlying Claude's Frollo's deceptive guise of prudishness is the ever-present and all-consuming ill of sexual frustration which slowly erodes and eventually consumes his maternal love for Quasimodo: 'Ces symptômes d'une violente préoccupation morale avaient surtout acquis un haut degré d'intensité [...] Par état comme par caractère, il s'était toujours tenu éloigné des femmes; il semblait les haïr plus que jamais.'⁹⁵⁵ Scott Yearsley describes how Claude Frollo can neither experience love, in his adoptive tie with his brother, with Quasimodo, or with Esmeralda as his 'conceptualization of the world does not allow for other subjects.'⁹⁵⁶ He argues that 'while Frollo does genuinely love Jehan, the relationship soon reveals itself to be a subject-object one' and similarly, 'while there appears to be sincere compassion in Frollo's adoption of Quasimodo, their subsequent relationship is

⁹⁵¹ *Notre-Dame de Paris*, (E. Huges: Paris, 1876-1877), p. 190.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb30625573m> [Accessed 15 May 2014]

⁹⁵² Kathryn Grossman argues that the mentality displayed by Hugo's saintly heroes who ascend from the underworld in *Les Misérables* is defined by "disinterestedness" (332: désintéressement), the real name, Hugo says, of "devotion" (864; dévouement). Rejecting dogmatism, the most saintly refuse violence for the sake of any ideal, while those who espouse political activism aspire toward human confraternity, the age of peace and concord.' (See *Figuring Transcendence*, p. 119.)

⁹⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 203.

⁹⁵⁴ *Ibid*

⁹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 204.

⁹⁵⁶ Yearsley, Scott, 'Sexuality in *Notre-Dame de Paris*,' p. 2. www.academia.edu [Accessed 8 October 2014]

definitely more master-servant than father-son' as Frollo seems to have an inability to treat other human beings as equals, either exploiting them...or objectifying them, as he does Esmeralda.⁹⁵⁷ Yearsley sees Frollo not as an asexual but as a desexualised character whose sexuality has been stifled by the imposed celibacy of the priesthood.⁹⁵⁸ His desire for forbidden knowledge in the form of alchemy and astrology can thus be seen as 'a pale ersatz for what Frollo truly desires – sex.'⁹⁵⁹ Due to his inability to reconcile this internal conflict, 'Frollo is damned because, upon assuming his sexuality, he finds that he cannot love people as equals' and so 'he cannot even love himself,'⁹⁶⁰ whereas Quasimodo 'who is also denied the expression of his sexuality instead turns his energy into a pure and self-sacrificing love'⁹⁶¹ akin to that exhibited by Valjean.⁹⁶²

This 'pure and self-sacrificing love' is evident in the maternal kindness which Quasimodo displays towards Esmeralda which elevates the grotesque monster to the realm of the sublime. Quasimodo is scornfully described as having a face so deformed and hideous that no mother could love it. By contrast to the maternal feelings displayed by Claude Frollo, the women who behold Quasimodo's face do not exhibit a shred of maternal feeling but recoil before him in disgust and fear: 'Les femmes se cachaient le visage: Oh ! le vilain singe! disait l'une. Aussi méchant que laid, reprenait une autre. C'est le diable, ajoutait une troisième.'⁹⁶³ Quasimodo is seen to possess an ugliness so grotesque and deformed, it repels, and even annihilates maternal feeling: 'Figure à faire avorter une grossesse mieux que toutes médecines et pharmasques,'⁹⁶⁴ and evinces fear of deformed maternity: 'C'est toi qui, rien qu'en passant devant elle, a fait accoucher ma femme d'un enfant à deux têtes !'⁹⁶⁵ However, the grotesque, hideous nature of Quasimodo conceals an inner misery which renders him sublime: 'C'eût été partout un spectacle touchante que cette belle fille [...] accourue au secours de tant de misère, de difformité et de méchanceté. Sur un pilori, ce spectacle était sublime.'⁹⁶⁶

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁹⁵⁹ *Ibid*

⁹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁹⁶² *Ibid*, p. 9.

⁹⁶³ *Notre-Dame de Paris I*, p. 61.

⁹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 295.

⁹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 299.

⁹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 300.

His gesture of maternal kindness when rescuing Esmeralda transforms him from grotesque to beautiful, and unlike the anti-maternal feelings expressed by the women who berate him for his aberrant maternity, Quasimodo's maternal affection enables him to identify with the maternal sublime of Paquette de Chantefleurie: 'Puis, tout à coup, il la serrait avec étreinte dans ses bras, sur sa poitrine anguleuse, comme son bien, comme son trésor, comme eût fait la mère de cette enfant !'⁹⁶⁷ 'C'étaient les deux misères extrêmes de la nature et de la société, qui se touchaient et qui s'entr'aident.'⁹⁶⁸

In the 'préface' to *Lucrèce Borgia*, Hugo describes how the most detestable, miserable, deformed creature can achieve the divine transfiguration of the sublime when attributed a paternal spirit: 'Prenez la difformité physique la plus hideuse, la plus repoussante, la plus complète...le plus méprisé de l'édifice social...cette misérable créature; et puis jetez-lui une âme, et mettez dans cette âme le sentiment le plus pur qui soit donné à l'homme, le sentiment paternel. Qu'arrivera-t-il ? C'est que ce sentiment sublime, chauffé selon certaines conditions, transformera sous vos yeux la créature dégradée.'⁹⁶⁹ As Dominique Peyrache-Leborgne argues, Hugo's sublime is equally dependent upon and reinforced by the confrontation of the grotesque and beautiful: 'Le sublime seul n'existe...pas dans la pensée de Hugo; il naît plutôt de la confrontation permanente du beau et du laid, du grand et du bas.'⁹⁷⁰ In Hugo's vision of the sublime '[...] l'être petit deviendra grand; c'est que l'être difforme deviendra beau.'⁹⁷¹ While Quasimodo embodies the most physically deformed of creatures, Lucrece Borgia is rendered a hideous and morally denatured monster through her acts of murder and incest: '[...] cette femme à qui tu parlais d'amour est empoisonneuse et adultère. Inceste à tous les degrés. Inceste avec ses deux frères, qui se sont entretenus pour l'amour d'elle !...Inceste avec son père, qui est pape !'⁹⁷² Like Quasimodo, Lucrece's deformities also render her seemingly repellent to maternity: 'Inceste avec ses enfans, si elle en avait; mais le ciel en refuse aux monstres!'⁹⁷³

⁹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 147.

⁹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 151.

⁹⁶⁹ *Lucrèce Borgia*, (E. Renduel: Paris, 1833), p. 4. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb30625660j> [Accessed 27 May 2014]

⁹⁷⁰ Peyrache-Leborgne, Dominique, 'Victor Hugo et le sublime: entre tragique et utopie' in *Romantisme*, 1993, (23):82, p. 19.

⁹⁷¹ *Lucrèce Borgia*, p. 4.

⁹⁷² *Ibid*, p. 46.

⁹⁷³ *Ibid* (spelling as in original)

However, Hugo argues that even the most physically grotesque and morally deformed of monsters can elicit sympathy and undergo a sublime transformation from grotesque to beautiful through the attribution of a feminine heart and maternal sentiment: ‘Prenez la difformité morale la plus hideuse, la plus repoussante, la plus complète; placez-la là où elle ressort le mieux, dans le cœur d’une femme...et maintenant mêlez à toutes cette difformité morale un sentiment pur, le plus pur que la femme puisse éprouver, sentiment maternel dans votre monstre, mettez une mère; et le monstre intéressera, et le monstre fera pleurer, et cette créature qui faisait peur fera pitié, et cette âme difforme deviendra presque belle à vos yeux.’⁹⁷⁴ If *Le Roi s’amuse* is defined by Hugo as ‘la paternité sanctifiant la difformité physique’, then *Lucrèce Borgia* is defined as ‘la maternité purifiant la difformité morale.’⁹⁷⁵ When *Lucrèce* is finally united with her son, the purity of her maternal love and her pleading demand for repentance supplant the horror of her past crimes and she is made sublime: ‘Oh! je le vois bien, j’ai ma grâce! Cela se lit dans tes yeux! Oh! Laisse-moi pleurer à tes pieds! [...] Ah!...tu m’as tuée! – Gennaro! je suis ta mère!’⁹⁷⁶ Thus the physically deformed Quasimodo and the morally denatured *Lucrèce* undergo a sublime transformation from grotesque to beautiful through their identification with the maternal. However, Roche observes that contrary to the static nature of the quintessential Hugolian mother, ‘two Hugolian mothers who can be characterized as representations of “la mauvaise mère”’: the Comtesse d’Ahlefeld of *Han d’Islande* and Madame Thénardier of *Les Misérables*, both of whom fail their children in their maternal duties and, consequently, are in no way transfigured by their maternity. On the contrary, the Comtesse goes mad at the end of *Han d’Islande* and Mme Thénardier dies alone in prison at the end of *Les Misérables*.⁹⁷⁷

If the quality of maternal kindness can thus equally be present in men and women, in benign as well as malevolent characters, the manifestation of the maternal in Hugo’s characters thus appears as a universal quality, undefined by sex, which speaks to the human capacity for unconditional love, devotion, redemption, and self-sacrifice. However, while men and women may equally be endowed with maternal qualities, the kind of sublime maternal transfiguration which Hugo attributes to *Fantine* and *Valjean*

⁹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁹⁷⁵ *Ibid*

⁹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 179. & p. 181.

⁹⁷⁷ Roche, p. 204.

is described as an all-sacrificing love which is characterised by the complete repression of self-interest and selfishness, which triumphs despair through complete and unconditional devotion, and which grants spiritual redemption to those who experience it. In this way, the heroic self-sacrifice of Hugo's maternal figures resembles the 'spiritual hunger' of his idealistic revolutionaries who 'through the instinct of self-preservation...conquer egotism and despair through devotion to a higher good.'⁹⁷⁸ The characters that embody just such a maternal sainthood for the most part appear as innocent and virginal exemplary figures, devoid of sexual passion. Commenting on the range of exemplary characters in *Les Misérables*, Grossman argues that while 'the primacy of masculine personages...might imply that they alone comprise the "virile people" exhorted to "sublimate" in the cause of civilization, "sublimation" is, in the text, the prerogative of both genders. Not only are these characters distinguished by abstinence, virginity, or – at the least – spiritual purity; their gestures of charity and disinterestedness can be viewed as genderless.'⁹⁷⁹

Maternal sublimation then is seen within Hugo's literary works as a universal, genderless quality to which both sexes may aspire, but which can only be attained by those who display a complete repression of self-interest, egotism, and sexual passion. However, if Hugo perceives the maternal as a genderless quality, he would also appear to be suggesting that, for both men and women, maternal tenderness is less a latent quality than a potentiality of both sexes and a behaviour that can be learned. While it is true that Hugo's archetypal mothers display a natural, instinctual maternity, this maternal value is by no means inherent in all women, rather it is an aspiration, like the sublime maternal sainthood achieved by Fantine or Valjean. Hugo's literary incarnations of maternity are thus far more complex than the polarised versions of maternal and anti-maternal types which critics suggest. Even Mme Thénardier, the most abhorrent of Hugo's unnatural mothers, does in fact display some maternal affection towards her two daughters, and though indifferent towards her sons, she still feeds them. The mothers who berate Quasimodo are devoid of maternal feeling, as with the gypsy women who taunt Paquette de Chantefleurie, but the villainous Claude Frolo is capable of sincere maternal affection.

