



VICTOR HUGO

by

Eileen Holland

This paper is one of a series presented by ICR which examines the lives of mystics and/or geniuses. It emphasizes the characteristics that appear to be consistent with an active and evolving Kundalini and, in this way, supports Gopi Krishna's Kundalini hypothesis.

What counted with him was the search, of which he never tired, for the secrets of a better world . . .
- Andre Maurois, "Victor Hugo"

Victor Hugo was a man of contrasts who was larger than life. He could be pompous and self-aggrandizing and still express a great humility and compassion for the human condition. He was a gourmet and yet he often lived like an ascetic; he loved lavish furnishings but was frugal in his household habits. He was a doting family man and at the same time an infamous philanderer. He was also both adored and vilified by others - but there can be little doubt that he was a great literary genius. As his biographer Samuel Edwards says, Hugo "wrote superb lyric and epic poetry, huge and immortal novels, highly popular plays and sharp-witted criticisms with equal, dazzling facility."

Beyond this, however, his life stands as a vivid example of the relationship between creative genius and mystical experience. Hugo can even be seen as an example of a person who had attained some degree of cosmic consciousness - a state of enlightenment described in detail in the book *Cosmic Consciousness* that was written by the renowned Canadian doctor Richard Maurice Bucke.

First published in 1901 - and reprinted countless times since - *Cosmic Consciousness* proposes the theory that human consciousness is evolving and that the great mystics and geniuses of the past were harbingers of the level of consciousness that all humankind would attain in the future. In his classic book Bucke lists the characteristics of cosmic consciousness and examines how they manifested in the lives of a number of mystics and creative geniuses. Had Victor Hugo been included in Bucke's book, he would have been shown to exhibit many of these characteristics. For example, according to Bucke, many mystics and geniuses are precocious as children and later, often in their mid-thirties, have a surge in productivity and originality that is indicative of a transformation of consciousness. For many of these individuals the creative output often continues into old age.

Hugo's life certainly fits this pattern. Born in 1802, he showed evidence of precocity at a startling age. In her 1921 biography of his life, Madame Duclaux says, "This sweet but solemn baby showed already one of the chief qualities of the future poet's genius . . . the faculty of absorption, of reflection, of an extraordinary retentiveness." At six months, he could speak with sufficient clarity to ask for his mother. When he was four, he was considered so intelligent he was sent to school and, by five, he could read and write. At seven, Hugo made up original games for his brothers and playmates. By the time he was 16 he had translated Virgil into French and had written a five act play, over 100 poems, a number of satires and a comic opera. At 18, he was afforded national recognition as an author and an invitation to the court of Louis XVIII. And his beloved literary classic *Notre Dame de Paris* (*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*) was published when he was only 29.

Two books published in his mid-thirties, *Les Chant* and *Les Voix*, indicated a notable change in his thinking and subject matter: his growing humanitarianism and concern for the condition of the human soul. His great work *Les Miserables* was not published until he was 60 (although he did begin it a number of years earlier) and *Ninety-three*, a historical novel based on the French Revolution in 1793, was not written until he was 70. Hugo continued to live in good health and to lead a creative and active life until his death at the age of 83.

Edwards, with no exaggeration, refers to Hugo's output as "staggering." In this Hugo exhibited another characteristic found in those who have attained some degree of cosmic consciousness: an exceptional ability to concentrate and a tremendous capacity for work. After rising early each morning, it was his habit to take a long, brisk walk and be at his writing by 8:00 A.M. His desk was a slab of wood hooked to the wall and he wrote standing up until 2:00 P.M. He ate and spent time with his children until 4:00 P.M.; then wrote from 4:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M. He often read two to three full books between 8:00 and 11:00 P.M.

