
Question Text [C]: Tell us about a book you have read that you found especially challenging, stimulating, or provocative. Explain why it made an impact on you. (Approximately 500 words)

Response:

In literature, just as in life, individuals often wrongly attribute their woes to the nondiscriminatory hand of destiny. Victor Hugo, however, rejects this concept of predetermined fate in his novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and instead suggests that one's course in life results directly from his or her own initiative.

In the novel, the character of the gypsy, La Esmeralda, falls madly in love with Captain Phoebus de Châteaupers. This is quite painful for the reader to watch since Esmeralda embodies kindness and virtue, whereas Captain Phoebus is the epitome of narcissism. At the same time, a corrupt priest, Dom Claude Frollo, becomes quite obsessed with the unwitting gypsy. Upon overhearing Esmeralda profess her love to Captain Phoebus, Frollo stabs the Captain, leaving the gypsy to be hanged for his crime.

To illustrate the theme that one's fate is derived from his own action, Hugo uses the plot events surrounding Esmeralda. Prior to her execution, Esmeralda finds herself with the opportunity to change the future that, at this point, seems inescapable. The priest, Dom Claude Frollo, is in charge of Esmeralda during her imprisonment, which is ironic since it is he who committed the crime for which Esmeralda has been condemned. Acting on his twisted love for the poor gypsy, Frollo offers La Esmeralda a choice: submit to his will and he will rescue her, or refuse and die the next day by hanging:

He walked straight to the gallows, and pointed to it with his finger—"Choose between us two," he said, coldly. She tore herself from his hands and fell at the foot of the gibbet, embracing that funereal support, then she half turned her

beautiful head, and looked at the priest over her shoulder. [...] At length the gypsy said to him—"It causes me less horror than you do." (Hugo 473)

It seems wildly unfair that these are the only options left to the unfortunate gypsy, but the reader must note that, despite the sheer injustice of the situation, the choice remains in Esmeralda's fragile hands.

Next, having escaped from prison, the gypsy flees from the guards sent to hang her. Esmeralda, however, willfully reveals her hiding place when she believes Captain Phoebus is among them, resulting in her capture and execution. Esmeralda's actions are both tragic and ironic because Phoebus, so wildly undeserving of her love, already has a wife by this point. It is a valid argument that humans cannot usually choose with whom they fall in love, but even the most affected of lovers still possesses free will. Therefore, the gypsy, though influenced by her desire for the pigheaded captain, brings about her death while acting of her own volition.

Throughout *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Victor Hugo refutes the concept of inevitable fate by showing that humans can guide their own futures with their decisions, behavior, and actions. This novel particularly affected me because the theme that Hugo presents is applicable to everyday life. A person's situation is never entirely out of his or her control, and though the circumstances may be undesirable, one is never without the choice or ability to change them.

Works Cited

Hugo, Victor. The Hunchback of Notre Dame. Ann Arbor: J. W. Edwards Inc., 2006.