⁹⁷⁸Grossman, *Figuring Transcendence*, p. 119.

⁹⁷⁹*Ibid*, p. 120.

The male characters who assume maternal roles within Hugo's literary works are admittedly less pre-disposed to the instinctual maternity and defensive animality of his archetypal mothers whose 'character...is symbolic in nature and characterized by her ferocious maternal devotion and willingness for self-sacrifice, as she will go to the extreme – and often does.'⁹⁸⁰ In contrast, 'biological fathers are neither named nor mentioned.'⁹⁸¹ However, as we have seen, the male characters to whom Hugo attributes a maternal role do demonstrate a 'willingness for self-sacrifice' and they do nonetheless attain the maternal sublimation attributed to these mothers through their devotion, self-abnegation, and unconditional love. By re-imagining the maternal as a genderless quality, Hugo does not however advocate a post-gender society in which the category of gender would cease to exist – his imagined social republic is one in which gender and sex roles are 'always already' clearly demarcated. The ideal person in Hugo's social republic, which women will help bring about, is one who exhibits both male and female modes of behaviour, in that women will display virility but will always retain their essential femininity, while men will display the compassionate, tender maternal qualities but without becoming feminine. In Hugo's sublime vision of future civilization, both sexes will unequivocally need to identify with the maternal as this is a quality of self-sacrifice and devotion upon which depends the greater good of humanity. His vision of the maternal is thus a potentiality, insofar as both sexes are capable of it, but it is also learned, insofar as assuming a maternal role necessitates a complete renouncement of self-interest, and in the sense that one does not need to have experienced biological or parental maternal love to be capable of it, as is the case with the great many of the male characters who assume maternal roles within his texts.

Each of Hugo's exemplary figures, whom he heralds as bearers of a sublime new civilization, demonstrate the way in which maternal behaviour can be learned by those who are willing to repress their egotism and self-interest and make the ultimate sacrifice for the survival of another. Mario Vargas Llosa comments on how sex in *Les Misérables* is considered as a weakness and as such, most of the male characters are portrayed as 'sexless beings': 'The revolutionary Enjolras, who leads the rebellion on the barricades at La Chanvrière – a pure soul, a fanatical republican, an idealistic Jacobin – has done without sex, as if sex might make him stray from his ideals and

⁹⁸⁰ Roche, pp. 130-131

⁹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 131.

deprive him of the physical and moral strength needed for the political struggle.⁹⁸² He argues that in the novel ‘love and sex appear as weaknesses that the main protagonists of the story...do not succumb to, so that they can be in peak physical and moral condition to carry out their mission, be it in search for God, the fulfillment of the law, or the revolutionary struggle.’⁹⁸³ The abstinent and virtuous quality of Valjean’s maternal love for Cosette is repeatedly evoked within the text: ‘Il avait sous les yeux le sommet sublime de l’abnégation, la plus haute cime de la vertu possible; l’innocence qui pardonne aux hommes leurs fautes et qui les expire à leur place; la servitude subie, la torture acceptée...l’amour de l’humanité [...]’⁹⁸⁴, ‘Sa force, qui était prodigieuse, on le sait, et fort peu diminuée par l’âge, grâce à sa vie chaste et sobre [...]’⁹⁸⁵

This genderless quality of grace and virtue is also embodied by the old woman in the convent whose other-worldly quality of grace, born out of human suffering, is described as being Valjean’s female double: ‘Cette grande dame, séquestrée et passant pour morte, est une sorte de double féminin de Jean Valjean.’⁹⁸⁶ Indeed, when Valjean assumes the benevolent title “Monsieur Madeleine”, his very name ‘alludes to Mary Magdalene, the archetype of repentance.’⁹⁸⁷ Moreover, it is the voluntary altruistic suffering of the nuns which ‘foreshadows Valjean’s voluntary self-sacrifice.’⁹⁸⁸ As the supreme model of selflessness and self-sacrifice, Valjean is the angelic embodiment of virtue, heroism, and courage: ‘Tous les courages, toutes les vertus, tous les héroïsmes, toutes les saintetés, il les a, Cosette, cet homme-là, c’est l’ange !’⁹⁸⁹ His virtue is supreme and soft: ‘Une vertu inouï lui apparaissait, suprême et douce, humble dans son immensité. Le forçat se transfigurait en Christ. Marius avait l’éblouissement de ce prodige.’⁹⁹⁰ Nicole Savy notes how Valjean’s identification with the feminine through his penetration of the explicitly feminine space of the convent at Petit-Picpus and through the influence of the Sœur Simplicie is necessary for the hero’s salvation: She argues that this feminine and maternal space not only offers Valjean a safe refuge

⁹⁸² Llosa, Mario Vargas, *The Temptation of the Impossible: Victor Hugo and Les Misérables*, trans. John King, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2007), p. 71.

⁹⁸³ *Ibid*, (The three male protagonists to which Llosa is referring to here and whose chastity is required for the fulfillment of their ‘mission’ are Valjean, Javert, and Enjolras.)

⁹⁸⁴ *Les Misérables III*, p. 385.

⁹⁸⁵ *Les Misérables V*, p. 170.

⁹⁸⁶ *Les Misérables II*, p. 313.

⁹⁸⁷ Porter, p. 130

⁹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 132.

⁹⁸⁹ *Les Misérables V*, p. 396.

⁹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 392-393

but also becomes a symbolic place of regeneration for Valjean, in the same way that his adoption of Cosette became a moral rebirth for the convict: ‘Ce lieu féminin, ce jardin clos et pourtant pénétré n’offre pas seulement une attente pétrifiée. Selon un rituel qui relève du fantasme de naissance s’y déroulent, après une entrevue initiatique, l’adoption de Jean Valjean et Cosette, le temps d’une gestation et la régénération. Renaissance pour eux, renaissance pour les religieuses infécondes du couvent.’⁹⁹¹⁹⁹² It is the feminine example of the saintly sisters which compels Valjean to sacrifice his life for the sake of another, which enables him to attain sublime sainthood in his maternal tie with Cosette, and which grant him spiritual redemption: ‘Non seulement il réapprend l’humilité et l’amour; mais il adopte la posture symbolique de la réparation [...] Quand il comprend le sens de cette *expiation pour autrui*, après l’avoir comparée à celle des bagnards, il la pratique à son tour [...] La réparation lui vaut rédemption.’⁹⁹³

Even prior to entering the convent, when Valjean was a young man, his role in his sister’s family was less a virile, paternal role than a maternal one in the care of his sister’s children: ‘Jean Valjean n’a pas une place fixe, individuelle, qui le définirait dans une famille. Il n’est pas même caractérisé par la fonction virile: sa sœur travaille aussi et, auprès de ses enfants, il joue un rôle plus maternel que paternel.’⁹⁹⁴ Enjolras too is described as being devoid of amorous passion, though no less virile and heroic:

⁹⁹¹ Savy, Nicole, ‘Les procédures de réalisation: l’exemple du Petit-Picpus des *Misérables*, Original publication in *Les Misérables, la preuve par les abîmes*, colloque d’agrégation, 3 December 1994, École Normale Supérieure, Société des Études romantiques, SEDES, 1994, p. 10. www.groupevictorhugo.fr [Accessed 3 November 2014]

⁹⁹² In this article, Nicole Savy describes the different functions which Hugo attributes to the convent at Petit-Picpus. Firstly, as an explicitly feminine space, the convent is a source of eternal fascination for Hugo: ‘La clôture est ici, dans la Bible, image de virginité et de propriété érotique: pour l’exégèse catholique, elle représente la vierge-mère, à l’hymen intact et à l’utérus fécond. Le couvent du Petit-Picpus est féminin, vierge, impénétrable – et pourtant pénétré par l’auteur, et par son héros.’ (pp.5-6) Savy argues that the ‘conjonction sadique du religieux, de la sexualité, et de la mort obsède Victor Hugo.’ (p.8) Secondly, Savy argues that Hugo ascribes a social function to the convent which he sees as a safe refuge for suffering women: ‘Le deuxième est d’ordre social. A la manière saint-simonienne, Hugo affirme son respect de l’austérité et de la religion catholique, principalement pour les femmes qu’elle protège des pires dangers sociaux, *car dans notre société, c’est la femme qui souffre le plus*. Un couvent eût pu, peut-être, sauver Fantine de la déchéance, de la prostitution et d’une mort misérable. Du point de vue de l’utilité sociale, pour les femmes, le couvent est un moindre mal.’ (p. 8.) Thirdly he ascribes a political and personal function to the convent as Hugo was able to identify with the extreme suffering of the sisters through his own experience of exile, while the identification with female suffering enables his male hero to attain spiritual redemption in his self-sacrifice for Cosette.

⁹⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 10.

⁹⁹⁴ Rosa, Guy, ‘Jean Valjean (I, 2, 6): Réalisme et irréalisme des *Misérables*’ in *Lire les Misérables*, details as before, p. 207.

‘Il vit seul, ce qui le rend peut-être un peu triste; Enjolras se plaint de sa grandeur qui l’attache au veuvage. Nous autres, nous avons tous plus ou moins des maîtresses qui nous rendent fous, c’est-à-dire braves. [...] Eh bien, Enjolras n’a pas de femme. Il n’est pas amoureux, et il trouve le moyen d’être intrépide.’⁹⁹⁵ While Hugo has always been associated with a mythical exaltation of maternity, which would suggest a pre-determined natural difference in the maternal and paternal role, Yves Gohin comments on how a close examination of the male father figures in *Les Misérables* in fact reveals that it is his virginal father-figures who are responsible for generating matrilinear links within the text: ‘On sait d’ailleurs à quel point en toute son œuvre Hugo a chargé de valeurs mythiques la maternité...mais en lisant de près *Les Misérables*, on peut observer que la dichotomie que cette exaltation supposerait, tend au contraire à s’effacer dans ce mouvement même, puisque la paternité – physique *et* spirituelle, jamais de dissociation rigoureuse entre l’une et l’autre – apparaît et se vit comme la fonction génératrice: dans les cas les plus exemplaires (Valjean ou Gillenormand) tout le propre de la maternité y est inclus. Au reste, si l’on remonte le temps, les ascendances maternelles disparaissent; et ni Me Gillenormand aînée, Mlle Baptistine, ni même Mme Magloire n’ont de progéniture; même à l’égard des vieillards dont elles sont les servantes elles manifestent plus une vénération ou une crainte filiales qu’une autorité maternelle. C’est seulement chez les personnages masculins que la virginité n’exclut pas l’expérience de cette passion forcenée, torturante ou enivrante, dont Jean Valjean est le héros et la victime extrêmes, comme Gillenormand en est finalement le facile bénéficiaire.’⁹⁹⁶ Maternal sublimation can thus be seen in Hugo’s texts as a divine transfiguration which can only be achieved through the complete renouncement of self-interest and sexual passion, as can be seen from the recurrent pattern of childlike or orphaned children who assume maternal roles in the lives of other children.

This maternal sublimation exemplified by socially alienated, virtuous male characters such as Valjean thus appears just as potent as that exhibited by Hugo’s quintessential mothers, especially his archetypal mother-prostitutes as the sacrifice, privations, and misery which these women endure for the survival of their children similarly serves only to heighten the virtuosity of their actions: ‘Et peu importe que ces femmes soient

⁹⁹⁵ *Les Misérables* V, p. 114.

