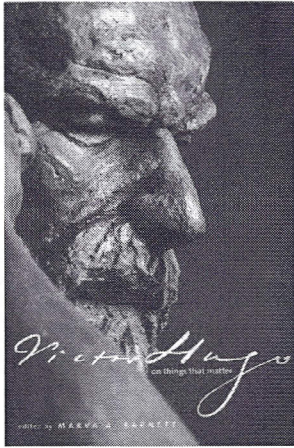


Marva Barnett's *Victor Hugo on Things That Matter*, Yale University Press – New Haven and London, 2010.



Victor Hugo was a literary giant of 19th century France, yet many British and American readers know him only through his popular novel *Les Misérables* and its musical adaptation. Thus the recent publication of Marva Barnett's *Victor Hugo on Things That Matter*, which introduces the Anglophone reader to the full range of Hugo's genius, is very welcome. The anthology is designed to give the reader the opportunity to gain insight into Hugo's ideas on personal and public matters as well as appreciate his literary talent. Much careful thought has gone into the book's organisation, making it a pleasure to explore. Hugo's works are grouped into two sections, "Private Life" and "Public Life", useful for understanding a writer who was deeply committed to social progress and humanitarian issues. Within each section, selections from Hugo's work are organised topically so that the reader can choose to head directly for a subject that interests him, such as love, children, grief, nature, religion, education, liberty, or humanity. This theme-based approach is ideal for realising the author's intention of helping the reader "make contact" with Hugo the man through his writings and engage with his ideas and thoughts on "things that matter".

The wide-ranging excerpts from Hugo's work, offered in the original French, are given biographical and historical context through introductions and notes in English. Barnett's overview of Hugo's life and ideas is lively and illuminating, valuable in its own right independently of the anthologized pieces. The author achieves the difficult balance of including a wealth of information without excessive detail or denseness. Some readers will simply enjoy browsing through this trove of literary treasures. But for the many who will be inspired to explore Hugo's life and work in more depth, the author has included annotations, critical references, a bibliography, suggestions for further reading, thumbnail sketches of major works and a biographical timeline.

Choosing representative texts from Hugo's impressively huge oeuvre is not a simple task. However, Barnett has made a wide-ranging and well-balanced selection from Hugo's novels, poetry, plays, letters, travel writing, speeches, and journal entries which will please both those looking for well-known pieces and those looking for something new. For example, the chapter "On Love and Passion" includes famous love poems and Hugo's own love letters. But it also offers selections that may surprise those Anglophone readers whose experience of "love" as portrayed by Hugo may be limited to Marius' and Cosette's romance in *Les Misérables*. Here they will discover, for example, impossible love across social boundaries from Hugo's play *Ruy Blas*, the obsessive, destructive passion of the priest Claude Frollo in an excerpt from *Notre-Dame de Paris*, and a scene of temptation from *L'Homme qui rit*.

Although there have been past exhibitions of Hugo's artwork in London and New York, and scenery inspired by Hugo's artwork is used in the new 25th anniversary production of *Les Misérables* that is touring the UK this year, this aspect of Hugo's talent is still largely unknown outside of France. Barnett's inclusion of twenty-five of Hugo's watercolours and drawings in her anthology should help to redress this. An original and well-conceived feature of this book is to integrate the images and the accompanying notes into the chapters alongside the text selections, allowing the reader to appreciate Hugo's artwork within the larger context of his overall creative output. Thus, for example, a section on love features a drawing of entwined initials created by Hugo for the name day of his mistress, Juliette Drouet, and in the chapter on social justice, the inclusion of Hugo's striking drawing of a hanged man, *ECCE*, illustrates Hugo's ability to transmit his ideas in images as well as the written word.