Even with only three or four hours of sleep, he would not stop work until he had finished 100 lines of poetry or 20 pages of prose. In his own words, "Every thought that has ever crossed my mind, sooner or later, finds its way on paper. I do not engage in random or useless thinking. Ideas are my sinew and my substance . . . an observation, a feeling, even a fleeting sensation, all these are the precious marrow which compels me to stand at my writing table."

When his political activities forced him to flee Paris, he started writing less than 24 hours after he arrived in Brussels. In less than five months, he completed a book so immense it required two volumes (*History of a Crime*). He couldn't find a publisher for years so he wrote a shortened version (*Napoleon le Petit*) in 4 weeks, published it himself and smuggled it into France.

In 1875, at the age of 73, Hugo was living again in Paris where he was involved, as always, in varied and hectic romances. He was healthy and strong, still read omnivorously and had no need for eyeglasses. He slept well, ate well, walked daily and after a day of prodigious output was fresh and cheerful. Quoting one of his many biographers, Joanna Richardson, "All that he did and felt and thought and saw was excessive as if he had had a surplus of himself to spend."

During his life Hugo spent much of his extraordinary energy in fighting for causes that evinced his deep morality, idealism, compassion, and concern for humanity - qualities that, according to Bucke, are yet another characteristic of the individual who has reached some degree of cosmic consciousness. As a Peer of France, for example, he gave political speeches on equality, poverty and the environment. During the Revolution of 1848 he became a champion of the people. While Louis-Napoleon pursued his plan to become Emperor, Hugo stood up and gave this speech, "The man of the masses suffers today from the two-fold and contradictory feeling of his actual poverty and the greatness to which he knows himself entitled . . . we who sit in this Chamber bear a special responsibility. For it is we who represent the people of France. It is we who must take steps to rid the land of poverty and set the poor on the road to greatness and enlightenment." In December of 1851 in his dramatic opposition to Louis-Napoleon he was truly heroic. Ignoring his own safety, speaking out and opposing the tyrant, he was forced into exile, fleeing for his life. He was a man passionately opposed to the death penalty. Joanna Richardson describes him in this way: "to Hugo there is a scale of things, a ladder of perfectibility and there is an ever-present danger that the Ideal may be diminished or destroyed by the Material."

Hugo was also hailed as one of the architects of the great republican victory that gave France a new political stability and made certain that the Third Republic would endure. His biographer Samuel Edwards points out that, although others worked as hard and deserve much of the credit for forging the new republic, Hugo's contributions were vital and he was universally regarded as the Patriarch of the Republic.

Some of Hugo's biographers, however, point out that his idealism was not always so evident in his personal life. Andre Maurois, for example, writes: "There is in *Les Miserables* a fine passage on the 'magnificent egoists of the infinite' who, distracted from their concerns of their fellow-men by consideration of the Cosmos, cannot understand why one should brood over human suffering when there is the blue of the sky for the eye to see. 'They compose,' says Hugo, 'a family of spirits at once trivial and great. Horace was one . . . so was Goethe.' Though he did not know it, Hugo himself was sometimes of that number. Not that he hadn't . . . brooded upon human suffering but his compassion was diffused rather than brotherly and in his case charity did not begin at home."

Still, there is no denying the desire to ease the suffering of humanity that Hugo expresses through his charac-

ters. As the beatific Myriel, Bishop of Digne says in *Les Miserables*, "Teach the ignorant as much as you can, society is guilty in not providing universal free education and it must answer for the night it produces. If the soul is left in darkness, sins will be committed. The guilty is not he who commits the sin, but the one who causes the darkness."

As another Hugo scholar, Richard B. Grant, summarizes this desire to put the world right: "All Hugo's works continually took the same form, the quest of the Hero who must descend into Hell to achieve salvation for himself and for others. The quest is for the Ideal or a voyage toward a distant Ideal. He moved gradually in the direction of human freedom trying to write in various ways his growing awareness of man's freedom and responsibility with the images he had developed."