⁹⁹⁶ Gohin, Yves, ‘Une histoire qui date’, in *Lire Les Misérables*, p. 93.

déchues: les gestes de protection qu'elles ont à l'égard de l'innocence les font renouer avec leur propre virginité.⁹⁹⁷ Piroué argues that through their love for their children, these mothers regress to a childlike state of innocence 'elles ont au travers de l'enfant régressé vers l'âge enfantin' and by this token, the young, unmarried mother and the orphaned child is perceived to be more virtuous: 'La fille mère, paradoxalement, a plus de dignité que l'épouse. Les exemples abondent, La Esmeralda, Cosette, les petits de *Quatrevingt-treize* n'ont pour soutien qu'une mère. Dea, la plus pure des fillettes et la plus vierge des jeunes filles, n'a même ni père ni mère. On la dirait tombée du ciel ou plutôt née de l'immaculé de la neige. Et c'est toujours aussi perdue, sans racines, orpheline, que la mort la recueille, alors que Gwynplaine a retrouvé son nom et est un instant rentré dans le giron de son milieu.'⁹⁹⁸ Nicole Savy comments on how the feminine for Hugo is linked to redemption and love, be it romantic love or maternal love: 'Le féminin est déjà pour Victor Hugo et selon un chemin qu'il trace de M. de Lorme aux *Misérables* lié à la rédemption par l'amour amoureux ou maternel, n'importe.'⁹⁹⁹

If Hugo's male characters can attain the redemptive maternal qualities of love in the same way as his quintessential mothers, it is because the human capacity for maternal love is a universal quality of goodness, disinterestedness and sacrifice, undefined by sex. Commenting on Hugo's 'pères maternels,' Piroué argues that 'ils ont l'air d'être le produit d'on ne sait quelle androgénèse.'¹⁰⁰⁰ Grossman argues that Valjean's espousal of a maternal and paternal role in Cosette's life transforms the 'great outlaw' into 'a powerful androgyne – a virgin father *and* mother to children...'¹⁰⁰¹ Valjean's androgyny can be seen in the explicitly bodily images of maternity attributed to him within the text: '[...] Jean Valjean mothers children. Nine months after Fantine's death, he "feels a stirring in his entrails" and experiences "straining like a mother [in childbirth]" [...] His union with Cosette lasts for nine years, a gestation after which the outlaw symbolically gives birth to Marius as well. Carrying him through the sewers as, in old paintings of the flood, a mother...also does with her child, he delivers Marius in a mammoth (birth) canal. The virile hero, in short, possesses a woman's creative

⁹⁹⁷ Piroué, p. 101.

⁹⁹⁸ *Ibid*

⁹⁹⁹ Savy, Nicole, 'De Notre-Dame aux Bénédictines, L'asile et l'exil,' in *Victor Hugo 3: Femmes* by Danièle Gasiglia-Laster, (Lettres modernes Minard, Paris, 1991), p. 3.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Piroué, p. 102.

¹⁰⁰¹ Grossman, *Figuring Transcendence*, p. 139.

power':¹⁰⁰² 'Il n'avait plus que la tête hors de l'eau, et ses deux bras élevant Marius. Il y a, dans les vieilles peintures du déluge, une mère qui fait ainsi de son enfant.'¹⁰⁰³ Porter argues that this scene between Marius and Valjean 'makes the novel's moral import more immediate at the climax' and as such Hugo's 'motto might be Rousseau's "Impendere Vero" [to sacrifice one life for the (casue of) truth].'¹⁰⁰⁴ He argues that 'this resolve is the essence of the moral sublime' of the novel.¹⁰⁰⁵ It is also the essence of the maternal sublime exemplified by Valjean.

Nicole Savy argues that the grandeur of Hugo's male characters depends upon their identification with the feminine: 'Pour Hugo un homme ne peut être grand que s'il est aussi une femme.'¹⁰⁰⁶ While in identifying with the maternal, Valjean and each of Hugo's exemplary male characters necessarily identify with the feminine qualities of tenderness and compassion, they also identify with the distinctly feminine experience of suffering. Savy describes how Hugo's state of exile enabled him to identify with the female suffering of the *sœurs bénédictines* and observes that this explicitly feminine experience of suffering is further manifested by the bishop Myriel and by Valjean's metaphorical experience of childbirth: '[...] Hugo vient s'agenouiller à côté de ces femmes dont il fait des compagnes de proscription; excuser leur exil par le sien propre, leur donner grandeur non seulement par la prière mais par l'affirmation orgueilleuse de la grandeur de tout exil. [...] Rappelons l'importance du féminin dans la personnalité de l'évêque Myriel, ou les *épreintes* – souffrances de l'accouchement – que ressent Jean Valjean, affres de sa paternité-maternité pour Cosette.'¹⁰⁰⁷ If Hugo perceives tenderness, sacrifice, and suffering as inherent in the female experience, he argues that men are endowed with a superior manhood and humanity through their identification with the feminine: 'Le passage par le féminin...montre l'absolu de la souffrance humaine par le pourissement du principe de la vie.'¹⁰⁰⁸

However, while Hugo does venerate the presence of such feminine qualities in men, he sees the manifestation of excessive femininity in men as a gross aberration of

¹⁰⁰² *Ibid*, p. 140.

¹⁰⁰³ *Les Misérables V*, p. 182.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Porter, p. 136.

¹⁰⁰⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁰⁶ Savy, 'Les procédures de réalisation', p. 8.

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁰⁸ *Ibid*

nature, while androgynous women are what Hugo detests most of all. By demonstrating a pure, self-sacrificing love for Cosette, Scott Yearsley sees Valjean not as an androgynous but asexual character whose love for Cosette reflects the asexual love which Quasimodo¹⁰⁰⁹ displays towards Esmeralda in *Notre-Dame de Paris*. He argues that the kind of love which Hugo advocates in this novel is not sexual love but the love which exists ‘between two equal and beautiful subjects’ and ‘this is the kind of love expressed by Valjean, who too is an asexual but deeply compassionate character.’¹⁰¹⁰ While the virtuosity of Valjean’s love for Cosette is repeatedly evoked within the text, there are however passionate, incestuous undercurrents which surface in his love for Cosette. Grossman argues that ‘the purity of his love can be hotly contested, given his jealousy of Marius and the fetishism of his attachment to the small valise [...]’¹⁰¹¹ Brombert further argues that ‘much can be said about the latent incestuousness of Valjean’s feelings for Cosette: guilt about their drawn-out seclusion; his surveillance and possessiveness; the exclusive nature of his affections; his sense of terror at the sight of her growing beauty; the jealousy he experiences when he suspects her of having fallen in love; his hatred for Marius...the fetishistic attachment to her clothes; his animal-like protectiveness [...]’¹⁰¹² He argues that intimations of incest in Hugo’s works ‘have an autobiographical resonance, reminding one of Hugo’s sense of loss and guilt after his daughter’s death by drowning.’¹⁰¹³ Nicole Savy further comments on the biographical similarity between Valjean and Cosette’s relationship and Hugo’s relationship with Léopoldine: ‘Elle est en tout cas une des héroïnes hugoliennes de romans pour laquelle l’investissement personnel est le plus grand [...] parce que tout au long du roman court le fil de l’inceste: l’amour paternel de Jean Valjean contient aussi la passion amoureuse, et une effrayante jalousie contre l’homme

¹⁰⁰⁹ Isabel Roche argues that ‘the virginal Quasimodo is figured as being as sexually incomplete as he is physically incomplete as witnessed by the scenes that depict his ardour for the cathedral’s bells, and particularly for the one that is called “Marie.” (Roche, p. 146.) Scott Yearsley comments on how ‘by not sexualizing his relationship with La Esmeralda’ and ‘in choosing to serve her’, Quasimodo ‘aspires to both “thingness” and free personhood, and the fact that he achieves such conditions is a testament to the power of the will to overcome the cruelties of biology and society.’ He observes that in the reciprocal union of compassion and kindness which develops between Quasimodo and Esmeralda ‘no mention of sex is made, so despite Hugo’s reputation as being a man deeply in touch with his sexual self, the picture given in *Notre-Dame de Paris* is that of perfect, but asexual love.’ (Yearsley, p. 9)

¹⁰¹⁰ Yearsley, p. 9.

¹⁰¹¹ Grossman, *Figuring Transcendence*, p. 141.

¹⁰¹² Brombert, p. 103.

¹⁰¹³ *Ibid*, p. 104.

qui lui prend Cosette. Le mariage de Cosette évite l'inceste, permet la rédemption de son père dont il provoque la mort. Renversement du réel: le mariage de Léopoldine précède sa mort, et le père ne peut survivre à sa fille que dans le sentiment de l'injustice divine de la culpabilité.^{'1014}

However, while many of Hugo's male characters including Quasimodo, Jean Valjean, Gilliat, and Gwynplaine 'are all more or less explicitly referenced in Hugo's novels by way of both their virginity and their latent and largely untapped sexuality', we find that 'they are most often so inexperienced in this unchartered territory...they are unable to comprehend the feelings that come alive inside them.'¹⁰¹⁵ While their amorous feelings are not acted upon, Roche argues Hugo's virginal male characters are however, by no means asexual: 'Gilliatt's virginity and sexual fears are underscored not only in the scene in which he sees the naked women bathing in the sea but in greater detail through the sexually charged encounter with the octopus in which the sea monster threatens to kill Gilliatt through penetration. [...] Hugo's virginal heroes are thus in no way asexual in their virginity; on the contrary, the very deliberate tension created by their (overt or covert) sexual longings serves both to add to their social and familial isolation and to emphasize the heroes' inability to connect to another as these longings remain openly unfulfilled.'¹⁰¹⁶ Valjean, then, like Hugo's many other virginal male heroes, is not 'asexual in his sexuality', rather his inability to comprehend his feelings reflects his wider social and familial disconnection. Indeed, it is Valjean's inability to survive in the world of the novel which heralds his symbolic, transcendent role as a supreme figure of virtue and salvation: '[...] the character of Jean Valjean...takes on meaning...through the depletion of his real and assumed names to the point that he is rendered completely anonymous and can be absorbed into the cosmic whole, where his condition will be transcended.'¹⁰¹⁷

Guy Rosa similarly sees Valjean's lack of any intimate history as one of the many details which signal the anonymity and lack of individuality which lead to the

¹⁰¹⁴ Savy, 'Cosette: un personnage qui n'existe pas,' pp. 138-139

¹⁰¹⁵ Roche, p. 146.

