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ABSTRACT

This thesis demonstrates how 19th-century French author Victor Hugo used masculinity as a trope to illustrate the sociopolitical destruction of France under the Second Empire of Napoleon III. Using Hugo's collection of poems in *Les Châtiments* (1853) as the primary point of inquiry, analysis of his literary work and political interventions shows how the author depicted Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte as a tyrant whose tenure as Emperor precipitated the destruction of France's national sense of virility. Hugo in turn, I contend exhorts the French people to recuperate their virility in order to reject Napoleon III. Furthermore, I examine the historical relationship between Napoleon III and his uncle, Napoleon I, and how Napoleon III's appropriation of the symbolism that characterized Napoleon I allowed Hugo to emasculate Napoleon III for representing the antithesis to his uncle's likeness. Finally, this thesis explores how Hugo's literature and political activism revirilized France at the beginning of the Third Republic.

INTRODUCTION

There is perhaps no writer who had a more profound, lasting influence on the social identity of France during the 19th and early 20th centuries than Victor Hugo. His literature's impact on the lives of both his contemporaries and on successive generations is indelible, as it provided commentary on both contemporary happenings as well as the future of the country. While to many he is first and foremost an author and poet – the epitome of the *homme de lettres* – Hugo was also notable for his sociopolitical relationship with French republicanism, the Second Empire and Napoleon III, and the Third Republic.¹ His intervention in these areas enabled him to provide commentary on the social effects of the political landscape in Paris, not least of which was the political era's effect on the country's national sense of virility. The nexus between his literature and his political involvement – and the sociopolitical influence that flows from it – illustrates a facet of Hugolian studies that is critical to better understanding both the writer himself and the history of 19th- and 20th-century France.

The coup d'état of December 2nd, 1851 placed France and its people on a new

¹ Maurice Barrès, *Les Déracinés*, (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004), 168-169. Barrès notes that Hugo was more than just a “poet-statesman: he was a mystical leader, a modern soothsayer, and a sacred god.”

sociopolitical trajectory. As President Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte disbanded the National Assembly and, overnight, seized absolute control of the country, the Second Republic was dead, laying the foundation for the establishment and declaration of the Second Empire on the same day the following year. The imperial reign of Napoleon III brought about many intangible upheavals to French society. One of these developments relates to the nation's sense of virility and how the social destruction of the regime affected this conception vis-à-vis France's people. Victor Hugo, the Emperor's most outspoken critic and detractor, offers an acerbic commentary on Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte's reign and on his perception of its destructive effect on France's social wellbeing.²

He puts forth this commentary in a trilogy of texts that, taken together, encompass 25 years of widely circulated castigations against Napoleon III. The first of these texts is *Napoléon le petit* (1852), written while Hugo was in exile in Brussels. Only nine days after Louis-Napoleon declared himself supreme ruler of France on December 2, Hugo fled the country, knowing his criticisms of the new supreme ruler made him a vulnerable subject of the regime. In fact, exactly one month after fleeing, the *Constitutionnel* of January 11 published that he was expelled from France and all of its occupied territories.³ While in Brussels, Hugo penned this 200 page political pamphlet in order to expose Louis-Napoleon's coming to power in 1848 – at the time as President of the Second

² Brian Joseph Martin, *Napoleonic Friendship: Military Fraternity, Intimacy & Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France*, (Durham, NH: University Press of New England, 2011), 294. Martin explains Hugo's development from a stalwart supporter of Napoleon I to a "fervent anti-Napoleonic republican, exile, and opponent of Napoleon III."

³ William VanderWolk. *Victor Hugo in Exile: from Historical Representations to Utopian Vistas*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006), 67. "In the name of the French: Louis-Napoléon, President of the Republic, decrees: 'Expelled from French territory, from Algeria and from the colonies, for reasons of general security: the former representatives of the legislative Assembly whose names follow...' (January 11, 1852). One of those names was of course Victor Hugo, who took refuge in Belgium."

Republic – and the betrayal of his oath to defend the Constitution. Although Louis-Napoleon’s mandate as president was to run until the second Sunday in May 1852, his promise to cede power was unfounded as he launched the coup d’état that would lead to his becoming emperor one year later.⁴ As William VanderWolk notes on the subject of this text, “Hugo’s premise is simple: since Louis violated the constitution at every turn after December 2, 1851, he should be ousted from power and replaced by a legitimate republican government.”⁵ In order to make public his primary goal, Hugo penned *Napoléon le petit*, appropriately named to illustrate the dichotomy in his opinion of Louis-Napoleon and his uncle – Napoleon I – the great emperor whom Hugo revered.⁶

After moving from Brussels in 1852 to the English Channel island of Jersey, Hugo continued his derision of Louis-Napoleon in *Les Châtiments* (1853), the polemical companion piece to *Napoléon le petit*. Writing this time in verse, Hugo continued his endeavor to illustrate for his countrymen the truth about their unbridled, tyrannical leader. As VanderWolk explains, “The poet in exile is in a privileged position. He can see what the people cannot. He is not blinded by fear nor influenced by propaganda nor burdened by crushing poverty and a lack of education.”⁷ Hugo capitalizes on this opportunity with *Les Châtiments*, and further solidifies his role as a sociopolitical commentator through this lengthy, detailed, and intricately crafted collection of poems.

It would be another 24 years before Hugo would publish the last work of his scornful trilogy, *Histoire d’un crime* (1877). Although he began writing it while in exile –

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Victor Hugo. *Napoléon le petit*, (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1875), 294. “Désormais 1848, la fraternité, se superpose à 1793, la terreur; Napoléon le Petit se superpose à Napoléon le Grand.”

⁷ VanderWolk, *Victor Hugo in Exile*, 111.

titled at the time *Histoire du 2 décembre* – and abandoned it to focus more on his political writing, by the time of its publication, Hugo’s role had shifted from the *poète engagé* – imploring his people to understand and act upon his revelations – to that of an historian chronicling the rise, tenure, and downfall of his primary adversary.⁸

Hugo’s collection of poetry *Les Châtiments* (1853) is the grounding primary text upon which I base my analysis for two principal reasons. First, Hugo’s poetry offers a nuanced conduit for analyzing the political history of the country and time period. It is far more advanced an historical account; it is personally expressive, emotional, motivated by experience and perspective, and is rich in its multifaceted way of presenting social, political, and historical commentary through not only content but also through literary form and technique. Hugo establishes a new role for the poet: no longer aloof or distanced from history, he is engaged in the political process, and his ideas find full voice through his poems.⁹ Second, *Les Châtiments*, as a collection of satirical poems, offers a multifaceted narrative of the late 19th and early 20th centuries; it is a monumental source of nuanced commentary on the subject of the Second Empire and Napoleon III, as well as Third Republic France.

One of the consequences of studying a prolific writer like Victor Hugo and the time period around which his life’s work is centered is that both have been analyzed by renowned scholars and experts in the field of Hugolian studies. However, when taking into account Hugo’s poetry in *Les Châtiments* as a singular text, Hugo’s deployment of national virility and conceptions of masculinity is a privileged lens through which we can

⁸ Michael Garval, *A Dream of Stone: Fame, Vision, and Monumentality in Nineteenth-century French Literary Culture*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 179.

⁹ VanderWolk, *Victor Hugo in Exile*, 111.

push Hugolian studies and view more deeply the social effects of the politics of the Second Empire and Napoleon III.¹⁰ Over the course of the Second Empire (1852-1870) and the early Third Republic (1871-1940), France looked inward to refocus and regain its self-conception of national virility and masculinity: the military was humiliated by the end of the Franco-Prussian War; the country lost part of its symbolic body with the surrender of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany; the French people – as a nation – was in near-complete disorder after decades of upheaval in the political regime and social order. As such, I take masculinity as the focus of my analysis, studying the ways in which Hugo mobilizes masculinity and emasculation in his critique of the Second Empire and prospectively figures France’s recovery from Napoleon III’s reign as a process of remasculation.

My analysis in Chapter One centers upon Hugo’s commentary on Napoleon III and how his work in *Les Châtiments* renders the Emperor’s usurpation of power as an emasculation of France and its people. Tying together this primary text from Hugo – including poems such as “Le Sacre,” “Le manteau impérial,” “O drapeau de Wagram,” “Le parti du crime” – and a cross-section of secondary analyses on the time period relating to masculinity and the historical context of the national narrative surrounding it, I aim to show how Hugo’s work attributes, in part, this debasement of French conceptions of masculinity, virility, and overall humanity to the aggression and oppression experienced by France’s people during the Second Empire.

I continue my analysis in Chapter Two by discussing how Hugo counters this

¹⁰ Bradley Stephens, *‘État présent’: Victor Hugo*, *French Studies*, vol 63: 1, 2000. Stephens points out that the relationship between Hugo and masculinity in 19th century France is an historical question of literary analysis that has yet to be fully explored.

narrative by shifting focus to detract from – and attack – Napoleon III through his poetry in *Les Châtiments*, which in turn emasculates the Emperor. It is well established that the anthology serves as a pulpit from which Hugo decries the emperor as a despotic tyrant and destructive force upon France and its people. A consideration of the ways in which tropes of masculinity modulate this attack permits an analysis of the relationship between Hugo's literature and his sociopolitical commentary, and illustrates how his work in *Les Châtiments* was not only a derision of Napoleon III, but also a retorting narrative of emasculation against his own portrayal of the French people's emasculation by Napoleon III, as seen in Chapter I.