And although criticism like that from Andre Maurois is undoubtedly to some extent deserved, Hugo did show his compassion on a personal level, too. Samuel Edwards tells how Hugo, after his wife's death, went back to Guernsey - the island where he had once lived in exile. There, says Edwards, "he also found time to continue and expand what had been Adele's favorite charity. Every Monday evening a group of about forty very poor children, mostly orphans, had been entertained at dinner by Adele. Victor not only took her place at the table, but gave a large sum of money in her name to the Institution where the children were housed. That fund still exists over 100 years later and the proceeds are still used to help the orphans of Guernsey." Hugo also strove to pass his ideals on to other members of his family. In his *Art of Being a Grandfather*, Hugo wrote five poems to be read to his grandchildren when they were adults. In them, says Edwards, Hugo preached the principles of liberty and equality and urged them to show respect for all humanity.

His dedication to improving the lot of others is summed up in a letter to Alfred Busquet, in which he wrote: "I no longer belong to myself, I no longer belong to pure poetry, to smiling thought, to serene and happy art. I belong to Duty. To severe, exclusive, immediate, implacable Duty. If I have any strength I must devote it to those who suffer, to those who weep, to those who are tortured. I owe it to the living and I know that the dead applaud me."

In *Cosmic Consciousness*, Bucke states that yet another characteristic of the person who has had even a taste of enlightenment is a sense of immortality. Death no longer is a source of fear or mystery to them. According to biographer Joanna Richardson, Hugo once responded to an acquaintance who argued that everything ends for the soul after the world by saying, "That may be true for your soul, but I know mine is eternal." Hugo was aware of his inner energy and did not believe that anything so vast could be exhausted by his leaving the earthly life.

This sense of immortality is expressed plainly in a passage from a poem he wrote entitled "During an Illness":

*"He's lost! I hear them murmur nigh
My body vacillates; I feel
The helpless broken armory
Of mind and senses fail and reel.

That moment - infinite, supreme -
From out the darkness meets my eye
A pale, vague sun, as in a dream
Through the wan heavens seems to rise.

My soul transformed, as sight dilates
My reason seek the Godhead veiled;
At last I touch the eternal gates
And night is by my keys assailed
To God, the sexton digs our way
To die is but to learn aright
'Old Laborer'! To death I say
'I come to see the hidden sight'.*

He continued to express these ideas even as he aged. When he was 71 he once said, "I feel within myself a whole new life, a whole new future. I feel that I have said only a thousandth part of what is in me. When I lie in the tomb, I shall not say 'I have had a life.' My day will begin again the next morning. My work is only beginning, my monument has hardly risen from the ground. I should like to see it rise even higher and still rise. The thirst for infinity proves infinity. What do you say to that, you atheists?"

He maintained this attitude to the day of his death, May 22, 1885, when he spent the afternoon bidding farewell to his friends and family. With his poetic spirit still much in evidence, he said to one, "Here is the battleground of Day and Night", and to another, "Death will be very welcome." He urged his grandchildren to seek happiness by giving love and his last words were "I see black light."

Hugo's powerful life-affirming attitude may have been part of the reason he exhibited such great charisma - yet another characteristic of the person who has tasted cosmic consciousness. Throughout his lifetime he was surrounded by admiring writers, actors and royalty and, to the very end, he was adored by the French people and considered a national hero. He also exuded an intense personal magnetism that was obvious in his numerous intimate and sexual relationships.

The evidence of his sexual proclivity seems, in fact, to be almost endless. It is written that his young wife found him so insatiable that she finally closed the bedroom door to him. And there is no doubt he had numerous affairs. In Hugo's defense, however, Edwards suggests that Victor did believe in the sanctity of marriage until he discovered that Adele was having an affair with a close friend of theirs named Saint-Beuve. According to Edwards, there is no evidence that Hugo had been unfaithful before that. Regardless, when he did begin to have affairs, it unleashed a sexual career unprecedented even by today's standards. Hugo had literally hundreds of mistresses, among whom Juliette Drouet was a life-long companion. At one point, he maintained three households. His sexual powers were undiminished into old age. At the age of 70 - when he was beginning a new novel and reviving a play - he became involved in several intense romances. Among them were Judith Gautier, a noted poet, and the renowned actress Sarah Bernhardt who was starring in his play. Juliette, who was the center of his life after Adele's death, shrugged these affairs off saying, "His vanity demands these little pleasures and he would grow old before his time if he were denied them."