¹⁰¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁰¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 140.

inevitable but necessary effacement of the hero from the novel¹⁰¹⁸: ‘Bref, son histoire familiale n’est pas une histoire parce que le sujet s’y dissout au lieu de s’y constituer et parce que cette histoire patine au lieu de progresser...Elle se répète dans l’impossibilité: son héros disparaît avant même qu’elle ne commence. Il n’a pas non plus d’histoire intime:¹⁰¹⁹‘il n’avait pas eu le temps d’être amoureux.’¹⁰²⁰ The spiritual ascension of the symbolic hero is thus necessarily marked by endless privations, abstinence, and self-sacrifice: ‘Le métier...de Jean Valjean, émondeur est symbolique. C’est le destin du héros que d’élaguer, nettoyer, purifier en lui-même. Par une ascèse continue – pauvreté, chasteté, obéissance au devoir et à la conscience – mais aussi par cette sorte d’ascèse intérieure qui fait de lui un personnage intense mais vide, blanc, et comme absent de lui-même.’¹⁰²¹ Indeed, each of Hugo’s ‘misérables’ are defined by the principle of self-sacrifice, which applies just as equally to their intimate lives as every other aspect of their existence: ‘Les misérables ne connaissent que le sacrifice [...] le misérable est voué au sacrifice, qu’il se sacrifie ou soit sacrifié.’¹⁰²²

Thus, far from Alexander Welch’s assertion that Valjean is an ‘absolute virgin where women are concerned, though (his) activity is chiefly inspired by sexual longings,’¹⁰²³ Roche perceives Jean Valjean’s feelings for Cosette in terms of a more general awakening to the range of emotions engendered by love, such as those of jealousy and rage [...]’¹⁰²⁴ It is for instance this jealousy which engenders his hatred for Marius and which, as Brombert observes, ‘can only be overcome by an act of total self-sacrifice.’¹⁰²⁵ Claude Habib sees Valjean’s revelation of his true identity to Marius as a symbolic act of self-sacrifice for the happiness of Cosette: ‘Sur le plan symbolique, c’est par deux fois l’aveu de son nom qui le précipite dans la fuite ou dans l’exil: lorsqu’il se nomme au tribunal d’Arras pour innocenter Champmathieu, et lorsqu’il révèle son nom à Marius, pour se sacrifier au bonheur conjugal.’¹⁰²⁶ The principle of

¹⁰¹⁸ Isabel Roche comments on how ‘Jean Valjean and the others lost along the way gain transcendence precisely through their erasure and anonymity’ as ‘the level of their ascension (is) proportionally linked to the depth of their descent [...]’ (p. 163.)

¹⁰¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 163.

¹⁰²⁰ *Les Misérables I*, p. 120.

¹⁰²¹ Rosa, ‘*Réalisme et irréalisme*,’ p. 202.

¹⁰²² *Ibid*, p. 203. & p. 204.

¹⁰²³ Welsh, Alexander, ‘Opening and Closing *Les Misérables*,’ in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 1978, (30):1, p. 21.

¹⁰²⁴ Roche, p. 146.

¹⁰²⁵ Brombert, p. 103.

¹⁰²⁶ Habib, Claude, ‘Autant en emporte le ventre !,’ in *Lire Les Misérables*, p. 72.

self-sacrifice is thus the strongest and most enduring characteristic when it comes to Valjean's strange love for Cosette: 'Le pauvre vieux Jean Valjean n'aimait certes pas Cosette autrement que comme un père; mais...dans cette paternité la vicuité même de sa vie avait introduit tous les amours; il aimait Cosette comme sa fille, et il l'aimait comme sa mère, et il l'aimait comme sa sœur; et, comme il n'avait jamais eu ni amante ni épouse, comme la nature est un créancier qui n'accepte aucun protêt, ce sentiment-là aussi...était mêlé aux autres, vague, ignorant, pur de la pureté de l'aveuglement, inconscient, céleste, angélique, divin...et l'amour proprement dit était dans sa tendresse...ténébreux et vierge.'¹⁰²⁷

Grossman and Rosa¹⁰²⁸ assert that this passage 'points not to incest' but rather 'to Jean Valjean's lack of familial distinction.'¹⁰²⁹ In particular, Grossman argues that it is possible to view the incestuous overtones of this passage from a different standpoint as an indication of the multiple and complex roles which Valjean comes to assume in the text: 'The ex-convicts's "divine" passion – one that multiplies the angles from which to regard the *other* – may in effect illustrate his ability to relate empathetically to a broad spectrum of people, regardless of age, gender, or class. [...] While the many traits that he shares with the criminals of *Les Misérables* do not prevent the reader from discerning his virtue, we should recognize that this virtue is never entirely pure. The hatred that he nurtures in the galleys still suffuses his glance at Marius in the sewers, even as he is saving his life. To love his enemy thus, he has had to understand and love himself. In transcending the disjunctions in his own sense of being, he is able to embrace a multitude of others.'¹⁰³⁰ To simply read Valjean's over-protectiveness and jealousy as signs of incestuous feelings towards Cosette is thus over-simplifying the complexity of his love for her. Rather, the ambiguity of Valjean's all-consuming love for Cosette is reflective of his fragmented and disconnected past life in which he has never previously experienced love, and it is the fear of losing this love and the

¹⁰²⁷ *Les Misérables IV*, p. 474.

¹⁰²⁸ Rosa, 'Réalisme et irréalisme', p. 207. ('L'histoire familiale aussi est remarquable, puisque Jean Valjean occupe successivement à peu près toutes les positions. Il est équivalent à son père par identité du nom, du prénom et du métier...il est fils de sa sœur qui porte le nom de sa mère et mari de sa sœur dont il remplace le mari mort. Tout ceci ne met en place aucun inceste mais une fondamentale indistinction familiale. Jean Valjean n'a pas une place fixe, individuelle, qui le définirait dans une famille.')

¹⁰²⁹ Grossman, *Figuring Transcendence*, p. 141.

¹⁰³⁰ *Ibid*

desire to be loved in turn by Cosette which engenders his feelings of jealousy and hatred towards Marius.

If the hero of *Les Misérables*, devoid of any familial, personal, or intimate history is defined only by his actions, then it is Valjean's self-sacrifice for Marius in the sewers, and again in his resignation to Cosette's marriage, which defines the socially alienated hero and which connect him to the world of the living before he rejoins Fantine, whose life too was defined by her self-sacrifice, in the faceless and anonymous grave: 'Seuls ses actes, seuls les jeux du hasard, de la misère et de la loi, le définissent comme personne.'¹⁰³¹ The devotional and all-sacrificing love which enables Valjean to attain maternal sublimation in his adoptive tie with Cosette is thus perhaps made most evident by this ultimate self-sacrifice for her – the sacrifice of his own love and opportunity of earthly happiness for the happiness of Cosette and Marius: 'Jean Valjean s'arc-boute pour parvenir à marier les enfants de ces deux familles: Cosette et Marius, soit la fille de la misère et le fils de la bourgeoisie. Symboliquement, Marius n'a pas de mère et Cosette pas de père. En se sacrifiant afin qu'ils s'unissent, Jean Valjean conjoint deux êtres qui s'aimaient. Il réunit au-delà d'eux les deux modes de filiation, le mode misérable et matrilinéaire [...]'¹⁰³² Furthermore, as Llosa observes, we must see Jean Valjean not as 'more than a man' but as 'a superman who stands out through his strength and talent and also through his capacity to embody suffering.'¹⁰³³ 'Valjean's idea of duty coincides with those moralists who are convinced that the road to perfection lies in the systematic self-punishment, in emulating the lives of a martyr.'¹⁰³⁴ Not only does Valjean's unwavering self-punishment and self-sacrifice enable him to atone for his sins and become a martyr, it is also this unwavering 'demonstration of disciplined self-punishment and sacrifice'¹⁰³⁵ which enables Valjean to become an exemplary and luminary figure of maternal sublimation for a compassionate and humane new civilization. It is this final act of self-sacrifice which enables Valjean to complete the steps towards his spiritual redemption and become a Christ-like figure for a regenerated and sublime humanity: 'Ce qu'il expie, cette troisième fois, c'est le bonheur de Cosette et Marius; il rend l'amour que lui a été

¹⁰³¹ Gohin, 'Une histoire qui date,' p. 89.

¹⁰³² Habib, p. 67.

¹⁰³³ Llosa, p. 69.

¹⁰³⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁰³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 68.

donné, sinistre arithmétique qui balise les étapes de sa régénération. Les religieuses du Petit-Pipus, en lui donnant la fécondité de la prière et du sacrifice, ont vraiment fait de lui un Christ.’¹⁰³⁶

To return to the question of Hugo’s autobiographical investment in his male heroes, the fact that the male characters to whom Hugo attributes this supreme maternal sublimation, are not driven by sexual passion and are either abstinent virgins who don’t experience passion or exemplify what Grossman terms an ‘experienced innocence,’¹⁰³⁷ is interesting nonetheless in light of Hugo’s own notorious sexual life during the writing of *Les Misérables*. Graham Robb notes how at a time when ‘prostitution was...one of Hugo’s major sources of information on the class of misérables’, and ‘even without a complete record of his doings, a statistical analysis shows that from 1847 to 1851, he had sex with more women than he wrote poems.’¹⁰³⁸ Robb argues that ‘the confusing coincidence of a fornicating “aristocratic” Hugo and the magnificent, well-informed sense of justice in *Les Misérables* has been explained by supposing that the novel was a guilt offering’ as ‘Hugo’s donations to beggars and charities came hot on the heels of his sexual splurges.’¹⁰³⁹ However, Robb argues that in reality ‘Hugo had no real desire to free himself from a sense of shame’ and that ‘the point of the mental transaction was to confirm the powerful reality of his conscience.’¹⁰⁴⁰ Llosa argues that biographers are not wrong to explore the “sordid intimacies” of Hugo’s sexual life during his time in exile and ‘take the Olympian god down from his pedestal’ as this only serves to make him more human¹⁰⁴¹: ‘No, they are right to do so. Because all of this humanizes him, showing that the genius was also the stuff of ordinary mortals.’¹⁰⁴² He argues that ‘on the matter of sex, the morality of *Les Misérables* melds perfectly with the most intolerant and puritanical interpretation of Catholic morality,’¹⁰⁴³ despite the reality of Hugo’s sexual activity during his years in exile – which have infamously become known as “the servant years” owing to his

¹⁰³⁶ Savy, ‘Les procédures de réalisation,’ p. 10.

¹⁰³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 124. ‘The passive martyrdom of some social victims...forms a continuum with the active sainthood of others – while not all are virgins, all exhibit a kind of “experienced innocence” that enables them to transcend their limited destinies.’

¹⁰³⁸ Robb, *Op cit*, p. 260.

¹⁰³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 261.

¹⁰⁴⁰ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁴¹ Llosa, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴² *Ibid*

¹⁰⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 72.

minutely detailed first-hand records of his sexual diversions during that time.¹⁰⁴⁴ He further argues that in *Les Misérables*, the ‘vindication of asexuality’ and the world of sex has been invented out of nostalgia for remote childhood adolescence in which Victor Hugo was – or wanted to be – a young man as pure as the unreal Marius, and out of a secret, irrational rejection of the carnal desires that possessed him all his life.’¹⁰⁴⁵

However, others take a much more critical line on the discrepancies between Hugo’s private sexual practices and his overtly moralising writing. Commenting on the conflictual coincidence of Hugo’s indulgent sexual practices and the virtuousness displayed by his maternal figures, Piroué argues that Hugo ‘s’interroge sur l’acte amoureux. Subjectivement, il y participe; objectivement il éprouve à son égard un très troublé éloignement.’¹⁰⁴⁶ Piroué goes so far as to argue that Hugo’s private behaviour renders him insensitive to the degrading social reality of women: ‘S’il est sensible à l’attrait de la putain, il ne se dissimule pas à quel point céder à cette séduction augmente l’aliénation sociale de celle qui la provoque. Il pose successivement sur la fille le regard allumé du mâle et le regard pitoyable du moraliste sociologue.’¹⁰⁴⁷ While it is unlikely that the virginity and abstinence which Hugo attributes to his male characters is intended as a ‘guilt offering’ or some kind of purgative expiation for his own sexual practices, to suggest that Hugo’s private sexual life distanced him from acknowledging the reality of social alienation experienced by women is quite simply not the case, as we have seen from Hugo’s socially acute treatment of prostitution within his literary and public discourse. His literary portrayal of prostitution has been praised by his contemporaneous and modern feminist critics alike for its acute recognition of prostitution as the oldest and most enduring form of female enslavement, victimhood, and degradation, as well as its sensitivity towards aspects of rape culture.¹⁰⁴⁸ Indeed, Hugo’s depiction of Fantine’s arrest is an instance where his own first-hand witnessing of the degrading reality and social alienation of

¹⁰⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁴⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁴⁶ Piroué, p. 105.