One of the author's stated aims is bring an appreciation of Hugo to 21st century Anglophone readers. However, the excerpts from Hugo's work are not translated, so although non-French speakers can still enjoy the author's informative background on Hugo's life and work on its own, full appreciation of the anthology is limited to English-speaking readers of French. As someone who believes passionately that the range of Hugo's genius deserves to be better known in the English-speaking world, I wish that this anthology, which succeeds so admirably in presenting the breadth and depth of Hugo's creativity, could have reached Anglophone readers who speak no French – particularly as it is these readers who are the most likely to be unfamiliar with Hugo's work. Admittedly, there would be technical

difficulties in providing translations. Much of Hugo's work has not yet been translated into English, and no English version of Hugo's complete works exists (due to the size of Hugo's oeuvre, translating his complete works is a daunting project but one that will hopefully be tackled by Hugo scholars in years to come). One must also consider that some of the magic of the language can be lost in a translation, particularly in poetry. Perhaps the ideal solution would be a parallel, wholly English-language version of *Victor Hugo on Things that Matter* that could be appreciated by English speakers with limited or no ability to read French – perhaps even inspiring them to learn French in order to read the originals! It is very much to be hoped that the author and publishers have such an edition in mind in the future.

Throughout, the book is animated with Barnett's own love and appreciation of Hugo's work and what emerges is not just a showcase of the writer's literary creations but an insight into "one great, intriguing mind". The reader gains an appreciation not only of the writer but of the man himself: his feelings, his character, his thoughts and his ideas that still speak to us today with their enduring optimism. *Victor Hugo on Things That Matter* is an important step in bringing Hugo to a deservedly wider world readership.

Andrea Beaghton

Marva Barnett a présenté son livre au Salon du livre Victor Hugo 2010.

Gérard Pouchain, *Dans les pas de... Victor Hugo en Normandie et aux îles anglo-normandes*, OREP éditions, 2010.

Gérard Pouchain connaît très bien son sujet : il guide chaque année touristes et amateurs de Victor Hugo en Normandie et dans les Iles-Anglo-normandes sur les pas de l'écrivain. Il a fait, dans ce beau volume, œuvre d'archéologue, reconstituant, en quelque sorte, les voyages de Hugo, revisitant avec lui les lieux qu'il a admirés, où il s'est promené, où il a vécu, aimé, écrit, souffert, été heureux, à partir de sources diverses et multiples : correspondances, carnets, récits de voyages, poèmes, romans et même pièces de théâtre. Les nombreuses notes, en marge sur la gauche et sur la droite, et en petits caractères, renvoient non seulement à ces sources mais les complètent avec d'autres citations et des éclairages historiques ou géographiques. Photos, dessins de Victor Hugo, gravures d'époque, accompagnent le texte tout au long de ces parcours comme des fenêtres ouvertes sur les paysages mais aussi sur ce passé recomposé à travers les lieux.

Gérard Pouchain a donc pris le parti judicieux de laisser les mots de Hugo nous conduire le long des côtes normandes, sur la Seine ou au bord de l'Océan, de nous faire écouter le fracas du vent avec ses phrases, de nous donner à voir le soleil mourir dans la mer avec son regard. Il établit de temps en temps des liens entre ces récits, pour apporter des précisions sur les dates, les circonstances dans lesquelles ces voyages ont été faits, évoquer les œuvres qui sont en gestation, rappeler les grands moments de la vie de l'écrivain liés aux lieux dont il est question. Les lettres ou notes de Juliette Drouet, qui accompagne la plupart du temps Hugo, apportent un supplément de saveur aux récits et aux poèmes, avec cette spontanéité de Juliette qui replace tout dans l'intensité de la vie, avec ses troubles, ses éclats de lumière comme ses tristesses. Dans une très belle lettre écrite à son amant au retour du voyage de l'été 1836 elle revit avec émotion les moments d'intense bonheur et ressuscite à merveille, pour eux et pour nous, l'atmosphère euphorique de ces découvertes à deux : « Que de chefs-d'œuvre m'ont ainsi exaltée parce que tu les aimais et que ta bouche savait m'en éclaircir le mystère ! Que de marches j'ai montées jusqu'aux sommets d'interminables tours parce que tu les montais devant moi ! Une fois dans les couloirs du Mont Saint-Michel, en visitant les cachots, j'ai gâté toute une robe, et je n'avais que celle-là, et je riais tout de même ! »

Gérard Pouchain a rassemblé bien d'autres témoignages des proches de Hugo sur les divers lieux évoqués. Ainsi, Auguste Vacquerie, dans son livre *Profils et grimaces* évoque le séjour de Villequier en 1846, trois ans après le drame, et son évocation poétique d'un rayon de lune sur la Seine, qui lui

