

All you need is love

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Victor Hugo presents many different themes in his prized novel, *Les Misérables*.

One of the most important themes introduced in the novel, is the power of love. There are many types of love including agape, the love of god, philia, brotherly love or love within the family, and eros, passionate love (sensual desire). Just as animals care for their young, doctors adore their very first stethoscopes, or a child loves their first blanket or teddy bear, Fantine loves Cosette with her whole heart. For a minor character Fantine possesses a big spirit that bears many hardships and sacrifices for her one love. In this time of great distress Fantine displays her love for Cosette by leaving her with the Thénardiens in hopes to start a better life for her, sacrificing her beauty and body, and even only caring about her daughter as her health is failing and she is slowly passing away.

Fantine was abandoned as a child, alone without a family and had served as a workingwoman since her youth. She was a beautiful young lady who sought to retain her purity as long as possible. And though she worked to stay alive, she too fell in love one day. Not long into Fantine's first romance did she have a child, and was quickly left by the father, leaving her with the responsibility of Cosette. Now Fantine wishes to go back to her home town to search for a job but realizes that she must hide her fault. Fantine was heartbroken, but she understood that if she truly loved her daughter, it was the only chance at starting a better life for Cosette and for herself; " Yes, but she must hide her fault.

And she had a confused glimpse of the possible necessity of a separation still more painful than the first. Her heart ached, but she took her resolution” (Hugo 42). At this decision she entrusted her love to the Thenardiers and promised that one day, after earning some money, she will return to pick up her daughter. At this she left, crying her heart and soul out: “ I have just met a woman in the street, who was crying as if her heart would break,” stated one of the Thenardier’s neighbors (46). Out of love and compassion, Fantine also sacrifices her beauty and her body to support Cosette. The Thenardiers once wrote a letter to Fantine requesting at least ten francs to buy a woolen skirt for Cosette, but since she lacked the money to send she cut her pretty blonde hair to buy clothing for her daughter.

Along with giving up her beautiful hair Fantine also sacrifices her fine teeth for Cosette’s well-being: “ The candle lit up her face. It was a sickening smile, for the corner of her mouth were stained with blood, and a dark cavity revealed itself there. The two teeth were gone. She sent the forty francs to Montfrmeil” (66). Fantine was so devastated at hearing the news of her “ sick” daughter that she was willing to give up her front teeth in a heartbeat; in fact she worshipped Cosette and loved her greatly.

Fantine went as far as prostitution which led to her arrest, but she did it with her heart filled with affection. Even at her last hours of life, Fantine’s number one thought was Cosette. She adored Cosette so much that she thought she could hear her daughter’s voice: “ Fantine had heard this little girl singing. ‘ Oh!’ said she. ‘ It is my Cosette! I know her voice!’” (127). Fantine even imagined her future with her daughter playing in a garden, learning to spell, and having her first communion.

She filled her heart with the happy thoughts of the future although she will not get the chance to see her daughter again. At the end of Fantine's short but meaningful life, the author proved one important message regarding the importance of love and compassion. Without Fantine's love and actions, Cosette would not have met Jean Valjean who helped her live a full and meaningful life. Although Cosette had also suffered greatly during her childhood, she was not abandoned by her mother. Fantine had passed away with her heart filled with devotion and compassion for the daughter she worshiped; her battles through life were not left in vain. Overall the world is filled with love; it is surrounding us everyday though we may not always realize it.