¹⁰⁴⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁴⁸ In *Victor Hugo: Un combat pour les opprimés: étude de son évolution politique*, Pascal Melka describes how Hugo foreshadows the arguments of Simone de Beauvoir’s *deuxième sexe* in his recognition of prostitution as the ultimate form of male sexual enslavement over women’s bodies. (p. 177.)

prostitutes is incorporated within his literary works. The scene depicting Fantine's arrest in fact mirrors a real-life encounter which occurred shortly after the success of *Notre-Dame* in which Hugo witnessed the unjust arrest of a prostitute in Paris and was compelled to write a letter to the police prefecture in her defence.¹⁰⁴⁹

However, while we can only ever speculate as to the influence of Hugo's personal experiences on the creation of his fictional characters, his attribution of virtuous innocence to his exemplary characters and his depiction of maternal kindness as a genderless, universal quality of self-sacrifice, devotion, self-effacement, and martyrdom can be far better explained as part of Hugo's prophetic vision for a just, egalitarian society during his time in exile. As Graham Robb describes in his biography, it was of course during the writing of *Les Misérables* that Hugo's vision of the future became increasingly orientated towards socialism: 'Three years after the death of Léopoldine, Hugo had ostensibly reached a kind of equilibrium: the reputation of his own past debauchery and the espousal of the probable future in a social philosophy which was beginning to look like socialism.'¹⁰⁵⁰ Just as Hugo's idealistic revolutionaries exhibit an absolute selflessness and martyrdom in their vision for the future, so Hugo's genderless figures of maternal sublimation are representative of his vision of a just, egalitarian, and compassionate society. While Hugo employs male revolutionaries such as Gauvain and Enjolras to herald the equality of the sexes, the attainment of female emancipation, and the right to equal citizenship in the future

¹⁰⁴⁹ The passage entitled 'Origine de Fantine' which appears in *Choses Vues* describes Hugo's witnessing of the attack and subsequent arrest of a young girl in Paris on the night of 9 January 1841. The account foreshadows the exact details of Fantine's vicious attack by Bamatabois, her act of self-defence, and her wrongful arrest by Javert: 'Il faisait ainsi le platon, quand il vit un jeune homme, ficelé et cossu dans sa mise, se baisser, ramasser une poignée de neige et la planter dans le dos d'une fille qui stationnait au coin du boulevard et qui était en robe décolletée. Cette fille jeta un cri perçant, tomba sur le fashionable, et le battit. Le jeune homme rendit les coups, la fille riposta, la bataille alla crescendo, si fort et si loin que les sergants de ville accoururent. Ils empoignèrent la fille et ne touchèrent pas à l'homme.' Hugo's decision to go to the police prefecture and testify to the young girl's innocence, thereby saving her from six months imprisonment, foreshadows Valjean's intervention in Fantine's arrest: 'Monsieur, j'ai été témoin de ce qui vient de se passer; je viens déposer de ce que j'ai vu et vous parler en faveur de cette femme. [...] V.H. lui raconta qu'il avait vu, de ses yeux...un monsieur ramasser un paquet de neige et le jeter dans le dos de cette fille...qu'en effet elle s'était jetée sur le monsieur, mais qu'elle était dans son droit...que loin d'ôter à cette fille – qui avait peut-être une mère ou un enfant – le pain gagné si misérablement...ce n'était pas la fille qu'on aurait dû arrêter, mais l'homme.' When the chief of police refused to release the girl without a trial, Victor Hugo gave his signature to secure her immediate release: 'Si la liberté de cette femme tient à ma signature, la voici. Et V.H. signa.' (Taken from 'Les Origines de Fantine' in *Choses Vues*, (G. Charpentier: Paris, 1888), <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb322629695> [Accessed 1 November 2014] pp. 53-56

¹⁰⁵⁰ Robb, p. 261.

French republic, the specific way in which he portrays the maternal as a genderless, universal quality, demonstrates the extent to which Hugo's vision for a social revolution depended upon the attainment of equality between the sexes.

As vehicles for Hugo's prophetic, messianic vision for the future, the maternal sublime attributed to his exemplary literary figures grants them significance which transcends far beyond their literary existence within his messianic vision of social revolution. Dominique Peyrache-Leborgne argues that the miserable, monstrous, and socially isolated creature who incarnates Hugo's concept of the sublime 'porte en lui...le destin, avorté il est vrai – de guide civilisateur,'¹⁰⁵¹ that 'solitaire, le héros romanesque sera martyr comme Job, et incompris comme Ezéchiél, mais en même temps, universel, il représentera le Prométhée moderne qui remplit sa mission civilisatrice, et dont le sacrifice incarne, pour un moment du moins, l'espoir d'une libération de l'humanité.'¹⁰⁵² Through their espousal of sacrifice and misery, Hugo's sublime maternal figures thus become prototypes for the compassionate society which he envisions for the future social republic. As Laurence Porter reminds us, for Hugo, 'it is sacrifice, not human love alone, that brings us closer to God.'¹⁰⁵³

Furthermore, by extending his vision of maternal sublimation beyond his archetypal maternal figures and by including his male characters just as amply in this divine state of maternal sublimation, Hugo is demonstrating how far his perception of the maternal extends beyond a Romantic or essentialist veneration of the maternal as a pre-determined feminine essence. Rather his distribution of maternal characteristics to a wide-ranging plethora of characters reveals his perception of maternal essence as a universal quality of devotion, self-sacrifice, and unconditional love, at once a potentiality and aspiration for both sexes. The range and diversity of male characters from the ex-convict Valjean, the orphan child Gwynplaine, the clergyman Cimourdain, to the *ouvrier* Gilbert, who adopt maternal roles within his literary texts, demonstrate how Hugo's vision of a just, egalitarian, compassionate society extends far beyond a virile, fraternal republic by incorporating a maternalist vision of human compassion, generosity, and kindness. Grossman argues that the fraternal-sororal sublime which appears in the second half of the novel 'enriches the notion of

¹⁰⁵¹ Peyrache-Leborgne, p. 24.

¹⁰⁵² *Ibid*

¹⁰⁵³ Porter, p. 135.

confraternity' in *Les Misérables*.¹⁰⁵⁴ She finds ample examples of Hugo's sororal models within the text such as the saintly Sœur Simplice, who, perceiving the sacred truth behind 'Fantine's martyrdom and society's pursuit of Madeleine...achieves glory by lying to Javert about the fugitive's whereabouts', and Éponine, whose 'solitary but courageous stand against the felons lined up to raid Valjean's house...elevates her to a superior mode of selfhood.'¹⁰⁵⁵ She thus argues that 'in sum, then, Hugo's maternal, paternal, and sisterly characters can be considered variants of the more numerous brotherly figures that populate *Les Misérables*', and that 'as in the case of sisterhood, age is not a determining factor for fraternity' but 'rather, it is an attitude towards others, one that emphasizes not so much the need for parental protection as the right to equal consideration, even at the expense of self.'¹⁰⁵⁶

Furthermore, by extolling a blend of gender-related traits to both sexes, Hugo's fictional characters closely reflect the way in which nineteenth-century writers such as Thomas Hardy and Elizabeth Gaskell were re-imagining relations between the sexes by attributing gender-related traits to their fictional characters. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy's heroine Bathsheba defies rigid gender categorization while the male hero Gabriel Oak displays caring, nurturing, and patient qualities. Elizabeth Gaskell's novels demonstrate the nurturing, feminized, emotive side of the working-class, while also demonstrating the social advantages of her characters' navigation of transgendered roles. Hugo similarly presents the social advantages of gender-blurring and the need to re-configure gender-related traits in order to achieve equality between the sexes. The virility with which he endows his female characters is presented as a heroic quality which determines the courage, audacity, and bravery of women. The women to whom Hugo attributes virile qualities are positioned as agents of political and social change such as the women who actively fight on the barricades or those who tend to the wounded soldiers. By the same token, the caring, nurturing, maternal qualities which he ascribes to his male characters illustrate how deeply his vision for a humane social republic is contingent upon a universal identification with the maternal, and the self-effacing devotion and limitless compassion which that requires.

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 124.

¹⁰⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 125.

¹⁰⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 126.

Further demonstrating how far his vision of the maternal extended beyond a pre-determined or innate feminine essence, Hugo also displays a deep sensitivity to the frustration which women feel when confined by the limitations of their maternal status. There are times especially when his formidable female heroines express a deep sense of confinement and constraint at the social limitations which their femininity and motherhood impose on their lives. In *Marie Tudor*, the queen despairs at the cowardice of the men who surround her and the limitations which her femininity imposes on her: ‘Oh! être abandonnée de tous! Avoir tout dit sans rien obtenir! Qu’est-ce que c’est donc que ces gentilshommes-là? Ce peuple est infâme. Je voudrais le broyer sous mes pieds. Il y a donc des cas où une reine ce n’est qu’une femme?’¹⁰⁵⁷ Lucrece Borgia demonstrates similar audacity when defending the capriciousness attributed to her sex in her attempt to foster an equal standpoint with her husband: ‘Je ne veux pas que ce jeune homme meure, monsieur le duc! [...] Tenez, c’est vrai, je suis une femme pleine de raison. Mon père m’a gâtée, que voulez-vous ? On a depuis mon enfance obéi à tous mes caprices. [...] Tenez, asseyez-vous là, près de moi, et causons un peu, tendrement, cordialement comme mari et femme, comme deux bons amis.’¹⁰⁵⁸ However, Lucrece also exploits the capricious nature of her sex when calling for the reprieve of her condemned son: ‘C’est un caprice...mais c’est quelque chose de sacré et d’auguste que le caprice d’une femme, quand il sauve la tête d’un homme,’¹⁰⁵⁹ or when she is pleading forgiveness before her son: ‘Misérable femme que je suis !’¹⁰⁶⁰

Thus, while criticism wielded against Hugo’s lack of wholly-rounded and complex female characterisations, as well as attacks on his position as a feminist, have focused upon his quintessential image of the maternal as the venerated ascension of women’s role beyond virginity and the natural completion of their role in society, his far-reaching treatment of the maternal as a sublime, universal, genderless quality throughout his literary works in fact solidifies his role as a 19th century feminist. Not only does such a perception of the maternal demonstrate his ability to reconfigure the essentialist and Romantic vision of femininity and maternity which throw doubt on our ability to claim the legitimacy of Hugo as a male feminist of his time, it also demonstrates the far-reaching and progressive nature of his feminist thought, by

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Œuvres complètes de Victor Hugo I*, pp. 332-333

¹⁰⁵⁸ *Lucrece Borgia*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 73.

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 86.

demonstrating his ability to perceive a society in which women may be considered beyond and separate from their maternal roles and in which men would assume greater compassion and devotion in their parental roles.