Although Bucke did not look in detail at sexuality when he discussed the charisma of people who had attained some degree of enlightenment, Gopi Krishna did. In several of his books, Gopi Krishna details the characteristics of what he called "higher consciousness." These traits include all those listed by Bucke with the addition of a few others that are based on his life-long study of the teachings of yoga. According to Gopi Krishna, the evolution of consciousness that Bucke wrote about is propelled by a cosmic force/mechanism that is known in yoga as Kundalini. Often depicted in symbolic terms as a serpent that lies coiled at the base of the spine until it is awakened. After awakening, this force or energy is said to travel up the spine and into the brain where it triggers a process of transformation that can manifest - depending on many factors - in such phenomena as mystical experience, psychic awakening, and inspired creative genius.

The relationship between kundalini and sexual energy is widely recognized in yoga. In fact, a number of asanas in hatha yoga are aimed at raising the subtle essence of the reproductive fluid up the spine. Although it is far beyond the scope of this paper to deal with this relationship in any detail, further explanations can be found in such books as *Living with Kundalini* by Gopi Krishna and *The Serpent Power* by Arthur Avalon. In the meantime, one simplistic but helpful means of visualizing this relationship is to imagine kundalini as a kind of "life energy" that, during reproduction, flows outward to create new life and, during the process of spiritual transformation, flows upward to create a new "life" in the brain.

In an essay in *Kundalini: Empowering Human Evolution* called "The Case of Alan Watts," Gopi Krishna explains it in this way: "With the accelerated activity of the evolutionary mechanism, there occurs a tremendous enhancement in the production of life energy or sex energy. When the organism is in perfect condition, the sublimated energy streams into the brain, raising the consciousness to inexpressible heights of oceanic knowledge and rapture. But when the system is impure and the pranic radiation becomes even slightly contaminated, then nature tries to adjust the situation . . ." One way this occurs, he explains, is through "an enormously increased pressure at the other end of the evolutionary mechanism - that is the sexual region - resulting in irrepressible amativeness. In such cases release becomes unavoidable to overcome the maddening pressure on the brain. The dominant position very often occupied by sex in the minds of creative intellectuals and their utter capitulation before it can be readily understood from this." Certainly, this information helps us see Hugo's sexual excesses in a new light.

In the same essay, Gopi Krishna goes on to say that if the impure pranic radiation does make its way to the brain, it can lead to "to anxiety, fear, tension, depression, craving for some kind of excitement or mind-altering drugs or the like. This is the 'dark night of the mystic,' the depressive, sterile mood of the genius, or 'a fit of the blues' of the intelligent mind."

Instances of such dark periods troubled Hugo's life from the very beginning. It is said that even in infancy he would sink into long, brooding silences when his mother was not available to him. This melancholy became a permanent characteristic and afflicted him throughout his life, often becoming apparent after prolonged periods of creative activity - many of which were beyond the capacity of ordinary men. Samuel Edwards recounts, "only when the young author was in the grip of the strange melancholia that sometimes overcame him did he vary his routine. When . . . it took hold of him he did no work whatsoever and usually locked himself in his bedroom for periods of a few hours to two full days and nights. At such times he could not eat, drink or sleep, but slouched in a chair, staring listlessly into space." It is interesting to note that these bouts of depression were not caused by specific events. In fact, Hugo was often at his strongest when dealing with the tragedies and crises in his life. Depression could strike him at any time - often when things were going very well. Not surprisingly, this spilled over into his work. For example, his earlier poems, the "Ballades," are filled with wild and disturbing events and much of his work is crowded with dark and chilling images.