I finish my analysis in Chapter Three by taking a step forward and looking into how Hugo's poetry in *Les Châtiments* – as well as his stature as a preeminent figure in French society – provided a conduit for remasculating France at the end of the Second Empire and the beginning of the Third Republic. It is critical to emphasize not only the ramifications of Hugo's work at the time he was alive and that they were published, but also the posthumous implications of his work and the stimulation that he provided to France in rebuilding its national sense of virility and masculinity.

All together, the intersection between Victor Hugo, the Second Empire and Third Republic, *Les Châtiments*, and the theme of masculinity provides a crossroads of analysis that contributes much to modern Hugolian studies. Analyzing the effect of this era on the country's national sense of virility – through the lens of Hugo's literature – is crucial to our understanding of France's history as it offers not merely an historical account of 19th and 20th century France by a prolific writer; it is a subtle yet powerful narration of – and window into – the consciousness of the people who occupied this space and the poet who

immortalized their history. Each facet of this project's analysis is independently worthy of study; however, it is their interdependence that renders each piece more relevant in the broader context of Hugo's literature and the insight we can glean both historically and contemporarily of France and its people. As we endeavor to refine our knowledge and deepen our understanding of Hugo as an historical commentator and keeper of the collective memory of his country, the unique and distinct vantage point from which these topics are approached herein further advances the study of one of France's – and the world's – most monumental literary figures.

CHAPTER I: NAPOLEON III: EMASCULATING FRANCE

The tyrannical reign of Napoleon III brought about many intangible upheavals in French society, and Victor Hugo uses the theme of masculinity to characterize Napoleon's deleterious effect on France and the French people. In his collection of poems *Les Châtiments* (1853), Hugo, perhaps the new emperor's most outspoken critic and opponent, offers a satirical account of the reign of Napoleon III and his own perception of its destructive effect on French society; the anthology illustrates very clearly not only his personal disdain for the Emperor, but also references the Emperor's effect on the masculine vitality of France and its people, which comes to stand for their national sense of virility. Hugo possessed a strong belief that Napoleon III was precipitating the emasculative destruction of France, and that that Emperor was a malevolent force whose crimes – disbanding the National Assembly, staging a coup d'état, and returning France to an imperial state – were not only literal crimes against the Constitution which he swore an oath to defend, but also – and more perniciously – implicit crimes against the dignity of his citizenry and country.¹¹ As David Baguley states, Hugo was obsessed with

¹¹ Victor Hugo. *Napoléon le petit*, (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1875), 1. The sacredness of the Constitution is summarized in an excerpt from the election commission of the Constituent Assembly: "By this admirable execution of the fundamental law the nation

bringing to the public eye “the iniquities of the coup d’état, the inadequacies of its main perpetrator, the illegality of the violation of the Constitution, [and] the heinous defilement of the Republic.”¹² Hugo’s poetic commentary suggests that he perceived a great deal of undesirable, destructive force resulting from Napoleon III, and that he felt the Emperor was degrading Hugo’s beloved country and his venerated people – a denigration made manifest in the poems, as we will see in this chapter, by recurrent references to Napoleon III’s emasculation of the French, and by the poet’s exhortations to his people to resist this desubjectivating force.

This sentiment is evident beginning in Book V of *Les Châtiments* in “Le sacre,” wherein Hugo describes what is happening to the epicenter of French society, Paris – and by extension, the country as a whole – as a result of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte’s coronation as Napoleon III: “Dans l’affreux cimetière, / Paris tremble, ô douleur, ô misère! / Dans l’affreux cimetière / Frémit le nénuphar.”¹³ In this stanza, Hugo draws a connection between Paris and a cemetery, using natural imagery to situate his metaphor of Paris sitting in a burial ground. This is evocative on multiple levels. First, Hugo insinuates that Paris is actually situated *in* the cemetery: it is trembling in pain and misery. The idea of being in the cemetery is particularly noteworthy because Hugo does not go so far as to say that Paris is dead. He conveys the message that although the city and its people are in the cemetery, the depository of all things dead, the city is not completely dead or beyond the point of resurrection, of life, of saving itself; he leaves the

places the sanction of its inviolable power in the Constitution, which it thereby renders sacred and inviolable.”

¹² David Baguley, *Napoleon III and His Regime: an Extravaganza*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 32.

¹³ Victor Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1973), “L’autorité est sacrée,” 1-4.

door open to recovery. Second, which further solidifies the former point in its evocation of the natural beauty of his country, Hugo mentions that Paris, represented by a water lily, is trembling. This metaphor ties back to the representation of France as an unshakeable yet vulnerable beauty, both extrinsically and intrinsically, which needs the attention of its people in order to be spared from the ruthless destruction of Napoleon III; in this metaphorical cemetery, the beautiful flower that is Paris is trembling on the verge of death.¹⁴

In subsequent stanzas, Hugo repeats the allusion to Paris trembling in pain and misery, and concludes by taking direct aim at Louis-Napoleon:

“Regardez, le saint-père,
Portant sa grande croix,
Nous sacre tous ensemble,
O misère, ô douleur, Paris tremble!
Nous sacre tous ensemble
Dans Napoléon trois !”¹⁵

Here, Hugo draws upon a religious allusion to God himself, saying God has crowned together the people, represented metonymically by Paris, as and in one body, representing France in its entirety: Napoleon III. He puts forward the notion that Paris is, and by extension the people of France are, assimilated into one singular body represented by Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte and his Second Empire.

For two principle reasons this is an exceptionally telling example of Hugo’s implicit suggestion that Napoleon III was emasculating his people and his country.

¹⁴ John Andrew Frey, *A Victor Hugo Encyclopedia*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 56. The author notes “Le Sacre” “mocks the coronation of Napoleon III as that of bandits who have stolen and raped French liberty.”

¹⁵ Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, “L’ autorité est sacrée,” 67-72.

First, Hugo invokes religion in his poem in a very nuanced way. When he references *le saint-père*, the words are not capitalized, which likely indicates that the reference is not to God himself; rather, Hugo mockingly refers to Napoleon III as a self-anointed, God-like figure who has unilaterally, with absolute authority, and without merit¹⁶ consecrated the people in his own body and image. Second, Hugo explicitly presents not only a personal opinion but a reality of the time, that the people, no longer in possession of their National Assembly or of their Constitution, have lost their political agency, their influence over their own government and thus their country. Hugo puts forward a succinct summary of this sentiment in *Napoléon le petit*, saying “La frégate la Constitution a été débaptisée, et s'appelle la frégate l'Élysée.”¹⁷ When he rejected and disbanded these institutions of the Second Republic, Louis-Napoleon symbolically rejected a portion of France’s national virility, by taking the power of the people that is consecrated in the Constitution of the Second Republic and centralizing it in his own personal authority, represented by the Emperor’s residence, *le palais de l'Élysée*; he stripped them of their agency, the ability to yield fruit from their vote, and concentrated all political influence in himself.

A similar concern with the divestment of popular authority from the people to Napoleon III animates “Le manteau impérial,” in which Hugo exhorts the imperial symbols adorning the emperor’s cloak to turn against the leader who has appropriated

¹⁶ J.C. Ireson, *Victor Hugo: a Companion to his Poetry*, (England: Clarendon Press, 1997), 115. “...Hugo casts him [Napoleon III] in two recurring roles. These are summarized respectively in the word *bandit* and in the name Robert Macaire. The one is designed to ensure that the stigma of the marauding outlaw clings to him, the other to expose him as a shabby adventurer posturing as a wealthy ruler.”

¹⁷ Hugo, *Napoléon le petit*, 23.

them.¹⁸ In this poem, the voice of the poem addresses himself to the imperial bee, perhaps the most famous of the imperial Napoleonic symbols. The bee, seen as a feverishly hardworking animal, was used as a metaphorical representation of the hardworking spirit of the French people.¹⁹ This poem is particularly nuanced in its approach, as Hugo, ostensibly addressing the *abeilles* on the imperial cloak, is simultaneously addressing his fellow countrymen.

In the second stanza, Hugo exclaims

“Chastes buveuses de rosée,
Qui, pareilles à l’épousée,
Visitez le lys du coteau,
O sœurs des corolles vermeilles,
Filles de la lumière, abeilles,
Envolez-vous de ce manteau!”²⁰

He invokes indigenous, natural imagery to cement the idea that the French people are beautiful and pure. He calls them chaste, and references them frequenting the white of the Lys flower, which is the actual symbol of virginity, candor, innocence, purity, and royalty.²¹ Phrases like “sisters of Vermillion petals” and “daughters of light” lend themselves not to a feminization of the French people, but to an image of natural beauty in an unsullied state. Hugo compels them at the end of the stanza, however, to “fly away

¹⁸ Frey, *A Victor Hugo Encyclopedia*, 56. The author notes “Le manteau impérial” focuses “on the bee icon which was found on the imperial cloaks, sullied now by Napoleon III. The bees recall France’s glorious past, and the hope is expressed that the usurper will be chased from his office by a swarm of black flies.”

¹⁹ Guy Rosa and Jean-Marie Gleize, in Victor Hugo, *Les Châtiments* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1973), 207 n1. “Celui de Napoléon était semé d’abeilles d’or brodées, choisies parce qu’elles représentent l’activité du peuple français et devenues emblème de l’Empire.”