Finally, by depicting the maternal sublime as a divine transfiguration to which both sexes may equally aspire for the greater good of humanity, Hugo is demonstrating how far his vision for the future French republic extends beyond a virile, fraternalist society. As Carole Pateman observes, since its use in the revolutionary slogan, fraternity has never served as a synonym for community, and ought not to have been placed alongside liberty and equality in that famous slogan given that the concept is underpinned by the same patriarchal assumptions which underpin the original, sexual contract: ‘Modern patriarchy is fraternal in form and the original contract is a fraternal pact. [...] the original contract was patriarchal because it was made by fathers.’¹⁰⁶¹ Simone de Beauvoir acutely observes the limitations of fraternity by reminding us that ‘non, la femme n’est pas notre frère’¹⁰⁶² [...] il est...nécessaire que par-delà leurs différenciations naturelles hommes et femmes affirment sans equivoque leur fraternité.’¹⁰⁶³ She argues that when both sexes realise that ‘ils ont un même essential besoin de l’autre; et [qu]’ils peuvent tirer de leur liberté la même gloire... ils ne seraient plus tentés de se disputer de fallacieux privilèges; et la fraternité pourrait alors naître entre eux.’¹⁰⁶⁴

In the enlightened vision of future society which emerges from his literary works, as from his public discourse on women, Hugo too demonstrates how fraternity can be extended to create an equal community for both sexes by assigning women an equal role in bringing about the ‘fraternité sociale’ of the newfound republic, by declaring them *citoyennes* in that republic, and by offering both fraternal and sororal examples in his epic ‘notion of confraternity.’¹⁰⁶⁵ In this way, the ‘avenir fraternel’¹⁰⁶⁶ which Hugo envisions is undeniably one which includes men and women equally in his

¹⁰⁶¹ Pateman, *Op cit*, p. 77.

¹⁰⁶² De Beauvoir, *Op cit*, p. 560.

¹⁰⁶³ *Ibid*, pp. 577-578

¹⁰⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 573.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Grossman, *Figuring Transcendence*, p. 124.

¹⁰⁶⁶ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 52.

messianic vision for the just, egalitarian, and compassionate society awaiting the republic, and the realisation of ‘cet avenir sublime dans ses flancs.’¹⁰⁶⁷

¹⁰⁶⁷ *Les Misérables* V, p. 52.

Victor Hugo: an ‘auxiliaire de bonne volonté’ in the liberation, emancipation, and changing perceptions of women in nineteenth-century French society.

‘Tant qu’il existera, par le fait des lois et des mœurs, une damnation sociale créant artificiellement, en pleine civilisation [...] les trois problèmes du siècle, la dégradation de l’homme par le prolétariat, la déchéance de la femme par la faim, l’atrophie de l’enfant par la nuit [...] des livres comme celui-ci pourront ne pas être inutiles.’¹⁰⁶⁸

When defining Victor Hugo’s legacy to nineteenth-century France and indeed to the world, the need to define his contribution to the cause of female emancipation and to consider Hugo as a feminist of his time is one of the most woefully overlooked and undervalued aspects of his legacy. It is of course inevitable considering the overwhelming breadth of Hugo’s contribution to the most pressing social issues of his time, that his involvement in a struggle, which was itself a fitful, unstable movement marred by continual revolutions, setbacks, and internal disagreements, that Hugo’s part therein should be overlooked considering the high-profile international nature of the many other social struggles to which he was committed, such as his campaign against capital punishment, the scourge of poverty, or the plight of the working-class, to name but a few.

However, while the sheer magnitude of Hugo’s involvement in the social and political movements which defined his century go a long way in explaining the comparatively scant attention devoted to his contribution to the feminist struggle of his time, there are also a great many other reasons that account for the lack of serious, in-depth appraisal of Hugo’s contribution to the struggle for female emancipation in 19th century France, and indeed his place in 19th century feminism.

As the undisputed leader of French Romanticism, Hugo will always be associated with a perennially Romantic idealisation of femininity, a valorisation of women which is eternally anchored by the elusive quest for ‘l’essentiel féminin’, and with a sublime veneration of devoted, all-sacrificing motherhood as the natural fulfilment of women’s role in society. Just as detrimental to the appraisal of Hugo’s contribution to 19th century feminism is the ongoing fascination in critical studies surrounding Hugo’s personal relationships with women, which tend to be invariably highly critical of Hugo’s stifling personal treatment of women as in the case of feminist appraisals of

¹⁰⁶⁸*Les Misérables I*, préface, p. 1. (Hachette: Paris, 1881-1882), <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb30625533c> [Accessed 29 November 2014]

Adèle H, or the many sympathetic studies devoted to his long-suffering lover Juliette Drouet, or voyeuristic, as is the case with the studies which examine the intimacies of Hugo's colourful sex life. While it is only natural to be interested in the personal relationships of a man who more than warranted his reputation as one of the most infamous Don Juans of his century, this dominant focus in critical attention on the women in Hugo's life has had the unfortunate effect of showing Hugo in a very one-dimensional, wholly critical light as a serial philanderer, an ardent, tyrannical lover, an adulterous husband, and an over-bearing father, consequently making any concrete claim to Hugo as a feminist a seemingly implausible, or even ludicrous prospect.

Then, of course, there are the inevitable comparisons between Hugo and his male contemporaries. Hugo did not after all produce a deep-seated psychological exploration of the female mind or women's innermost desires – he did not give us a *Madame Bovary*. He did not eschew his century's obsession with a mythical, revered, and essential femininity in the manner of Stendhal. He did not explore women's sexuality in sufficient depth as to merit the praise attributed to Proust or Dickens. His personal relationships with women were a far cry from the exemplary marital relationships of his contemporaneous male feminists such as Condorcet, William Godwin, or Louis Blanc, each of whom vaunted the virtue of egalitarian, devoted, and monogamous marriage. The scandal surrounding Hugo's personal relationships with women was as much a source of gossip during his own time as it is a talking-point for present-day Hugolian scholars, readers, and biographers alike.

The image of Hugo that lingers on in the public imagination is not the young, self-possessed Hugo but the greying, wise, white-bearded paternal forefather of modern France, the loving grandfather, and the quintessential patriarch of the 19th century. This paternalistic image has again not readily lent itself to our perception of Hugo as a progressive, feminist thinker. Rather, we see in that image the epitome of the 19th century patriarch whose family were destined to reside beneath his illustrious shadow, and for whom they sacrificed everything.

Such reasons have more than precluded any serious consideration of Hugo as a male feminist of his time, let alone his contribution or even foreshadowing of developments in contemporary feminism. However, while he may not have provided us with the exemplary female heroines of Flaubert or George Sand, is it not to Hugo that we

accredit perhaps the most enduring image of the 19th century woman, in all her sacrifice, misery, and social oppression, in the figure of Fantine. In his ‘préface’ to *Les Misérables*, Hugo’s great bible of social reform and his single most defining judgement on the most pressing and urgent social problems of his time, he identifies the ‘misère, prostitution, droit de la femme, qui relève de minorité une moitié de l’espèce humain’ among the gravest problems of his century, which, ‘abordés et pénétrés, c’est-à-dire résolus....sauveront le monde.’¹⁰⁶⁹

While Hugo’s contribution to the struggle for female emancipation has been comparatively overlooked in the larger scheme of his social activism, what in fact emerges from a deep-seated study of his *œuvre* from his most canonical literary texts to his most neglected and forgotten public discourse, is a perennial and life-long concern for the suffering and oppression of women, a concern for the socially neglected mother who is forced into prostitution to save her starving child, and a concern for the wider collective oppression of women who have been made minority citizens by the law, by the judicial system, and by society at large. This deep concern for the suffering of women pervades the entire corpus of Hugo’s work, encompassing his private correspondences, his public discourse, his oratory, and his literary texts. Not only do these works depict a profoundly personal concern for the plight of women, they also illustrate Hugo’s support for the most pressing demands which defined the feminist movement of the 19th century – namely women’s rights to equal citizenship, universal suffrage, equal education rights, and women’s public and political involvement in a democratic, just, and egalitarian republic.

In considering Hugo as a feminist of his time, this thesis has thus not fixated on the personal or biographical details of his relationships with women which have effectively hindered any fair assessment of Hugo’s contribution to 19th century feminism, but has instead focused on situating Hugo’s thought in relation to the most progressive precepts of Enlightenment feminism, and the most defining demands of 19th century feminism. After all, when we examine the personal life of any great thinker, we are confronted by the astonishing contradictions between their theory and their personal lives. Rousseau is an obvious example but even when we examine the personal lives of thinkers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, who is widely lauded as being

¹⁰⁶⁹ *Actes et Paroles II*, p. 172.

the first true British feminist, we find certain aspects of her personal life, most notably, her life-long hankering for domestic fulfilment, which are quite antithetical to contemporary feminist thought. Why should Hugo's contribution to feminism be so harshly dismissed on the basis of his personal relationships with women when his contemporaneous feminists led lives which were less than exemplary in light of the progressiveness of their feminist convictions. And why should we expect Hugo to profess views which were more radical and forward-thinking than feminists of his time?

Thus in attempting to define Hugo as a feminist of his time, it has been far more instructive to consider what it meant to be a feminist in 19th century France. If we see the French feminist movement of the century as a movement which sought legal, judicial, and civil equality for women, and equal education rights, then Hugo's support for each of these issues more than merits his place in the feminist struggle of his time. Further, his support for some of the most radical feminist issues of the century, most notably women's right to equal citizenship and universal suffrage align Hugo with the most radical feminists of his time such as Hubertine Auclert and Flora Tristan, while at times even placing him ahead of his contemporaneous feminists such as George Sand, who has been heavily criticised by contemporary feminists for her lack of support for women's political equality, something which Hugo strongly defended in his public discourse on women's rights.

Likewise, if we identify the feminist movement of the 19th century as one of the first attempts to reconfigure women's maternal function in order to ascribe maternity with a specifically social function, then Hugo's thought can again be seen to be very much in line with Saint-Simonian feminists such as Jeanne Déroin, Claire Démar, and Suzanne Voilquin who strategically invoked the specificity and uniqueness of women's maternal function as the basis for their arguments for female emancipation. Hugo's invocation of women's maternal essence as the basis of his arguments for their civil, political, and judicial equality not only aligns him with the feminist writings of the *Saint-Simoniennes*, which can be seen to foreshadow the strategic essentialism of post-structural feminists a century later, but also sets him apart from the hierarchical, phallogocentric discourse espoused by the male leaders of Saint-Simonism, whose writings served to increase the conceptual weight of women's maternal essence while effectively reducing the actual, material status of women in society.

While Hugo's fervent support for the political, civil, and judicial equality of women, as well as his support for women's access to equal education reveal a distinctly feminist disposition, his inherent Romanticism and its attendant espousal of a mythical, saintly femininity nonetheless present a great challenge in defining Hugo as a male feminist, even during his own time. Hugo will, after all, always be associated with a quintessentially Romantic notion of femininity which appears so flagrantly throughout his *œuvre* whether it be the exotic sultans of *Les Orientales*, the mythical Goddess Isis, or the hauntingly beautiful 'être charmants' who linger over *Les Contemplations*, reminding us that Hugo's ideal woman is forever immortalised in the beautiful, demure, and charming Léopoldine.