Gopi Krishna's research indicated that hereditary factors might be related to the awakening of kundalini and affect how smoothly the process evolved in the individual. Certainly other members of Hugo's family were both exceptional and troubled. His father, although not considered brilliant, was in advance of most of his contemporaries. When he entered Napoleon's army at the age of 15, he could read and write and had studied the classics. Within three years, he had achieved the rank of Major, and he was known for his humanity to captured enemies. Hugo's mother, Sophie, was an iconoclast and, in contrast to most women of her day, was fiercely independent. His brother Eugene went mad on the day of Victor's wedding celebration and never recovered. His daughter, Adele, went mad after an unhappy love affair and spent the rest of her life in an asylum and, although it has never been proven, his daughter, Leopoldine, is thought to have committed suicide.

Despite Hugo's frailties and the suffering he endured, his life was also filled with great blessings. Like others who Bucke described as having reached some degree of enlightenment, Hugo believed deeply in God, had a profound sense of oneness of all things, had a great love of nature, and expressed an expanded consciousness in many ways. Throughout his novels and poems, in his conversations and letters, Victor Hugo expressed these qualities in powerful, lyrical ways. For example, in "Believe - But not in Yourself" he writes:

*"God is the only light the world can need:
Atoms and space are in this text agreed.
God only great, the humble flowerets name,
And only true, the mighty floods proclaim;
And only good, winds tell, from spot to spot
O man! let idle vaunts deceive you not!
Whence did you spring, to think that you can be
Better than God, who made the stars and sea!
And who awakes you when your rest is done,
With that prodigious smile of love - the Sun!"*

In this same vein, near the end of his life he wrote "I believe in God with all the power of my soul. There is nothing useless in the world, and the whole world would be useless if there were not a divine thought which provided over all . . . I am waiting with confidence for the moment when I appear before God, before Infinity."

It is indicative of Hugo's concern for individuals, perhaps, that this strong belief in God was accompanied by a distinctly anti-clerical feeling. This disdain for organized religion is shown in a poem called "Le Pape." In it, an unnamed Pope falls asleep and has a dream in which he dresses in sack cloth, smears himself with ashes in an act of humility, and goes out among the poor to preach the Gospel. Living a life of sacrifice he spreads charity, does good deeds, preaches equality and like virtues. When he wakes from the dream he exclaims, "What a frightening dream I have suffered!"

Hugo's attitude to both God and humanity is perhaps best summed up by the words contained in his will: "God. The Soul. Responsibility. This three-fold idea is sufficient for mankind. It has been sufficient for me. It is the true religion. I have lived in it. I die in it. Truth, light, justice, conscience. It is God."

*I shall close my earthly eyes but my spiritual ones will remain open wider than ever.
I refuse the prayers of all churches.
I ask for a prayer from every soul.
I believe in God."*

There is a great deal of evidence in Hugo's writing that he had an expanded consciousness. In discussing Hugo's *Les Contemplations*, Samuel Edwards notes that, "each of the poems appears to be an individual's reactions to his environment but there is a larger pattern. Victor's concern was not merely for himself. He explored the nature of humankind and searched for an understanding, in depth, of man's relationship to God. He explored the forces of external nature and its relationship to God and man. The poems in *The Art of Being a Grandfather* are devoted to the physical beauty and wonders of nature as seen through the eyes of a child. Victor believed that it is a living and disturbing world. 'Everything on earth', he said, 'is aware of its existence and the sea and the sky commune with God.'"