²⁰ Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, “Le manteau impérial,” 7-12.

²¹ Rosa and Gleize, in Victor Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, 207 n6.

from this coat!” in a call to arms for the French people to reject their emperor and not to permit him the opportunity to appropriate the nectar of their labors and the beauty of their very being for himself, or the imagery, history, and tradition of French royalty that he is desecrating as Emperor. Henri Pena-Ruez and Jean-Paul Scot explain how “En exil, Hugo ne cesse de rêver à la future révolution qui renversa l’Empire en France,” which further explains Hugo’s cry to his people to take flight and reject Napoleon III.²²

While it does not visibly present itself early on, the recurrence to the *topos* of emasculation becomes clearer in subsequent stanzas. Hugo’s call to action continues in the following stanza, where he says

“Ruez-vous sur l’homme, guerrières !
O généreuses ouvrières,
Vous le devoir, vous la vertu,
Ailes d’or et flèches de flamme,
Tourbillonnez sur cet infâme !
Dites-lui : « Pour qui nous prends-tu ?”²³

In asking his people – “hard work and virtue” – to swarm the Emperor, he is explicitly compelling them – appealing to their sense of duty – to reject the despotism of Napoleon III. He tells them to ask their Emperor “For whom do you take us?” in an appeal to their collective pride as a nation. It is evident that Hugo perceives Louis-Napoleon’s actions as an affront to their pride, and by extension, their masculinity, and wishes for the French people to recognize and understand the plight they have implicitly earned themselves. As William VanderWolk notes, “The ultimate force in Hugo’s universe is his notion of

²² Henri Pena-Ruiz, *Un Poète En Politique: Les Combats De Victor Hugo*, (Paris: Flammarion, 2002), 274.

²³ Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, “Le manteau impérial,” 13-18.

progress,”²⁴ and Hugo frames the societal progression of the French people as predicated upon their revirilization. Hugo uses masculinity as a metaphor for criticizing Napoleon III and for encouraging the French to rise up and fight his Empire, and this sentiment is presented in this poem.

The notion that Napoleon III has emasculated the people in assuming his uncle’s symbolic cloak is grammatically reinforced by the gender of the poem’s central metaphor. In likening the people to the feminine *abeilles*, Hugo feminizes his depiction of the French warriors and workers (the feminine *guerrières and ouvrières*) he enjoins to rise up and assemble themselves, to swarm their leader, and to overthrow his authority in a collective act of defiance. Moreover, by using the feminine *abeilles* to represent the French people, a species where the females possess all of the power, Hugo is saying that the feminized French people are the real possessors of power and political agency, despite Louis-Napoleon’s appropriation of virility and authority. Franck Laurent summarizes Hugo’s call to action very effectively, saying “Il s’agit de dénoncer l’assassin (de telle manière qu’il fasse rire qu’horreur), de saluer les morts et les martyrs, mais aussi de réveiller les vivants, d’appeler à la résistance en clamant l’indignation et en donnant des raisons plausibles d’espérer et d’agir.”²⁵

This appeal to the spirit and national pride of the French people carries on into the final poem in Book V, “O drapeau de Wagram,” wherein Hugo openly extols the virtues of his country and his people, playing into their collective identity as *citoyens* and the disparity between what that history ought to have precipitated for a country of such rich

²⁴ VanderWolk, *Victor Hugo in Exile*, 143.

²⁵ Franck Laurent, *Victor Hugo : Espace et Politique, jusqu’à l’exil : 1823-1852*, (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008), 242.

history and national grandeur, and what is the abhorrent status quo under Napoleon III.

The poem begins

“O drapeau de Wagram ! ô pays de Voltaire !
Puissance, liberté, vieil honneur militaire,
Principes, droits, pensée, ils font en ce moment
De toute cette gloire un vaste abaissement.”²⁶

Hugo communicates that despite all of the glory that is incumbent upon a country that won the Battle of Wagram, that produced Voltaire, that codified personal liberties and republican principles, the country is experiencing a lowering of status, a debasement, and humiliation; the people and their country are being stripped of their vigor. He illustrates a dichotomy between the dignity and prosperity that is incumbent upon the French people and their current plight to show the people in clear terms how the Second Empire and Napoleon III are beneath the dignity that has been earned and for which history has paid in French blood and French accomplishment. As Baguley notes, “Hugo’s overt aim in castigating the leader of the coup d’état was to shake the French out of the torpor which, ‘for a nation, is shame.’”²⁷

Hugo continues his dialogue with the people and expounds the malfeasance of Napoleon III in “Le parti du crime” with a long and impassioned poem. While calling upon his countrymen in France to rise up against the tyrannical emperor, Hugo laces the poem with both explicit indications that point to Louis-Napoleon’s emasculative force, as well as phrases that, by implication, further elaborate upon the theme of France and its people’s masculinity being insidiously oppressed. Referring to Napoleon III, Hugo writes

²⁶ Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, “O drapeau de Wagram,” 1-4.

²⁷ Baguley, *Napoleon III and His Regime*, 33.

“Il a tué les lois et le gouvernement,
La justice, l’honneur, tout, jusqu’à l’espérance ;
Il a rougi de sang, de ton sang pur, ô France,
Tous nos fleuves, depuis la Seine jusqu’au Var ;
Il a conquis le Louvre en méritant Clamar ;
Et maintenant il règne, appuyant, ô patrie,
Son vil talon fangeux sur ta bouche meurtrie...”²⁸

In J.C. Iresson’s chapter on Victor Hugo as the “guardian of political values,” he quotes Hugo’s proclamation in the rue Blanche after Louis-Napoleon’s revision of the Constitution, saying “Louis-Napoléon est un traître! / Il a violé la Constitution! / Il s’est parjuré. Il est hors la loi.”²⁹ Hugo exclaims that Louis-Napoleon violated – raped – the Constitution and the government. If France and its Second Republic created a government that in turn created a Constitution, then to violate, rape, or kill such an institution is to commit the same transgressions against the creation of its creator; to kill the government and its progeny, its Constitution, is to violate, rape, and kill the progeny of the people itself.

Napoleon III is further charged with tearing apart his country by turning its rivers red with the pure blood of its citizens, and by placing his vile, dirty claw on their wounded mouths. These phrases are particularly evocative, if not provocative, as they precipitate the feeling of a people being not only murdered but also violated in the process. For a people to be murdered to the extent that its blood is seen even hyperbolically as turning a river red is egregious as it stands; to sully the purity of a person, to have a dirty hand placed on one’s mouth is to make the act even more pernicious, to the point of degradation, humiliation, and dehumanization. This is further

²⁸ Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, “Le parti du crime,” 20-26.

²⁹ Iresson, *Victor Hugo: a Companion to his Poetry*, 105.

supported later in the poem: first, when Hugo states “les morts, vierge, enfant, vieillards et femmes / Ont à peine eu le temps de pourrir dans leurs fosses !”³⁰ Neither virgin nor child, neither elderly man nor woman was spared from the destruction of Napoleon III, which is a striking indication of his ruthlessness and lack of regard and deference for his people. Second, Hugo writes that the people must take action “Pour réconcilier le palais et l’échoppe, / Pour faire reflourir la fleur Fraternité” and

“Pour tirer les martyrs de ces bagnes infâmes,
Pour rendre aux fils le père et les maris aux femmes,
Pour qu’enfin ce grand siècle et cette nation
Sortent du Bonaparte et de l’abjection.”³¹

In both instances of description regarding the tumult brought on by Napoleon III, Hugo’s commentary to this effect suggests that Louis-Napoleon’s actions not only tore apart and defiled France’s institutions, but that his actions transcended the institutional and extended themselves to the very physical and emotional being of all French citizens. Moreover, by imploring the people to persevere so that at the end of the century they are freed of Louis-Napoleon and his abject Second Empire, Hugo portends that the people will get back their husbands and sons; he suggests that to rid themselves of Napoleon III is to regain the buttressing masculinity of which they have been robbed. Baguley observes Hugo’s hopeful sentiment in these lines, noting, “The tormented innocent is the Republic herself, defiled by the usurper, but redeemed in the end.”³²

The tone surrounding Hugo’s denouncement of Louis-Napoleon’s emasculation shifts as he enters Book VI, “La stabilité est assurée,” where Hugo moves away from his

³⁰ Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, “Le parti du crime,” 85-86.

³¹ *Ibid.* 131-131, 133-136.