However, just as Hugo did not believe in art for art's sake, so his Romantic venerations of a sublime, mysterious femininity are grounded in a vision of women's social facticity. As Morten Nøjgaard reminds us 'une des originalités du romantisme français est en effet sa préoccupation constante de ce qu'on appelait à l'époque la question sociale.'¹⁰⁷⁰ The preoccupation with the great social questions of his time which defined Hugo's Romanticism is particularly evident in his Romantic venerations of femininity wherein his fascination with a mythical, idealised femininity is always accompanied by a deeper vision of women as social beings, and an acute awareness of their social misery and oppression in society. The figure of the woman thus assumes the dual, if contradictory, realm in Hugo's imagination as both the elusive incarnation of 'le mystère humain' and the miserable epitome 'le problème social,' and his feminism is reflective of this.¹⁰⁷¹

While Hugo was eternally drawn to the beauty of women, even in his most Romantic exaltations of femininity, the reality of women's social misery and oppression is never far from his mind. Agnès Spiquel comments on how Hugo draws upon the mythical figure of Isis in his depiction of prostitutes: [...] 'Hugo constitue Isis comme un mythe de l'âme. Plusieurs textes où il parle de l'âme drainent des images isiaques, en particulier le texte sur la prostitution que constituent *Les Fleurs*, chapitres retirés du livre *Patron-Minette* des *Misérables*. "La prostitution est une Isis dont nul n'a levé le

¹⁰⁷⁰ Nøjgaard, Morten, 'Hugo et le peuple' in *L'œuvre de Victor Hugo: entre fragments et œuvre totale: Actes du colloque international Copenhague 25 octobre 2002*, ed. Hans Peter Lund, (Museum Tusulanum Press : Copenhagen, 2003), p. 15.

¹⁰⁷¹ In his eulogy to Madame Louis Blanc, Hugo declares 'La femme contient le problème social et le mystère humain.' (*Actes et Paroles III*, p. 240.)

dernier voile,'¹⁰⁷² écrit-il, et on pense à une déesse noire; mais, à l'autre bout du texte, l'âme de la prostituée est une petite flamme derrière les voiles opaques de la misère; la prostituée est isiaque en tant que témoin de l'âme éclipsée.'¹⁰⁷³ While his references to prostitution throughout his literary works reveal his deep-seated awareness of the oppression of women through the ages, his works also demonstrate an acute awareness of the many other instances of female oppression in society such as violence against women, absentee fathers, infanticide, and rape, as can be seen from the harrowing images which appear in his manifesto 'Pour la Serbie' wherein 'Hugo describes how 'on vend les petites filles,' 'on ouvre les femmes grosses pour leur tuer leur enfant dans les entrailles, c'est qu'il y a dans les places publiques des tas de squelettes de femmes ayant la trace de l'éventrement, c'est que les chiens rongent dans les rues le crâne des jeunes filles violées.'¹⁰⁷⁴¹⁰⁷⁵

Furthermore, Hugo's deep-rooted Romantic perceptions of womanhood are accompanied by a far-reaching vision of femininity and women's changing roles in 19th century society. This is particularly evident in relation to Hugo's perception of female genius which can be seen to be far more progressive than the explicitly gendered notion of genius espoused by the majority of the male Romantics, and by his contemporaries such as Balzac and Baudelaire, who were not just perturbed but also threatened by the display of female genius. By contrast, Hugo venerates women such as George Sand and Louise Colet as his literary equals whose genius unequivocally elevates them to the status of 'grand homme', but in no way unsexes them or amounts to a monstrous femininity or a manifestation of female madness. Rather, Hugo believes that it is women's charm, intuition, and spirit which predispose them to

¹⁰⁷² 'La prostitution est une Isis dont nul n'a levé le dernier voile. Il y a un sphinx dans cette morne odalisque de l'affreux sultan Tout-le-Monde. Tous entrouvrent sa robe; personne son énigme. C'est la Toute-Nue masquée. Spectre terrible.' (Hugo, Victor, *Fragments philosophiques 1860-1865: Nouvelle édition augmentée*, (Arvensa: Paris, 2014), p. 21.

¹⁰⁷³ Spiquel, Agnès, *La Déesse cachée: Isis dans l'œuvre de Victor Hugo*, (Champion, Paris, 1997), p. 61.

¹⁰⁷⁴ *Actes et Paroles III*, pp. 255-256

¹⁰⁷⁵ Themes relating to women's social misery can be widely found in Hugo's poetry. In *Fiat Voluntas*, Hugo condemns the public derision of a woman who was driven mad by the death of her child: 'Une femme du peuple, un jour dans la rue se pressait sur ses pas une foule accourue, rien qu'à la voir souffrir devina son malheur, les hommes, en voyant ce beau front sans couleur, et cet œil froid toujours suivant une chimère, s'écriaient: Pauvre folle! elle dit: Pauvre mère.' *Les Rayons et les Ombres*, (C. Gruaz: Geneva, 1840), p.75. <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb306254511> [Accessed 6 March 2015] (For more on these themes see J.C. Ireson, *Victor Hugo: A Companion to his Poetry*, pp. 63-67

genius, and indeed which render their genius all the greater and more sublime for their feminine spirit.

Again in his funeral eulogies to women, Hugo's veneration of female death reveal far more than 'a vicarious and mitigated Romantic experience'¹⁰⁷⁶ which posits the female dead muse as a source of divine inspiration for poetic creativity. Rather, the women he eulogizes are reanimated as 'la femme du peuple', 'la femme de Paris', and 'la femme du siècle' by virtue of their genius, their participation in the various social revolutions which unfolded during the century, and their indispensable contribution to the future French republic.

The sublime maternal essence which lies at the core of Hugo's Romantic perceptions of femininity presents an equally formidable challenge when justifying his claim to feminism. However, an in-depth exploration of his treatment of the maternal throughout his literary works reveals a far broader vision of the maternal than the instinctual maternal essence characteristic of Hugolian mothers, in which sublime maternity is seen to be a quality of self-sacrifice and 'dévouement' which is undefined by sex, and to which all humankind must aspire for a just, compassionate, and egalitarian society.

Similarly, when we examine Hugo's vindication of 'republican motherhood', we find that his views come far closer to those of his Enlightenment predecessors, and his contemporaneous feminists Maria Deraismes and Léon Richer, than his Republican contemporaries, in his ability to invoke women's unique role in 'republican motherhood' as the basis for their equal education, and civil, judicial, and political equality, while the majority of his republican peers from Proudhon to Ferry, invoked women's primordial role in republican motherhood as a justification for their confinement to the domestic sphere. While his archetypal mothers have been much maligned for their interchangeable and universal traits, Hugo's works also depict exemplary women who are not defined by their maternity such as Houzarde in *Quatrevingt-treize*, while the primacy of male characters who assume maternal roles within his texts suggest that societal change in the manner in which we perceive the

¹⁰⁷⁶ Bronfen, *Op cit*, p. 365.

maternal is imminent, and that men will need to partake in this change for the greater good of humanity.

While Hugo's feminism can be seen to clearly reflect both the Saint-Simonian feminism of the mid-nineteenth century and the intellectual feminism which emerged during the Third Republic and which was deeply grounded by the illuminating precepts of Enlightenment feminism, then defining the precise nature of his feminism remains nonetheless problematic. As Belinda Stack observes in her appraisal of George Sand's feminism, 'Sand's positions can be used to oppose various forms of feminism: Marxist and psychoanalytical, individualist and collectivist, Lacanian and Althusserian, and all the rest.'¹⁰⁷⁷ The same can be said of Hugo. However, Stack argues that Sand nevertheless holds a rightful claim to 19th century feminism owing to the fact that 'she believed in the essential equality of women and men, despite their differences', and that these differences 'did not imply a spiritual or intellectual feminine inferiority.'¹⁰⁷⁸

This is true of Hugo also who believed in the fundamental equality of the sexes despite their differences: [...] 'une des grandes gloires de notre grand siècle: donner pour contre-poids au droit de l'homme le droit de la femme...'¹⁰⁷⁹ His feminism is thus best defined as a distinct, though little documented aspect of his socialism in that it is underpinned by the same feelings of compassion and empathy for the plight of oppressed, marginalised, and disenfranchised people everywhere which underpinned his commitment to the great social issues of his time such as his campaign against capital punishment, his protection of children, and his defence of the working-class.

It is this profound sense of empathy and compassion for the most oppressed and afflicted groups in society which instigated Hugo's contribution to the struggle for female emancipation and which best justifies his claim to 19th century feminism. When we examine Hugo's campaign against regulated prostitution, which is one of the major feminist issues to which he devoted his attention, we find that his denunciation of prostitution, epitomised by Fantine's tragic fate, owes nothing to the Romanticisation of female death, the literary eroticisation of the prostitute, or the public castigation of

¹⁰⁷⁷ Stack, Belinda, *George Sand: a woman's life writ large*, (Vantage: London, 2001), p. 364.

¹⁰⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷⁹ *Actes et paroles II*, p. 178.

the ‘fallen woman’ characteristic of his century, but rather reveals Hugo’s deep-seated compassion and empathy for the 19th century woman as the tragic victim of male oppression, social neglect, and the sexual double standards inherent in bourgeois society.

Pascal Melka comments on how Hugo’s depiction of prostitution as the enactment of male sexual enslavement over women’s bodies can be seen through his depiction of Fantine’s social banishment and descent into the depths of social deprivation and Tholomyès’ unpunished licentiousness and parallel social ascent through the rungs of bourgeois society: ‘Cette inégalité de traitement aboutit à un vrai esclavage sexuel dans la mesure où elle revient à soumettre les Fantines au bon plaisir et au caprice des Tholomyès.’¹⁰⁸⁰ In this way, Melka argues that Hugo’s portrayal of prostitution in *Les Misérables* can be seen to foreshadow certain aspects of *Le deuxième sexe*: ‘En ce faisant, Victor Hugo, qui a écrit que le sort de la femme se résumait dans l’histoire de Fantine, annonce déjà certaines réflexions du *Deuxième sexe*. Près d’un siècle avant Simone de Beauvoir, l’auteur des *Misérables* a déjà émis l’idée que les tabous sociaux en matière de sexualité pouvaient masquer l’expression d’une domination masculine.’¹⁰⁸¹

Given that one of the most pertinent and ongoing obstacles confronting the position of men in feminism is the question surrounding the ability of men to abandon their position of power and privilege and internalise the experience of female oppression, Hugo’s ability to see prostitution as the enactment of male oppression over women’s bodies, and to align himself with the struggle of women against a tyrannical male ‘opresseur’, thus foreshadows developments in contemporary feminism in more ways than one. In the first instance, Hugo’s distinctly feminist stance on prostitution acknowledges that if women are the weak and more vulnerable victims of social oppression, it is because society in general, and men in particular, have made them thus. As the male pro-feminist, Michael Kimmel observes: ‘To be sure, men may be oppressed by race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, age, physical ability – but men are oppressed as men.’¹⁰⁸² Hugo acknowledges this when he declares the suffering of

¹⁰⁸⁰ Melka, Pascal, *Victor Hugo: un combat pour les opprimés: étude de son évolution politique*, (La Compagnie Littéraire: Paris, 2008), p. 177.