In his work *William Shakespeare* he reveals much about his own views on genius and mysticism, when he writes: "The Supreme Intelligence, which here below is the great man, what is the power that invokes it, incorporates it and reduces it to a human state? What part do the flesh and blood take in this prodigy? Why do certain terrestrial sparks seek certain terrestrial molecules? Where do they plunge, those sparks? Where do they go? How do they manage? What is the gift of man to set fire to the unknown? This mine, the infinite, this extraction, a genius, what more wonderful! Whence does that spring up? Why, at a given moment, this one and not that one? Here, as everywhere, the incalculable law of affinities appears and escapes. One gets a glimpse but sees not. O forger of the unfathomable, where are thou?"

In *Les Miserables*, he muses further, "At the same time that he is infinite outside of us is he not boundless within us? These two infinities (how dreadfully plural!) are they not superimposed one with the other? The second infinity is he not in and for thus to speak, sub-speaker for the first? It is me before it the sounding board, it is me on high, it is God!" Hugo's expanded consciousness is evident yet again in the poem "To My Daughter" in the advice he gives:

*Earth does to none or joy or triumph give;
All things are incomplete, all quickly fade.
Dear Child, Time is a shadow, and our life
Of the same substance made.*

*God gives us light at every step we go
And tells us of His nature and our own;
One certain law from all things here below;
And from mankind, is shown.*

*All must obey that edict from above,
Which in the compass of each soul doth fall;
Nothing to hate, Dear Child, and all to love -
At least, to pity all.*

In *Cosmic Consciousness*, Bucke indicates that the road to enlightenment is often punctuated with profound mystical experiences. Although Hugo may not have written any personal accounts of his own mystical experiences, there are certainly indications that he had them. He once said, "I am probably the only person now alive who has discussed the nature of the Godhead with the Holy Ghost himself. It was an edifying experience principally because I discovered that He and I were in total agreement - in all our views. Were I a devout man relatively blameless in my private life, I believe I would qualify for the Red Hat (the signature headpiece reserved for Cardinals of the Catholic Church). Alas, I am a sinner so I must keep the gist of these talks to myself. No one would believe they were held and, do you know, I strongly doubt their veracity myself."

His poetry and the characters in his fictional works also express the mystical in a profound and unmistakable fashion. For example, in *Les Miserables*, Monseigneur Myriel, the Bishop of Digne, "was out there alone with himself, composed, tranquil, adoring, comparing the serenity of his heart with the serenity of the skies, moved in the darkness by the visible splendors of the constellations and the invisible splendour of God, opening his soul to the thoughts that fall from the unknown. In such moments offering up his heart at that hour when the flowers of night emit their perfume lit like a lamp in the middle of the starry night, expanding in ecstasy in the midst of creation's universal radiance, perhaps he could not have told what was happening in his mind. He felt something floating away from him; and something descending upon him, mysterious exchanges of the soul with the universe."

Although we will never know if it was Hugo himself or simply a character in his imagination that had this experience, others believed Hugo had transcendental experiences. In one analysis, for example, Francois Coppee writes, "I am convinced that Victor Hugo's genius during these years of solitude, of meditation and inner life on the Channel Islands took on immense flight . . . He fraternizes with that power, the Abyss. He contemplates Infinity, he listens to the Unknown, the great and sombre Voice seems to speak to him".

Certainly Hugo was a visionary. He once wrote that the complete poet is composed of these three visions: Humanity, Nature and the Supernatural. "Man always dreamed," he wrote, "always went beyond reality." In the preface of *La Legende des Siecles* - a chronological series of dramas, poems and ballads - he writes that the purpose of the work - "To express humanity in a kind of cyclical work; to paint it successively and simultaneously in all its aspects, history, fable, philosophy, religion, science, which are summed up in one, vast movement of ascension towards the light . . . The blossoming of the human race from century to century. Man rising from the darkness to the ideal . . . A kind of religious hymn with a thousand stanzas with a deep faith in its entrails . . . and a lofty prayer at its summit; that is what this poem will be as a whole when it is finished, if God the Master of human lives consents."