³² Baguley, *Napoleon III and His Regime*, 43.

exhortation to the French people and begins to address Louis-Napoleon directly to enumerate a series of charges against the emperor. “Napoleon III” taps into this through an overwhelmingly militaristic lens, alluding to a series of persons and battles whose macabre outcomes are ascribed to Napoleon III. Hugo charges “C’est pour toi qu’on livra ces combats inouïs !” and “C’est pour toi qu’à travers la flamme et la fumée / Les grenadiers pensifs s’avançaient à pas lents !”³³ Hugo chastises Napoleon III, saying it is because of him that the French people delivered unknown soldiers to their deaths, and that soldiers walk slowly to battle, which is a stunning indictment of the Emperor’s effect on French masculinity as it relates to French militiamen. The second part is particularly noteworthy because of the word *flamme*. Both figuratively and literally, as the soldiers walked across the flames and fires in slow steps, Hugo taps into the military pride and love of country that is endemic throughout France’s history, projecting the notion that Napoleon III robbed them of the national pride that is characteristic to French militiamen, causing them to walk over flames and into battle with a lack of pride or sense of national virility; they are burdened with their task as opposed to empowered by it. This is echoed in *Napoleon le petit*, where Hugo says Napoleon III “ne sera jamais que l’étrangleur nocturne de la liberté; il ne sera jamais que l’homme qui a soulé les soldats, non avec de la gloire, comme le premier Napoléon, mais avec du vin; il ne sera jamais que le tyran pygmée d’un grand peuple.”³⁴

The militaristic hue of the country’s emasculation in this poem turns very personal as Hugo wades into how his own family has been affected by Louis-Napoleon’s reign. With his son Charles having been imprisoned for penning an editorial opposing

³³ Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, “Napoléon III,” 13, 16-17.

³⁴ Hugo, *Napoleon le petit*, 192.

capital punishment, Hugo's attacks become more personally motivated.³⁵ He laments "C'est pour toi que mon père et mes oncles vaillants / Ont répandu leur sang dans ces guerres épiques ! / Pour toi qu'ont fourmillé les sabres et les piques," showing how Hugo counts himself and his family among those who were *abaissé[s]* and emasculated by Napoleon III.³⁶ From Hugo's perspective, his family shed blood not for *la patrie* but for a despotic man so that he could drink with pretty women.³⁷

At the end of "Napoléon III," the poem turns back to France as a collective unit as Hugo addresses what Louis-Napoleon's military campaigns have done symbolically to the country. Hugo writes, addressing the Emperor directly

"C'est pour toi qu'agitant le pin et le bouleau,
Le vent fait aujourd'hui, sous ses âpres haleines,
Blanchir tant d'ossements, hélas ! dans tant de plaines !"³⁸

Using the natural symbolism of pines and birches, trees that characterize the northern and southern regions of France, Hugo compares his people to trees that have been stripped of their foliage by a rough wind that has torn them down to their bones. His language is a strong indication that the battles waged by Louis-Napoleon, and thus the man himself, have taken the French people from thick, full trees to bare-boned skeletons; Baguley remarks that Hugo sees "Louis-Napoleon [as] the crucifier of the French nation," which supports the sentiment that their Emperor has torn apart their strength and robustness as a people, and dehumanized them collectively from the North to the

³⁵ Baguley, *Napoleon III and His Regime*, 39.

³⁶ Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, "Napoléon III," 18-20.

³⁷ Ibid. 24. "Pour que tu puisses boire avec de belles filles."

³⁸ Rosa and Gleize, in Victor Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, 252 n6. "Soit du Nord de l'Europe à la Méditerranée."

Mediterranean.³⁹

Hugo continues to push his appeal to the hearts and minds of his countrymen to rise up against Louis-Napoleon's destructive, emasculative force in "Applaudissement," where he enumerates his points of contention with the society Napoleon III has promoted and created. Relating almost entirely to the corrupt, opulent lifestyles of those at the top of the socio-economic ladder, Hugo illustrates how the French citizenry have implicitly permitted the Emperor and his liaisons to accumulate staggering masses of wealth at the citizens' expense. Hugo writes about

"Des maréchaux dorés sur toutes les coutures,
Un Paris qu'on refait tout à neuf, des voitures
À huit chevaux, entrant dans le Louvre à grand bruit,
Des fêtes tout le jour, des bals toute la nuit,
Des lampions, des jeux, des spectacles ; en somme,
Tu t'es prostituée à ce misérable homme !"⁴⁰

While the opulence of the newly fashioned Second Empire itself incenses Hugo, the poet likewise condemns the implicit permission that he feels the people have given Louis-Napoleon. In his view, they have prostituted themselves to this despotic man and accepted this reality for the sake of that opulence, giving him the latitude to degrade and dehumanize the people through his vicious agenda, and to consolidate national wealth – the product of French labor – at the highest inner circles of political and military power.⁴¹ This sentiment is further discussed later in the poem, where Hugo laments

³⁹ Baguley, *Napoleon III and His Regime*, 36.

⁴⁰ Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, "Applaudissement," 13-18.

⁴¹ Ireson, *Victor Hugo: a Companion to his Poetry*, 114. "The technique is to ignore as far as possible the transition and the growing stability of the regime and to flay more

“Ton âme est comme un chien sous le pied qui l’écrase ;
Ton fier quatrevingt-neuf reçoit des coups de fouet
D’un gueux qu’hier encor l’Europe bafouait.
Tes propres souvenirs, folle, tu les lapides.
La Marseillaise est morte à tes lèvres stupides.”⁴²

This is one of the most poignant examples of Hugo’s appeal to his people’s emotions, as he blends the personal, individual experience with the collective, national experience and aims to show how Napoleon III is destroying both. He compares the French spirit to a dog that is being stepped upon, and says that the revolution of 1789 and the Marseillaise – two of the country’s proudest national symbols – are being whipped, stoned by a man they have let take control of their country. This commentary is suggestive of a country and a people being dehumanized by a leader who treats them as abused animals and eviscerates the symbols of their collective, proud history. Furthermore, Hugo continues his attribution of a female gender to the people, most notably using words like *folle* and *stupides* in his description of their apathy, which further suggests Hugo’s interpretation of a feminized country.

The poems discussed in Books V and VI of *Les Châtiments* make use of emasculation as a metaphor for the intangible effects of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte’s reign during the Second Empire. Hugo harbors a strong disdain for Napoleon III, *le petit*, and he vilifies him without hindrance throughout the anthology. What becomes clear after analyzing the subtleties of his poetry, however, are the nuanced depictions of how Hugo uses masculinity and emasculation to characterize the destructive nature of the Second Empire. Hugo’s commentary on Louis-Napoleon’s policies, agenda, military

fiercely than ever the seedy and rapacious figure which he presents as the leader of a gang bent on its own prosperity.”

⁴² Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, “Applaudissement,” 30-34.

campaigns, gallivanting, lavish corruption, and his own desire for a popular uprising suggest that Hugo himself Napoleon III as a dehumanizing force, and that he felt the Emperor was emasculating his people and his country as he consolidated his absolute power. Hugo believed that Napoleon III was enough of a liability to the future of France and its people that he felt compelled to pen a bona fide plea to his people, to reawaken and appeal to their collective, national *esprit*, and to provoke the country as a whole to save its honor, pride, and masculinity. Looking into Chapter II, we will see how Hugo compounds his characterization of the Second Empire's destruction by applying the metaphor of masculinity and emasculation to the Emperor himself.

CHAPTER II: HUGO'S EMASCULATION OF NAPOLEON III

In this chapter we continue with the metaphor of emasculation characterizing Victor Hugo's interpretation of Napoleon III and the Second Empire's destructive influence on French society. Here, however, the analysis shifts to how Hugo uses masculinity and emasculation as a metaphor to characterize his sentiments towards Napoleon III. In the poem *L'Expiation*, Hugo lays out vociferously and unreservedly a comparative indictment of Napoleon III relative to his uncle, Napoleon I. The poem is a scathing critique of Napoleon III, as it delineates the downfall of Napoleon I and, in Hugo's vision, the divergent relationship he shares with his nephew; it personifies the title of the anthology by showing how Napoleon III is the definitive punishment for the actions of his uncle, and how the new Emperor represented the antithesis of his uncle's reputation.⁴³ Hugo uses powerful images, cunning metaphors, and both implicit and explicit symbolism to illustrate this point. By criticizing Napoleon III directly and by drawing comparisons between him and Napoleon I, Hugo depicts Napoleon III as the

⁴³ Stefan Dudink, *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 24. "He was, quite literally, a caricature of martial virility as Republican satire delighted in pointing out, beginning with Victor Hugo's epic poem predicting the humiliation of the new Emperor by God and History."

ultimate punishment to his uncle, greater than the perceived punishments experienced by Napoleon I and his army over the course of his tenure as Emperor. In doing so, Hugo emasculates Napoleon III and provides a retorting and competing narrative of emasculation against his own portrayal of the French people's emasculation by Napoleon III, which we saw in Chapter I.

Hugo's emasculation of Napoleon III does not begin *L'Expiation*, but rather it progresses out of the beginning of the poem, wherein Hugo depicts a sleeping Napoleon I being awakened to a conversation with God. As Hugo describes the military defeats of Napoleon I, the late emperor asks God if the ensuing aftermaths are his punishment, to which God responds no each time. It is curious that the poem starts with Napoleon I as the focus of inquiry, as while the poem develops into a scathing criticism of Napoleon III, the focus of the early stages is on the last moments of the military campaigns and imperial life of Napoleon I. Although it may appear cursory, the chronicling of Napoleon I serves as a preamble to the more direct criticism of his nephew while functioning as a starting point and frame of reference for why Napoleon III is a punishment to his uncle. This sequencing of the poem illustrates not only how Hugo's representations of each emperor's political grandeur and masculinity were proportional to each other, but also the relationship between Hugo's reverence of Napoleon I and the Emperor's symbolic construction of masculinity; Hugo's perception of these two qualities in Napoleon I affected, by comparison, a weakened perception of each in Napoleon III.

