

Les miserables: character analysis



**ASSIGN
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Jean Valjean

Jean Valjean is a central character of *Les Misérables*. His story is that of misery, pain, and injustice. Valjean is an epitome of change. He makes transitions from one kind of man to another, as dictated by his drastic experiences in life. Valjean's life is a story of how an honest and good man can be hardened by society in general, and prison in particular.

Because of Valjean's unfortunate experience in prison, he hardens into a criminal and a social outcast. This transformation in Valjean's life is a recognition of the observed truth and pattern of human behavior, wherein man changes, either for better or for worse, as a result of external forces such as society. The most important part of Valjean's personality is his resilience and positive attitude towards life and change in general. He accepts the positive effect of other people in his life, and learns to love and care for such people.

Ultimately, however, the good character of Valjean surfaces, and even the bishop realizes that, as shown by this passage:

" The bishop approached him and said, in a low voice, 'Do not forget, ever, that you have promised me to use this silver to become an honest man.' Jean Valjean, who had no recollection of any such promise, stood dumbfounded. The bishop had stressed these words as he spoke them. He continued solemnly, 'Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good. It is your soul I am buying for you. I withdraw it from dark thoughts and from the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God!'"

Fantine

Fantine is one of the characters in Les Miserales who lived the less appealing life. She had been deprived of good opportunities since her childhood, such as education and care. Thus, she grew up to be an uneducated girl whom everyone else found easy to victimize.

Fantine can easily be categorized as a victim of society, since she had been deprived of education without her fault, and yet society readily found her corrupt and unfit for fruitful activity and relationships. A lot of people took advantage of her lack of knowledge, education and experience, and thereafter left her out in the cold. Fantine's character is a perfect illustration of the bigotry in human society and the story of her life is but a perfect example of the way injustice ruins lives.

Brought by her experiences, Fantine learned to have a different view of morality, as expressed in her statement, "[T]he guilty one is not he who commits the sin, but the one who causes the darkness."

Cosette

The character of Cosette is in many respects similar to that of Valjean, an effect largely influenced by the latter's taking charge over her education and upbringing. Thus, like Valjean, Cosette exhibits her kindheartedness and morality through her actions, thereby manifesting that her initial experience with the cruel Thénardiens did not corrupt her character. Cosette, at one point in the story, said, "[W]e bow to the man who kneels. A faith is necessary to man. Woe to him who believes in nothing." Such a statement reflects her belief about man, and shows how pure Cosette's character has remained.

Fortunately for Cosette, she had not been exposed to the kind of cruelty and hardship that Valjean went through, although she expressed resentment over Valjean's overprotective stance. When viewed as a whole, Cosette's character does not provide a lot of conflict, she being one of the lucky personalities in the story.