Andre Maurois comments on the visionary aspect of Hugo's nature when he writes, "What counted with him was the search, of which he never tired, for the secrets of a better world. That we are all of us poor, tormented, jealous, unhappy creatures, he knew. He had his own examples and that of those close to him to teach him that truth, but his knowledge went further. He knew how those poor same creatures, in their moments of mystic ecstasy can glimpse in a vision both sublime and vague, the dawn which already shows bright on the horizon." He quotes Hugo's own words: "Solitude produces to some extent a divine bewilderment. It is the smoke of the burning bush."

Both the mystical and the visionary elements in Hugo's inner life are reflected in his writings. In *Les Miserables*, Hugo's character Enjolras, the idealist at the barricades, speaks visionary words, "The true division of humanity is this: the luminous and the dark. To diminish the number of the dark - to increase the number of the luminous, there is the aim. That is why we cry - Education! Knowledge! To learn to read is to kindle a fire. Every syllable spelled sparkles. But, whoever says 'Light' does not necessarily say 'Joy'. There is suffering in the light, as excess burns. Flame is hostile to the wing. To burn and yet to fly! This is the miracle of genius."

In his poems the "voice" that has been heard by mystics of all ages rings out:

*Silent and calm, have you e're heaven's sight!
. . . I have listened, heard, and such a voice did ne'er
From such a mouth strike upon mortal ear!
First 'twas a voice, immense, vast, undefined,
More vague than through the forest sounds the wind;
Music it was, ineffable and deep,
Which vibrates, flows and round the world doth sweep,
And in the skies immense, its waves make young,
In large and larger orbits rolls along;*

And in the poem "Dreams," he writes:

*Let me in dreams ascend
To heavens of love and shade,
And let them never end,
But night the vision lend
That in the day was made.

It is a voice profound,
Creation's total song;
It is the Globe's vast sound
The world as it turns round
The heavenly space along.*

Madame Duclaux sums up Victor's mysticism and sense of vision when she writes, "Of all his poems, I imagine those Hugo preferred himself were what I call his gnostic poems - full of mystic doctrine and immortality, of divine indulgence - liberty, progress, duty. Anti-papist and anti-clerical, he was not anti-religious. He is a spiritualist - a believer in the soul."

He thinks the world evolves towards a glorious goal but that its path is veiled in mystery and shadow. Still he believes in life, infinitely larger than our existence - life which transcends our visible universe - which mounts from the stone to the tree, from the brute to the savage, from man to an unknown destiny, until at length, after centuries of varied incarnations, the individual soul should be absorbed in the eternal splendour."

His mystical and visionary attributes aside, Hugo stands as a great literary genius. In Victor Hugo A Tumultuous Life, Samuel Edwards summarizes many people's opinion of Hugo's work, when he says, "It is said, even by his detractors, that no one ever expressed the French language in such a unique fashion. Les Contemplations was a masterpiece world-wide. He was acclaimed as the greatest lyric poet of the century and one of the greatest who had ever lived. Rarely had any poet achieved such purity of conception, execution and style. 'A Ville Quier' (a tribute after the death of his daughter Leopoldine) is a lyric elegy of unsurpassed beauty and is recognized as one of the greatest poems ever written in the French language."

Beyond this, he expressed the heart of all great teachers in the words he once used in defense of Les Miserables: "If the radical is the Ideal, yes I am a radical. A society which admits poverty, a religion which admits Hell, a humanity which sanctions war seems to me an inferior society, religion and humanity and it is towards the higher society, the higher religion and humanity that I turn, society without a king, humanity without frontiers, religion without a book. Yes, I fight the priest who sells a lie and the judge who metes out injustice. Every man is a proprietor and no man a master. That is to me the true social and political economy."

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THE WORKS OF VICTOR HUGO

Les Contemplations
La Legende Des Siecles
Les Miserables
Notre Dame de Paris
Memoirs Les Ballades