Hugo's emasculation of Napoleon III is set in motion as he delineates the chronology of Napoleon Bonaparte's military conquests in the context of a sleeping, dead Napoleon I in conversation with God. Napoleon I asks God whether or not his retreat

from Russia in 1812, the subsequent Battle of Waterloo in 1815, his exile, or the ensuing dissolution of the First Empire is the singular punishment – *le châtement* – for his seizure and recreation of imperial power during the 18 Brumaire.⁴⁴ After God responds saying “no” through to Part VI, Hugo shifts focus in Part VII and becomes directly and unequivocally critical of Napoleon III in his commentary. While still in the context of a sleeping Napoleon I who is awakening to his punishment, Hugo arrives at the crescendo of the poem and expounds upon the malevolence of the former emperor’s nephew, Napoleon “le petit,” framing his tenure as emperor and his Second Empire as the greatest punishment and insult to his uncle. Hugo uses Louis-Napoleon’s appropriation of his uncle’s virile authority to illustrate how the Emperor’s use of his uncle’s image is the more egregious punishment than the military defeats and dehumanization experienced by Napoleon I and his army.

Hugo begins his chronology of history in *L’Expiation* at the outset of the poem, where Napoleon I, the once mighty, formidable political and military leader has just been served a catastrophic, surprising defeat in Moscow: it debases and degrades both the Emperor and his army, resulting from a loss of political and military clout. The poem reads “On ne connaissait plus les chefs ni le drapeau,”⁴⁵ which prompts the question of whom the “on” represents. It is fair to conclude that at this point that “on” has the French people, and particularly the French army as its subject, a people and its army who have become so dehumanized by their leader and their flag that they no longer recognize

⁴⁴ Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: the Sense of History*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 25. “In 1799 Napoleon returned unexpectedly to France from his Egyptian campaign, reached Paris on October 16 with massive popular support, and took control of the Directory in the coup d’état of 18 Brumaire (actually 18-19 Brumaire; November 9-10)”

⁴⁵ Victor Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1973), “L’Expiation,” 7.

neither that for which they are fighting nor for whom they are fighting. Out of this battle, confusion ensues: they have lost their way, their sense of self, and their ability to identify with the flag of their country. This loss of virility and clout is further signaled later in this passage of the poem, where Hugo notes that “les grenadiers, surpris d’être tremblants, / Marchaient pensifs, la glace à leur moustache grise.”⁴⁶ The military officers are surprised by their current situation of defeat.⁴⁷ It is as though they possessed an air of invincibility flowing from their leader, Napoleon I, and they are incredulous that they must hang their heads and return to France as defeated soldiers. Beyond this, however, is the description that they are left standing, trembling in the cold. It is not only a matter of loss of political power and influence; they are depicted as physically and emotionally shaken by their experience and it debases their self-perceptions of pride and humanity.⁴⁸

Delving deeper into the idea of their diminishing pride and humanity, the poem states “On s’endormait dix mille, on se réveillait cent.”⁴⁹ Although this is, on the surface, an allusion to the corps of men who are perishing as a result of the long, Russian winter nights, it also serves as a subtle allusion to the mentality of the soldiers. The men are losing their strength with each passing night, falling asleep and waking up with only a fraction of their whole. If we look at the military *corps* as a symbolic body, the unit itself

⁴⁶ Ibid. 16-17.

⁴⁷ Venita Datta, *Heroes and Legends of Fin-de-siècle France: Gender, Politics, and National Identity*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 127. “At a time that witnessed the apotheosis of the military hero, Napoleon was the ultimate hero. Not only was he a symbol of France’s victories, but he was also a virile man on horseback – a sexual image certainly not lost on contemporaries of the fin de siècle.”

⁴⁸ Ibid. “...Napoleon was a familiar and reassuring symbol of France’s past glory and a society in which French men ruled both at home and abroad.”

⁴⁹ Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, “L’Expiation,” 39.

is being devirilized. This point is further solidified when Hugo refers to Napoleon I surveying his withering army like a tree losing its branches:

“L’empereur était là, debout, qui regardait.
Il était comme un arbre en proie à la cognée.
Tressaillant sous le spectre aux lugubres revanches,
Il regardait tomber autour de lui ses branches.”⁵⁰

The relationship between the military body and virility is exemplified here, where the passage offers a succinct summation of what is occurring throughout this episode of the Emperor’s career: he is losing the appendages of his power structure, and is left standing like the naked frame of a tree trunk without foliage and branches to support its grandeur. As Napoleon I loses his power structure, the symbolic imperial body is devirilized, both as a punishing self-perception and as a perception vis-à-vis the French people.

Hugo further uses masculinity as a means to attack the despotism of Napoleon III through his allusion to the perceived divinity of Napoleon I. He solidifies the relative gap in esteem he holds for the two emperors, and presents key verses relating to his military exploits that help illustrate this point. The first of these comes when Hugo states

“Tous, ceux de Friedland et ceux de Rivoli,
Comprenant qu’ils allaient mourir dans cette fête,
Saluèrent leur dieu, debout dans la tempête.
Leur bouche, d’un seul cri, dit : vive l’empereur !
Puis, à pas lents, musique en tête, sans fureur,
Tranquille, souriant à la mitraille anglaise,
La garde impériale entra dans la fournaise.”⁵¹

In this passage, Hugo makes reference to all of the soldiers who fought in two of Napoleon’s most historically significant and decisive victories at previous battles at

⁵⁰ Ibid. 48-49, 53-54.

⁵¹ Ibid. 108-114.

Friedland and Rivoli, and how they are saluting their god.⁵² This establishes for the reader the dignity and respect that is incumbent upon a decorated and respected military leader such as Napoleon I. Following this, the soldiers, who know they are going to die, are depicted as spirited and willing warriors who are content to die. Combined, these verses serve as explicit markers for where Napoleon I rests in the minds of his soldiers, his countrymen. More implicitly, however, they serve as indicators for the high esteem in which Hugo holds Napoleon I. In considering the stylistics of the verses through the lens of the rhyming couplets that end in “vive l’empereur !” and “sans fureur,” it appears as though Hugo is putting forth a message of nostalgia; he is longing for the emperor of late – by implicitly comparing him with his nephew – for a time when the author himself was without fury and rage. Hugo calls Waterloo – the field itself – a ‘funeral plateau’ that witnessed “la fuite des géants,” which serves as a nostalgic indicator of his fondness for Napoleon I.⁵³

This fondness for the late Emperor develops further into a nostalgic longing for Napoleon I. Hugo writes

“Adieu, tente de pourpre aux panaches mouvants,
Adieu, le cheval blanc que César éperonne!
Plus de tambours battant aux champs, plus de couronne,
Plus de rois prosternés dans l’ombre avec terreur,
Plus de manteau traînant sur eux, plus d’empereur!

⁵² Albert Sidney Britt, *The Wars of Napoleon*, (Wayne, NJ: Avery Publishing Group, 1985), 15. “The Battle of Rivoli offers a point of departure for interjecting a brief analysis of Bonaparte’s strategic ability. More than a few military theorists have proposed that Bonaparte developed a campaign formula in Italy and worked all his life refining it in practice.”

⁵³ Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, “L’Expiation,” 149.

Napoléon était retombé Bonaparte.
Comme un romain blessé par la fleche du parthe.”⁵⁴

This section is an overt cry for the past, and it elicits strong emotional responses both from its content and through its style. As he says goodbye, Hugo’s language is symbolically saying farewell to the beauty of the reign of Napoleon I, by referring to his regal purple tents and a white horse, which provokes the idea and sentiment of lost purity. This scene also demythifies Napoleon I – who was so powerful and revered that he was considered mythical – by saying he had fallen from his lofty mythical status to a nonmythical, human one; the magnanimous “Napoleon” was now simply a Bonaparte.⁵⁵ When saying goodbye in the latter three lines, Hugo gives the impression that Napoleon I is the last of the emperors of France, that there is no longer an emperor in whose shadow the people would bow down – and certainly not his nephew’s.

The verses of the final stanza of the poem, and the style through which they are presented, are significant in how they bring full circle Hugo’s scorn for Napoleon III and solidify the depiction of Hugo’s emasculation of him. Napoleon I is being punished for his most fundamental crime: his overpowering of the Directory in 1799, the ensuing Consulate, and his consolidation of power as Emperor in 1804. Napoleon III is his true punishment, as he is tearing apart his uncle’s legacy and reducing his glory by appropriating the likeness of Napoleon I for himself. For Napoleon III to be classified as the ultimate punishment for the most illustrious and revered political leader in France’s

⁵⁴ Ibid. 173-179.