¹⁰⁸¹ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁸² Kimmel, Michael, *Misframing Men: The Politics of Contemporary Masculinities*, (Rutgers University Press: Piscataway, 2010), p. 222.

women to be more acute than that of men as women are ‘always already’ the oppressed class: ‘Une femme misérable est plus malheureuse qu’un homme misérable, parce qu’elle est instrument de plaisir.’¹⁰⁸³

Acknowledging women as the oppressed class in society and men as their oppressor is only the first step however. Kimmel argues that men may share the empirical observation of women’s oppression and take the moral stance and to that extent, they support feminism as an ideal.¹⁰⁸⁴ However he argues that ‘feminism as an identity...involves that felt experience of inequality.’¹⁰⁸⁵ The ability of men to engage in feminism is thus underpinned not just by an observation on the ills of women in society but a willingness to internalise women’s experience of social oppression and suffering. Léo Thiers-Vidal argues that in order for men to relinquish the power and privilege conferred on them by their dominant position as bearers of patriarchy and engage with the experience of female oppression, men need to ‘se dépendre de soi assez souvent et assez longtemps pour donner en soi une place affective et psychologique autre qu’annexe et subordonnée au vécu des femmes’, and this entails ‘une répétition d’abandons momentanés de points de vue oppresseurs afin de faire une place intellectuelle et affective plus importante et plus permanente aux points de vue opprimés.’¹⁰⁸⁶ By internalising the affective and psychological experience of female oppression, men become ‘non-gendered moral agents...who have somehow managed, at least temporarily, to adopt the standpoint of women,’¹⁰⁸⁷ and whose ability to take on aspects of female identity should not be seen as ‘crossing over to female gender identity, but as a direct third gender category.’¹⁰⁸⁸ As Kimmel argues ‘one cannot cling to one’s gender as the core of one’s being and be of use in the struggle. One must change the core of one’s being. The core of one’s being must love justice more than manhood.’¹⁰⁸⁹

If ‘one of feminism’s central tenets is that gender relations are constructed in a field of power’, then the ability of men to engage in pro-feminism ‘involves an empirical

¹⁰⁸³ Quatrevingt-treize Tome II, p. 209.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Kimmel, *Ibid*

¹⁰⁸⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁸⁶ Vidal, *Op cit*, p. 79.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Brod, *Op cit*, p. 197.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Philips, Susan U., ‘The New Gender Scholarship’, in *The University of Chicago Press*, 1987, (13):1, p. 193.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Kimmel, *Op cit*, p. 165.

observation – that men are not equal – with the moral position that declares they should be.’¹⁰⁹⁰ The self-proclaimed male pro-feminist Michael Kimmel identifies the ‘moral imperative,’¹⁰⁹¹ underlying the ability of men to engage in feminism and defines the ‘moral identity’ which men must necessarily assume in order to become pro-feminist as ‘a part of ourselves that is capable of living beyond gender, and it sometimes does’, and in this respect ‘it is also the part of ourselves that is nearest our experience when we are feeling deep remorse and pain over the suffering and injustice that we see in the world.’¹⁰⁹²

While the painfully emotive experience of Hugo’s exile served to make him all more acutely sensitive to the plight of the ‘les misérables’ everywhere, the particular way in which Hugo drew upon the feelings of isolation, estrangement, and marginality occasioned by his emotive exilic experience to form a relational and experiential connection with the afflicted women who sought his assistance, demonstrate the profoundly humanistic and moralistic motives underpinning his feminism.

From a feminist perspective however, Hugo’s alignment with the suffering of women is also troubling as it seemingly posits a fundamentally essentialist view of femininity which sees suffering and oppression as inherent in the female condition. The male characters who come to assume maternal roles within his literary texts likewise are seen to be in a state of social misery, orphanhood, and abandonment. However, Hugo’s depiction of female suffering is far more complex in that his self-identification with the plight of women as a suffering figure arises from the most traumatic and life-shattering events of his own life. The intense feelings of grief and devastation occasioned by Léopoldine’s death enabled Hugo to identify with the explicitly feminine experience of mourning and maternal grief. If the state of alterity and estrangement occasioned by his exile plunged him into a private introspective contemplation of nature and history, then these private, solitary, feelings also brought Hugo closer than ever before to the shared, collective experience of female suffering.

By posturing himself as a humble, vanquished exile in his public discourse on women’s rights, and by identifying his own personal experience of mourning with the

¹⁰⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 222.

¹⁰⁹¹ Brod, p. 197.

¹⁰⁹² Kimmel, p. 174.

experience of maternal grief, Hugo is demonstrating his awareness of the need for men to first identify with the most extreme experience of female suffering before they can speak on behalf of women's rights. In order for the 19th century to bestow rights on the oppressed half of the population, men first need to internalise the experience of female suffering and oppression. As they are, men are incomplete as they haven't experienced the depths of human suffering and as such, they are not in a position to argue for the cause for female emancipation. It is for this same reason that the male characters to whom Hugo attributes maternal roles within his literary texts are always seen to be in a state of liminality, as the dispossessed orphans, convicts, and forgotten members of society. Rather than identifying suffering and victimhood as an unchanging, inherent aspect of the female condition, Hugo thus perceives the necessity for men to identify with the explicitly feminine experience of suffering and victimhood as central to his vision for female emancipation. As Nicole Savy observes: 'Pour Hugo un homme ne peut être grand que s'il est aussi une femme.'¹⁰⁹³ In the same way that Hugo believes that the plight of 'les misérables' can only be resolved through society's acknowledgement that 'humanité, c'est identité,'¹⁰⁹⁴ so his wilful self-identification with the plight of women demonstrates the forward-thinking nature of his defence of women which acknowledges the need for each man to internalise the shared experience of female oppression before they can claim to speak on behalf of the oppressed half of humanity.

However, while the feelings of marginality, oppression, and acute sensitivity to social difference occasioned by Hugo's experience of exile afforded him a rich affective ideological standpoint from which to defend the cause of female emancipation, there are of course times when Hugo's over-zealous attempts to identify with the plight of women led him to resume the position of power and privilege bestowed on him by patriarchal society. This of course may be due in part also to the death of his daughter and his intense feelings of guilt over her death, thus explaining his need to assume an overly-protective and paternalistic stance in the struggle for women's rights. It owes more still however to his inherently Romantic perceptions of women and the inevitable constraints which these place upon his feminism. In particular, Hugo's designation of

¹⁰⁹³ Savy, Nicole, 'Les procédures de réalisation: l'exemple du Petit-Picpus des *Misérables*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁹⁴ *Les Misérables III*, (Hachette: Paris, 1881-1882), p. 212.

<http://catalogue.bnf.fr/12148/cb30625533c> [Accessed 13 December 2014]

men as the rational and thinking agents of social change and women as the passive emotional victims of social oppression is problematic as such a delineation of gender roles smacks of patriarchal ideology. As Toril Moi observes: ‘Patriarchy...insists on labelling women as emotional, intuitive, and imaginative, while jealously converting reason and rationality into an exclusively male preserve.’¹⁰⁹⁵

Before we judge Hugo too harshly however for these instances where he re-asserts the power and privilege of his male position, we must acknowledge that the problems with which Hugo was confronted when becoming a public voice for women, are still as troublesome for profeminist men today as they were for 19th century male feminists. What is important is that Hugo’s willingness to relinquish his masculine subjectivity and internalise the experience of female oppression in order to better defend the cause of women and speak on their behalf, demonstrates a profoundly humanistic and moral commitment to improving the plight of women, which is lacking in a great many men who engage in feminism today.

We must acknowledge too that Hugo was, after all, in a position of great power to assist in the struggle for women’s rights. Furthermore, the women who sought his assistance saw Hugo as such by identifying him as both an ‘auxiliaire de bonne volonté’ and an ‘illustre maître.’¹⁰⁹⁶ Even the most radical feminists of his time were moved by Hugo’s public discourse on women’s rights to join the feminist struggle. He was praised by women such as Hubertine Auclert, who claimed that it was Hugo’s writings which compelled her to move to Paris and become involved in the feminist struggle, and who introduced her to *l’Avenir des Femmes*. Male feminists like Léon Richer similarly looked to Hugo to consolidate his campaign for the repeal of the *Code civil*, which determined women’s inferior and minority status in 19th century French society since its enactment during the French Revolution.

Then, we cannot forget the concrete contribution which Hugo made to the struggle for female emancipation during the 19th century – he became the spokesperson of *La ligue française pour les droits des femmes* and *La société pour l’amélioration du sort des femmes*, his portrayal of prostitution in *Les Misérables* is as relevant in today’s society as it was in the context of 19th century debates against regulated prostitution. Hugo

¹⁰⁹⁵ Moi, Toril, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, (Routledge: London, 1985), p. 123.

¹⁰⁹⁶ *Actes et Paroles III*, p. 176.

helped countless voiceless women struggling in the depths of social revolution such as the exiled women in Guernsey, the female victims of the Cuban Revolution, and the wives of condemned Fenian prisoners. He acknowledged the need for a feminisation of language to accompany women's entry into public life, something which only materialised in France from the 1950s and later.

Undoubtedly, Hugo's deep-seated Romantic idealisation of women limits the parameters of his feminism and the consequent appraisal of his place in contemporary feminist studies. In his mind the new-age woman might be virile but she will always be soft and feminine and this inevitably situates Hugo's thought firmly in the context of his time. Consequently, Hugo will never be more than a 'pseudo-feminist' for feminists like Simone de Beauvoir. However, his fervent self-identification with the plight of women, his support for the most pressing and radical demands of 19th century feminism, most of which were not achieved until the mid 20th century, more than vindicate his contribution in the struggle for the liberation, emancipation, and changing perceptions of women in 19th century French society.

Moreover, the profound sense of compassion and empathy for the suffering of women, the most defining trait underpinning Hugo's feminism and the most pertinent value required of men who wish to engage in feminism today, justify his claim as a feminist of his time, and as a visionary of contemporary feminism. Above all, it is the profoundly moralistic and humanistic underpinnings of his feminism which compelled feminist women and oppressed women from all over the world to identify Hugo as a sympathetic ally to their cause and which determined Hugo's action on their behalf. Perhaps it is most fitting to thus conclude with the words of the women who sought his assistance and who saw in Hugo as both an 'auxiliaire de bonne volonté' and an 'illustre maître' in the struggle for female emancipation in 19th century France: 'Et nous hésiterions...à solliciter de votre dévouement l'appui que vous ne refusez à personne....ce serait méconnaître tout à la fois l'irrésistible puissance de votre parole et l'incommensurable générosité de votre cœur. Personne mieux que vous n'a fait ressortir l'iniquité légale qui fait de chaque femme une mineure. [...] Dites un mot et daignez nous tendre la main. Agréez, illustre maître, l'hommage de notre profond respect.'¹⁰⁹⁷

¹⁰⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 177.

On 5 July 1914 when ten thousand women organised a vast manifestation in front of Condorcet's statue to proclaim their right to vote, in the exact place where Théroigne de Méricourt was publicly whipped for demanding precisely the same rights in 1789, Victor Hugo was heralded along with Condorcet, Victor Schœlcher, Léon Richer et Jules Claretie as a precursor of feminism.¹⁰⁹⁸ By bringing to light his far-reaching support for the struggle for female emancipation and his support for the most pertinent demands of 19th century feminism, this thesis has endeavoured to bring contemporary views on Victor Hugo as a figure worthy of feminist appraisal in line with the profound esteem and respect in which he was held by pioneering 19th century feminists, and by oppressed, voiceless, and disfavoured women alike.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Groult, *Op cit*, p. 87.

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