Les Misérables is a French novel by Victor Hugo, published in 1862 and set in the 19th century. It tells the story of ex-convict Jean Valjean, who seeks redemption after serving 19 years in prison for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his starving family. The story explores poverty, justice, love, and redemption, as Valjean struggles to overcome his past and find his place in society.

Though the plot itself is complex and spans several decades, it is, at its core, a story of the human spirit's resilience and the transformative power of love and compassion. The novel opens with Valjean's release from prison and follows his struggle to find work and acceptance in a society that shuns him as a criminal. He is taken in by a kind bishop who shows him mercy and forgiveness, which sets him on a path of redemption.

As Valjean tries to rebuild his life, he becomes embroiled in a cat-and-mouse game with Inspector Javert, who is determined to put him back in prison. Along the way, Valjean takes in the orphaned Cosette, the daughter of a former employee of his, and becomes a surrogate father to her. The novel's other characters, such as the street urchin Gavroche, the revolutionary student Marius, and the tragic prostitute Fantine, are all connected to Valjean's story and contribute to the novel's exploration of social injustice and the struggle for a better life.

Some of Les Misérables’ central themes are poverty and the harsh realities of life for the working class. Hugo portrays the lives of the poor in vivid detail, highlighting their struggles with hunger, disease, and exploitation. He also unravels the corruption and hypocrisy of the ruling class, who live in luxury while the poor suffer.

The novel also explores the pursuit of justice and the power of forgiveness. Valjean's journey is one of self-discovery and redemption, as he learns to let go of his anger and bitterness and instead embrace compassion and forgiveness. Through this character arc, the story emphasizes the idea that true justice is not simply about punishment, but also about mercy and rehabilitation.

In conclusion, Les Misérables is a timeless masterpiece that continues to resonate with readers today. Its themes of poverty, justice, love, and redemption are universal, and its characters are memorable and enduring. The novel's message of hope and the capacity of the human spirit to overcome adversity is a testament to the lasting power of literature to inspire and uplift us.