⁵⁵ Pierre Nora, *Rethinking France: Les lieux de mémoire*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 164. “Four great figures in history – Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and Napoleon – had surpassed all the others to attain a stature that could be considered mythical...”

history is an enormous blow to his character and a shredding of his standing as an omnipotent, masculine figure. Yet while he tries to appropriate the likeness of his uncle, Napoleon III – as represented in “L’Expiation” – does not hold the same stature of his uncle. Hugo not only neglects to accord Napoleon III with the aspects of masculinity that characterized Napoleon I; he actively promotes the idea that Louis-Napoleon represents the antithesis of his uncle.⁵⁶

Hugo’s derisive emasculation of Napoleon III takes hold when Napoleon I is awakened in the night by laughter he hears in the environs of his tomb, coming from a voice he recognizes. Hugo breaks from the poem in an aside to say the end always comes in the night, which serves as an immediate signal to this being the final stage wherein Napoleon becomes aware of his ultimate punishment.⁵⁷ The familiar voice exclaims finally to Napoleon, that Moscow, Waterloo, Saint Helena, exile, and prison guards – all of the consequences of his illustrious reign as Emperor of the First Empire were nothing.⁵⁸ The voice makes allusions to what Napoleon, earlier in “L’Expiation,” previously conceived as the punishments for his power seizure as Emperor. Hugo then emboldens the voice that is speaking to Napoleon, describing it as follows: “La voix alors devint âpre, amère, stridente, Comme le noir sarcasme et l’ironie ardente ; C’était le rire amer mordant un demi-dieu.⁵⁹” Ironically, it is as though a superior, a commander, a type of military officer is preparing to lash out at one of his subordinates, and for Napoleon I this condemnation begins in the following stanza. Napoleon I, having been the

⁵⁶ Dudink, *Masculinities in Politics and War*, 24. “Napoleon III was a gift to the opposition because he tried to renew his uncle’s authority without the latter’s military prestige.”

⁵⁷ Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, “L’Expiation,” 296. “C’est toujours la nuit dans le tombeau.”

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 305. “Sire, cela n’est rien. Voici le châtement.”

⁵⁹ Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, “L’Expiation,” 308.

commander of *L'armée française*, would never have been subject to scorn or punishment; he is now receiving both posthumously.

Hugo then, through the voice that is coming to Napoleon I in the night, describes how they have taken him from the Pantheon, how they have taken his statue down from the Vendôme Column, how swarming bandits have taken him into their arms and made him their prisoner. The voice goes on to cry out that the remaining physical manifestation of the Emperor's luster and legacy is dying like a fading star: "Napoléon le Grand, empereur ; tu renais Bonaparte, écuyer du cirque Beauharnais."⁶⁰ These two lines offer a crushing summation of what Napoleon III has done – and is doing – to the legacy of his uncle. The voice, analogous to Hugo's own voice, is describing how Paris – through Napoleon III – is making an old fool of Napoleon I and that the Empire has become a spectacle, a circus under Napoleon III.⁶¹

It is also important to note the stylistic nuances of this passage, which together with its content depict a strong diminishing of the legacy of Napoleon I in the face of his pernicious nephew. Napoleon I is repeatedly the object of the verb rather than the subject, wherein he has no power, no agency, and no recourse for the destruction that is being carried out against him. Hugo says, in referring to Louis-Napoleon and his empire "[...] on t'a retiré de ton Panthéon bleu! / Sire! On t'a descendu de ta haute colonne! / [...] [ils]

⁶⁰ Guy Rosa and Jean-Marie Gleize, in Victor Hugo, *Les Châtiments* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1973), 245 n1. The editors explain the significance of Beauharnais, which is said to be a name befitting of a person belonging to a circus act. In actuality, it is the surname of Louis-Napoleon's mother. Thus, Hugo uses the name to say that in Napoleon III there is more Beauharnais than Bonaparte.

⁶¹ David Baguley, *Napoleon III and His Regime: an Extravaganza*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 29. "...for Hugo, he [Napoleon III] was Machiavel reincarnate."

t'ont fait prisonnier [...] ils t'ont pris...”⁶² The once dominant political and military leader is being removed from an establishment of greatness and relegated to one of weakness; saying that Napoleon I is being retired from the Pantheon, the home of France’s greatest political, military, and societal heroes, and taken to be made a prisoner is a definitive gutting of his prowess and character, and depicts it as the result of a causal relationship with his insidious nephew. Through this portrayal Hugo shows how Napoleon III is emasculating Napoleon I, which in turn, attacks the pride of Napoleon III.

Extending our analysis of the stylistics of this passage is critical to understanding the rhyming couplets in this passage, which offer important insight into the message and tone that Hugo puts forth. The concurrence of rhyming couplets with Napoleon I in his coffin and the ghost imagery that is presented in the final stanza of the poem make them particularly noteworthy in light of the words they contain. Each couplet is presented with a word at the end of the first line, which, if taken into account with the individual word at the end of the second line of each couplet, shows the latter being described very intimately by the former. The first example of this is in the first two lines of the stanza, where the paired words in the rhyming couplet are “l’empereur” and “d’horreur.” First, it is easy to deduce that Hugo has used rhyme in this instance to draw a direct link between the two words, emperor and horror. However, if we look more deeply beyond the two words on their own, we can see Hugo’s cunning as a writer, as he weaves the verses in a way that permits the articles that precede the noun and its descriptor to fit perfectly with each other: if we place them side by side, Napoleon III is quite explicitly called the emperor of horror. These mechanics hold true in the subsequent verses where the Empire

⁶² Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, “L’Expiation,” 309-310, 313, 315.

of Napoleon III is alluded to as “les ténèbres funèbres,” and where “[l]’ étrange (Napoléon III) se venge (de son oncle).”

Hugo goes further in his derision by invoking one of the most notable physical symbols of Napoleon’s reign as emperor of the First Republic: the imperial eagle. He states “Ils ont pris de la paille au fond des casernes pour empailer ton aigle, ô vainqueur d’Iéna !”⁶³ The symbolism behind these lines is evocative on two levels. First, here and throughout the poem, when Hugo deploys this fundamental symbol of Napoleon’s reign – the eagle – it represents the emperor’s virility, his masculinity, and his authority.⁶⁴ Its denigration figuratively symbolizes the denigration of Napoleon I; to bring shame on the metaphorical manifestation of the qualities that made Napoleon I so powerful and acclaimed is to bring shame to Napoleon I himself.⁶⁵ Second, Hugo describes how the imperial eagle of Napoleon I has been filled with straw: the grandeur and solidness of Napoleon I have been substituted with weakness and hollowness – referring to Napoleon III – to fill the void left from the substance that once existed in Louis-Napoleon’s predecessor. The significance behind juxtaposing the symbol of power and authority with the hollowness of straw creates the resemblance of an effigy, a caricature of the once great emperor, masqueraded around Paris by his nephew who is trying to appropriate his likeness, his virility and authority, yet ends up being a stuffed, hollow version of the original Napoleon.

⁶³ Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, “L’Expiation,” 331-332.

⁶⁴ H. Rogers, *Napoleon’s Army*, (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1974), 67. “The establishment of the Empire entailed another change in the colours and standards of the army. Napoleon selected an eagle with wings displayed as the Imperial emblem...”

⁶⁵ Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 137. “The eagle was the symbol of the Emperor’s presence and the regiment’s rally point in battle.”

Returning to the opening stanzas of the poem, we may now further explore the symbolism behind the imperial eagle of Napoleon I and its comparative juxtaposition with the weakness of Napoleon III. At the very beginning, the poem reads “Il neigeait. On était vaincu par sa conquête. / Pour la première fois l’aigle baissait la tête.”⁶⁶ As was the case later in the poem, the nebulous “on” compels the reader to wonder if Hugo is being purposefully vague in order to include the many groups and persons who were defeated by Napoleon’s conquest: the soldiers themselves, fervent supporters of Napoleon, and the French people. Of greater interest and significance, however, is that which is written in the second line. While making an allusion to the symbol of Napoleon I and his imperial rule, the eagle, Hugo notes that it has lowered its head for the first time in an expression of defeat. While during its first reading this may appear to be in reference to his retreat from Moscow, in the context of the comparison between Napoleon I and Napoleon III, this real defeat of Napoleon I is, in retrospect, the precipitate of his nephew and the damage he has inflicted upon his country and his people; the eagle is lowering its head for the first time, which is part of the ultimate punishment brought on by Napoleon III. Through depicting Louis-Napoleon as the most severe punishment to his uncle – desecrating the image and memory of Napoleon I – Hugo destroys the character of Napoleon III, which in turn, emasculates him. In Chapter III, we see how Hugo’s mobilization of masculinity as a trope is indicative of the ways in which masculinity served as shorthand for thinking about conceptions of national vigor in 19th-century France.

⁶⁶ Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, “L’Expiation,” 1-2.

CHAPTER III: HUGO IN THE THIRD REPUBLIC

The end of the 19th century was a turning point for France and its self-conception of national grandeur and masculinity. In this regard, it was a period of crisis. The capitulation of Louis-Napoleon's forces at the Battle of Sedan in 1870 represented the culmination of years of declining French military glory, to which conceptions of masculinity and national pride had traditionally been attached.⁶⁷ With a waning international military reputation and clout, Frenchmen started to look inward for other avenues to recoup their pride and project a new self-image of grandeur. To this end, Victor Hugo was a non-active yet pivotal voice; his textual work provided an integral focal point for the new cultural pride that France appropriated itself. In the absence of a more traditional militaristic perception of masculinity, important cultural figures – the *grands hommes* of the country – became the flag bearers and rallying points for French masculinity. In this sense, Victor Hugo was a “remasculating” figure in 19th Century France. As Judith Surkis points out, masculinity was “repeatedly reorganized and

⁶⁷ Venita Datta, *Heroes and Legends of Fin-de-siècle France: Gender, Politics, and National Identity*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 10. “The close associations of the notion of honor and the culture of the sword also help to explain the particular resonance of military heroes. Certainly, civilian heroes were also celebrated, but it was the cult of the military hero that held sway.”

rearticulated” during the time from the Revolution in 1789 to the rise of the Third Republic; after over a century of shifting perceptions of masculinity from the Revolution through to the unsuccessful military campaigns and destructive, tyrannical dogma of Napoleon III – and during this time of national social and political upheaval, renewal and revival – Victor Hugo’s textual work, along with his image, and the values for which he stood, provided a conduit for remasculating France.⁶⁸ His exhortations of the French people in *Les Châtiments* to recapture and reassert their virility in order to combat Napoleon III and his degradation of the nation prefigure the ways in which he would become a counter-hero to Napoleon III in the early years of the Third Republic – a remasculating, consolidating force.

The historical context at the close of the 19th century and the beginning of the Third Republic frame Hugolian literature’s effect on French self-conceptions of masculinity and his role as a remasculating force. The Third Republic was born out of the ashes of the Second Empire of Napoleon III and his army’s defeat at Sedan, coupled with the ensuing civil war of the Paris Commune.⁶⁹ This created a two-front cause for the destruction of French social cohesion, as France was wounded not only by external forces from Germany, but also by internal belligerence between the domestic left and right of the political sphere, both of whom had competing visions of what underpinned the meaning of being a Frenchman.⁷⁰ The monarchist right adhered to the proverbial notions of masculinity governed by aggressive militarism, whereas the Republican left diverged

⁶⁸ Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870-1920*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 7.

⁶⁹ Datta, *Heroes and Legends of fin-de-siècle France*, 2.

⁷⁰ Kevin Passmore, *The Right in France from the Third Republic to Vichy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 38.

from this perspective, believing in the birth of a new national self-conception of masculinity predicated on more modern virtues flowing out of a new political-cultural ascendancy, such as intellect. It was a time of little – if any – social solidity, meager national pride, and a paltry sense of masculinity, which had been debased both militarily and within French society over the course of the century.⁷¹ As Surkis shows, the close of the 19th century was a time when these competing notions of masculinity came into focus: “In the 1890s, widespread anxieties about social ‘waste’ converged in the figure of the overeducated, underemployed ‘bachelor.’ ... Social reformers and critics intimated that an excess of “intellect,” instead of moderating and mastering men’s desires, could in fact pervert them.”⁷² Resulting from this strong national sense of loss and the ensuing national, confrontational discourse on masculinity, “French men and women, yearning for cohesion in the face of internecine conflict, turned increasingly to heroes in the fictions of the theater and the press to find a unity ‘above’ politics.”⁷³

Caught in the fray of political infighting and collectively wounded in the Franco-Prussian War, the French people found a sense of relief and energy in Victor Hugo, as he was a transcendental figure whose preeminence as a political and social commentator during this time period was unquestionable. When he returned to Paris from Guernsey in 1870, after 19 years in exile, he arrived as a triumphant hero who had outlasted Napoleon III and had returned home to save his country. He epitomized the phrase *grand homme*, and was so revered as a central figure in the country’s socio-political progression that

⁷¹ Datta, *Heroes and Legends of fin-de-siècle France*, 16. “Not only were bourgeois notions of manhood contested from within, they were also contested from without, first and foremost by women, who challenged male superiority and difference by entering traditionally male-dominated spheres.”

⁷² Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen*, 121.

⁷³ Datta, *Heroes and Legends of fin-de-siècle France*, 4.

when he died in 1885, an estimated two million mourners – more than the population of Paris at the time – followed his coffin in procession as he moved to his place of interment at the Pantheon. Maurice Barrès makes note of this sentiment in his novel *Les Déracinés* (1897), where he references Hugo’s gifts to France as a whole:

“Hugo est sacré comme le bienfaiteur qui leur a donné leurs modèles, leurs rythmes, leur vocabulaire. Durant ces longues heures nocturnes, ils se définissent son rôle historique dans la littérature française. C’est son aspect légendaire qui prévaut dans les masses et qui les courbe d’amour ; pour elles et fort justement, il est ceci : la plus haute magistrature nationale. Elles le remercient de l’appui magnifique qu’il a donné aux formes successives de l’idéal français dans ce siècle.”⁷⁴

With the Second Empire’s passing and the birth of the Third Republic, Hugo was seen as a colossal national hero who provided for his country a sense of strength and direction while at the crucible of national conflict. Hugo was a central cultural figure whose work, along with that of his contemporaries, was held to be capable of stopping the progression of the modern crisis of masculinity in France. As a nationally recognized and revered author and poet, he was a monumental stabilizer during a period of crisis.⁷⁵

Hugo further cemented himself as a heroic figure with which French conceptions of masculinity and national pride were closely associated because of his unabashed, nearly militant desire for France to recoup the Alsace-Lorraine region from Germany. As Pascal Melka notes in his commentary on Barrès’ *Les Déracinés*, the latter author virulently denounces the philosophy espoused by the professor in his novel, which stipulates that “les cultures régionales, nationales, religieuses ou ethniques ne sont que des préjugés dont la science, la philosophie et l’école publique doivent libérer le genre

⁷⁴ Maurice Barrès, *Les Déracinés*, (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004), 445-446.

⁷⁵ Datta, *Heroes and Legends of fin-de-siècle France*, 10.

humain.”⁷⁶ Barrès denounces the professor’s teaching because “elle va déraciner les personnages du roman et les couper de leurs attaches.”⁷⁷ Hugo’s philosophy is in line with that of Barrès, which permits him to be taken up even more as a symbol of French masculinity and an embodiment of the nationalist endeavor to revitalize France, because he pushed adamantly for France to reclaim its territory and thus its national pride and virility by taking back Alsace-Lorraine.⁷⁸

As it relates to masculinity, this period of crisis was further compounded by the proliferation of Third Republic “consumer culture,” wherein the effects of the Haussmannization of Paris and its accompaniment of a growth in theaters and department stores disrupted the social order as it relates to the French conception of masculinity. As historian Michelle Perrot notes, writers like Emile Zola, Octave Mirabeau, and Maurice Barrès all subscribed to the notion that France’s men losing their virility was both a sign and a cause of the social degeneracy and decadence.⁷⁹ Consumption was linked to female desire, and when juxtaposed with male self-control, it “threatened to feminize men who could be both swept up in a desire to consume and rendered helpless by the consuming women around them.”⁸⁰ Barrès, again in his novel *Les Déracinés*, scorned intellectual men and those with a propensity to consume for their lack of masculinity. This national dilemma on the question of masculinity conceptions is further illustrated by Surkis, who

⁷⁶ Pascal Melka, *Victor Hugo, Un combat pour les opprimés : Étude de son évolution politique*, (Paris: Compagnie Littéraire, 2008), 423.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 437. “La Ligue des Patriotes est née en 1882. Saluée par Hugo et par Gambetta, elle regroupe initialement les plus patriotes des républicains et son objectif est de réparer les Français à récupérer l’Alsace-Lorraine en ayant recours, s’il le faut, à une guerre de revanche.”

⁷⁹ Carolyn J. Dean, *The Frail Social Body: Pornography, Homosexuality, and Other Fantasies in Interwar France*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 68.

⁸⁰ Datta, *Heroes and Legends of fin-de-siècle France*, 22.

writes that the modern development of Frenchmen's behavior was contentiously seen as a loss of virility: "They [social reformers] imagined that sterile learning (whether construed as Kantianism, classical literature, or science) and the institutions that cultivated it destroyed men's social instincts, including their capacity to 'love.'"⁸¹ Heroes such as Victor Hugo became a way of "offsetting the 'feminizing' influences of consumption,"⁸² which is where his poetry in *Les Châtiments* played a pivotal role in the Third Republic renewal.

The remasculination of France's men through alternative avenues from the military and political arenas was a difficult endeavor, as it required uniting different factions of French society under ideas that transcended their differences. Hugo was a giant in the unification of his countrymen, as he was seen as the pinnacle of French unity; no one rivaled Hugo in terms of a person under whom the nation could rally.⁸³ His historically magnanimous stature as an author – and his political choices regarding Napoleon III, exiling himself in protest – allowed him to be received as a universal symbol for all Frenchmen to stand behind and as a source from which they could glean insight into their own collective virility. Looking back at Hugo's work after his death, Frenchmen were able to use his work to seek inspiration and renewal at a time when French conceptions of masculinity were questioned, if not wholly broken.

After offering a lengthy, nearly incessant castigation of Napoleon III in the body of *Les Châtiments*, Hugo ceases to expound his contempt for his prime adversary and ends the anthology in a forward-looking direction. In a prophetic yet prescriptive way,

⁸¹ Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen*, 121.

⁸² Datta, *Heroes and Legends of fin-de-siècle France*, 23.

⁸³ Barrès, *Les Déracinés*, 397. Barrès notes through the teacher's dialogue in the novel that Victor Hugo is "le héros qui maintient le mieux l'unité française."

he looks to the future in “Lux” and writes what he sees as the next chapter in France’s history. The name itself, the Latin word for “light,” indicates how the country will emerge from a period of darkness and come into a period of renewal, of rejuvenation, of light.⁸⁴ The poem reads in its opening

“Temps futurs ! vision sublime !
Les peuples sont hors de l’abîme.
Le désert morne est traversé.
Après les sables, la pelouse ;
Et la terre est comme une épouse,
Et l’homme est comme un fiancé !
Dès à présent l’œil que s’élève
Voit distinctement ce beau rêve
Qui sera le réel un jour ;
Car Dieu dénouera toute chaîne,
Car le passé s’appelle haine
Et l’avenir se nomme amour !”⁸⁵

This passage represents a noteworthy juxtaposition between the past and the present, as Hugo is addressing a future time period that becomes the present for those who are reading the poem, and are finding both national and personal rejuvenation in his poetry. From Hugo’s perspective at the time he penned “Lux,” he is predicting and prescribing an enlightened future where his countrymen have left behind an era of despotism and darkness, and emerged into a period of glory and enlightenment. From the perspective of the disillusioned, emasculated men in their own time period, the Third Republic, the poem represents the present; it is a prescription that they must fulfill and a reality to which they must aspire. Hugo calls upon his countrymen to marry their country, to take it

⁸⁴ Guy Rosa and Jean-Marie Gleize, in Victor Hugo, *Les Châtiments* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1973), 375 n1. “P. Albouy note que *Lux* « représente une date dans la poésie hugolienne ; c’est [...] le premier de ces chants messianiques qui, après la dénonciation du mal, célèbrent l’inéluctable et total triomphe du bien.”

⁸⁵ Victor Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1973), “Lux,” 1-12.

into their arms and nurture it, to usher it into a new period of greatness. As we saw in Chapter II, Hugo echoes this sentiment in his other poems, wherein he exhorts his countrymen to rise up against the tyranny of Napoleon III and to reject the emasculation that the Emperor has thrust upon his country.

The language of this scene is noteworthy, because for the men of the Third Republic, their masculinity is emboldened by the gender that Hugo employs, which is a departure from his previous rhetoric describing their status under the regime of the Second Empire. In Hugo's previous poetry in the collection, men's *genre* was feminized; they were treated as feminine subjects, and Hugo's language was unequivocal in its descriptive choice of words.⁸⁶ Here, at the end of the anthology with "Lux," the *genre* has shifted to the masculine form. By saying that in the enlightened, glorious future of the renewed France that men are masculine, Hugo's prescription emboldens a facet of society that is reaching out for a pillar of stability and voice vis-à-vis their own masculinity; as French men are looking to literary and public figures to appropriate themselves a renewed national sense of masculinity, Hugo is telling them that in the Third Republic, men are revirilized.

Hugo further empowers the modern, Third Republic sense of French men's masculinity in the latter part of this passage, where he symbolizes the Second Empire as a period of antisocial men (hate), and the future Third Republic as a time that is underscored by the restoration of a traditional, patriarchal social order modeled on the family and head-of-household male (love). By affirming the masculinity of France's Third Republic men and saying simultaneously that this time period is predicated on love,

⁸⁶ Chapter I, pages 15 and 22.

Hugo strengthens French men's sense of masculinity by suggesting that it is inherently masculine to embrace the societal norms for men that come with the Third Republic; focusing on the literary symbolism he employs, Hugo suggests that the men will become revirilized. The rise and progression of the Third Republic from the end of the 19th and into the 20th century coincided with confused perceptions of masculinity, sexuality, and man's role in society.⁸⁷ As Surkis notes, the substantial rise in the Third Republic of the "intellectual proletariat" represented an upheaval in male social order and, to many, a threat to French men's virility. The more modern, intellectual man was seen to be physically less healthy and thus unable to father healthy children, and the "frustration of professional ambitions aggravated these impediments to reproductive, married love."⁸⁸ In this instance, Hugo's poetry provides a literary framework for French men to refocus their national sense of virility.

As an invocation of the physical, natural imagery of France frames this new projection of male strength and virility, Hugo continues to be prophetic and prescriptive as he predates the ways in which he would become a hero as it relates to French conceptions of masculinity. He writes

"Ainsi les verts sapins, vainqueurs des avalanches,
Les grands chênes, remplis de feuilles et de branches,
Les vieux cèdres touffus, plus durs que le granit,
Quand la fauvette en mai vient y faire son nid,
Tressaillent dans leur force et leur hauteur superbe,

⁸⁷ Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen*, 15. "...the Third Republic did not presume that men were automatically capable of simultaneously acceding to both autonomy and social attachment. Masculinity, like citizenship itself, required schooling."

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 110.

Tout joyeux qu'un oiseau leur apporte un brin d'herbe."⁸⁹

This passage is noteworthy on multiple levels. First, the metaphorical comparison between the country's flora and its people is underscored by strength, natural might, and by extension of the metaphor, virility. In the future Third Republic, with the *chênes* having all of their leaves and branches, the people are virile and robust; with the *cèdres* being harder than granite, the people are firm in their resoluteness; and with the *sapins* overcoming the destructive force of avalanches, the French people will have overpowered their despotic emperor. This is closely associated with the idea of "rootedness," which is discussed and valorized in Barrès' *Les Déracinés*. While in his book the sentiment references the destroyed rootedness of young men who leave Lorraine to go to Paris and are emasculated by leaving their homeland, there is a strong and troublesome pre-fascist nationalism in Barrès with which heteronormative masculinity is aligned. In essence, Hugo's commentary to the effect of the people being rooted and strong counteracts Barrès' later work, and offers a channel for overcoming this constricted narrative, which was contemporary at the turn of the century.

Second, Hugo appropriates the people as male subjects through his use of the masculine gender in the images he puts forward. Continuing from previous analysis, wherein feminine subjects represented the French people, this shift suggests a development from a feminized people to a remasculated people from the Second Empire to the Third Republic. Lastly, when Hugo makes the comparison between birds choosing to make their nests in these tall, strong trees, he suggests that the trees revel in their own strength and are joyous that the birds would choose to make their nests in their sturdy

⁸⁹ Hugo, *Les Châtiments*, "Lux," 70-75.

branches. This serves as a symbolic appropriation of masculinity to French men of the Third Republic, an implicit recognition of the men of this new epoch as strong, virile, appealing suitors with whom women will want to cohabit the domestic space because of their virility. As Maurice Barrès notes, it is as though Hugo, in retrospect, prescribes the principles of masculinity that inform Third Republic France.⁹⁰ His ability to prophetically project the characteristics of a modern French masculinity predate how, as a cultural icon, he and his work would together provide a conduit for revirilizing and remasculating France's men.

⁹⁰ Barrès, *Les Déracinés*, 417. Referring to Hugo, the teacher in the novel notes “de son œuvre en tend qu'elle prétend nous donner le sens moral de l'univers”.

CONCLUSION

Contemporarily to the people of his era – and later as an important historical figure of the past – Victor Hugo had a tremendous effect on 19th-century France. Through his passionate appeal to the pride and virility of his people, his poetry in *Les Châtiments* (1853) – along with his other literary and political works – he left an indelible mark on the political attitudes of the nation and helped push their collective spirit into a new space. It is a considerable project to analyze the reasons Hugo was taken up as a national hero – through his literature and in political activity during the Second Empire and Third Republic – and how they are related to France’s recuperation of a sense of national identity. It is even more of an endeavor to look forward from the Third Republic and understand his effect on successive generations.

Hugo knew his work was important for the progress of his country, and this notion of progress underscored all of his literature and political interventions during this time. As VanderWolk notes, Hugo understood the power of the present to influence the future: he saw the present as “the agent of change, foreshadowing the new world.”⁹¹ Moreover, however, Hugo recognized how the “ability and right to judge the past rely on

⁹¹ William VanderWolk. *Victor Hugo in Exile: from Historical Representations to Utopian Vistas*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006), 204.

an individual's desire to build a future."⁹² Hugo's desire for progress in France was not a project based solely on his rejection of the present; it was predicated on a revirilization of his people and country that would help both progress into a new era. His project to destroy Napoleon III and the Second Empire did not represent the finality of his desire: "As long as the empire was in place, stifling all voices of opposition, Hugo had to play the role of citizen-judge-historian. Only when the empire was replaced could the process of healing begin."⁹³ After over one hundred years have passed and the Second Empire long since destroyed and replaced, we are left to speculate, did France heal? Did Hugo succeed in his project of progress? Would Hugo approve of the progression of his country from his death in 1877 up to the present? The answers to these questions are complicated by the problematic nationalist and pro-fascist politics associated with the 'progress through revirilization' mindset at the end of the Second Empire. Many authors – notably among them Maurice Barrès – perceived French society as being in shambles, and promoted a dangerous model of nationalism as the last remaining basis for a cultural resurgence.⁹⁴ As David Carroll notes, this *fin de siècle* attitude "exposes the philosophical premises supporting the extreme form of nationalism at the foundation of what I am calling French literary fascism."⁹⁵ Measuring the success of Hugo's conception of progress would be difficult, but in the 21st century we can conclude that the author's literary and political undertakings bore a definitive influence on his countrymen and helped inform their revirilization at the end of the Second Empire.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid. 209.

⁹⁴ David Carroll, *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, anti-Semitism, and the Ideology of Culture*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 22.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

If time permitted further research, I would like to extend my analysis of the poetic structure itself in *Les Châtiments* and of poetic form in general as a political tool. I would have also liked to further explore the more negative, dirty dimensions of masculinity and the troublesome facets of this societal question in France during the 19th century, along with their depictions in *Les Châtiments*. While my project addresses the more positive aspects masculinity as a societal question in France during Hugo's time, there is an unquestionably large, less encouraging, other side of masculinity as a theme at this time that deserves to be brought to light through further research and analysis.

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